

Julius Caesar

Dictator or Reformer

Few individuals in history provoke more interest or debate than Julius Caesar. The contradictory nature of his rise to power, popularity, reforms and early death leave many questions unanswered and his legacy open to interpretation.

Read some of the words of Caesar's contemporaries below...

"Our tyrant deserved to die. Here was a man who wanted to be king of the Roman people and master of the whole world. Those who agree with an ambition like this must also accept the destruction of existing laws and freedoms. It is not right or fair to want to be king in a state that used to be free and ought to be free today." Cicero.

"People blame me for mourning the death of my friend. They say my country should be preferred to my friends, as if they had proved that killing him was good for the state. I did not abandon him as a friend however much I disapproved of what he was doing." Gaius Matius.

To add to the ambiguity of Caesar's historical legacy, many interpretations are heavily influenced, or completely directed by William Shakespeare's work penned centuries after Caesar's death.

Do these words sound familiar?

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones; So let it be with Caesar.

Beware the ides of March.

Cowards die many times before their deaths; The valiant never taste of death but once. Of all the wonders that I yet have heard, It seems to me most strange that men should fear; Seeing that death, a necessary end, Will come when it will come.

Et tu, Brute?

Decide for yourself... Do some digging!

How should Julius Caesar's life and work be interpreted?

- Provide evidence of his good work.
- Provide evidence of his abuse of power.
- Formulate your own opinion...What do you think? Dictator or Reformer?