

# Information on Julius Caesar

## Biographical Briefing

Julius Caesar (pronounced JOO-lee-uss SEE-zur) was born in 100 B.C.E. into one of Rome's oldest and wealthiest, or *patrician*, families. Throughout his life, Caesar was described as a man of contradictions. He could be personally charming and forgiving to his enemies one minute, and ruthless and vengeful the next. His forceful personality and amazing intellect commanded great loyalty from his troops, yet many of his friends and supporters betrayed and eventually murdered him. As a young man, Caesar's marriage and political connections placed him in disfavor with Sulla (pronounced SULL-ah), the ruling dictator of Rome. This situation forced Caesar to leave Rome for Asia Minor, where he distinguished himself serving in military campaigns.

Following Sulla's death in 78 B.C.E., Caesar returned to Rome and began a political career. Over the next 18 years, he held many political positions, both in Rome and in provinces such as Spain. From his position as *consul*, Caesar took steps that the common people cheered. He reformed the farm laws by distributing land to former soldiers and to many poor people. He also passed other measures that eased the financial burden of the poor. These steps made him popular with the poor, and unpopular with the aristocracy and the Senate.

For the next 10 years, Caesar concentrated on a military career away from Rome. He gained command positions in the provinces around Gaul, and succeeded in pacifying and subduing the native tribes in that region. Fearing his power in 49 B.C.E., the Senate ordered Caesar to disband his legions or be declared an enemy of the Republic. Refusing to obey their orders, Caesar crossed the Rubicon River and marched his army into Italy. Civil war followed, and Caesar achieved one military success after another. By 45 B.C.E., Caesar returned to Rome in triumph, and became the most powerful figure in the Republic. Fearing that Caesar would eventually declare himself king, his enemies assassinated him in the Senate on March 15 in 44 B.C.E.



- Why was Caesar described as a man of contradictions?
- What actions did Caesar take to help the common people of Rome?
- Why did members of the Senate assassinate Caesar in 44 B.C.E.?

**Position:** Julius Caesar believed that expansion helped Rome because it made Italy safer from military attacks.

### Main Points on Roman Expansion

Throughout much of its early history, Rome was either ruled or threatened by outsiders. First the Etruscans—from the northern part of Italy—seized control during the mid 600s B.C.E., and forced the Romans to accept rule by their kings. By the late sixth century, the Romans were looking favorably on a government modeled after the Greeks' democracy. They rebelled against the harsh rule of the Etruscan king and formed the Roman Republic around 509 B.C.E.

Even after the Republic was formed, Rome faced constant danger. At the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E., tribes from Gaul swept down across the Alps and marched south, looting towns along the way. In 390 B.C.E. these fierce warriors met the Roman army a few miles north of the city and dealt them a stunning defeat. Then the Gauls marched on Rome, slaughtering the few Senators who tried to resist, and looting and burning the city. The invaders agreed to return to the North only after Rome had paid them a huge ransom.

During the Punic Wars, the great Carthaginian general Hannibal threatened Rome's very survival. He and his troops ravaged and conquered much of the Italian peninsula, burning farms and villages along the way. Hannibal remained in Italy for 15 years, and caused the Romans tremendous losses—both in money and lives—before he was finally driven out.

Rome's later military conquests allowed its armies to meet enemy threats far from home. When one of the barbarian tribes from Switzerland became aggressive, the Romans met the danger in the province of Gaul, far to the north of the gates of the city. Every later battle against the Gauls was fought on foreign soil, far from the center of Rome. In fact, no foreign soldiers invaded Italy after the end of the Second Punic War, around 200 B.C.E.

Stop Here  
& Discuss



- What groups threatened the security of Rome before the Punic Wars?
- What types of losses did the Romans sustain during the Punic Wars?
- How did the conquest of Gaul make the city of Rome more secure?