

Republic to Empire: Julius Caesar

Prepare to Read

Objectives

In this selection you will

1. Read a historian's account of Julius Caesar.
2. Examine the historian's opinion of Julius Caesar as a leader.

Background

Julius Caesar remains a colorful and controversial historical figure. His achievements are many. Caesar served the Roman Republic as an accomplished orator, politician, general, and statesman.

In *Lives of the Caesars*, Roman historian Suetonius writes about Julius Caesar's life and character.

Vocabulary Builder

desist (dih sist) *v.* to stop doing something

perpetuity (pehr peh too ih tee) *n.* for all future time

arrogance (AIR oh gans) *n.* too much pride

insolence (ihh suh lehns) *n.* insulting behavior

When people spoke of him critically, he was content to urge in public that they should desist. He was able to carry with good grace the harm to his reputation caused by the most [unflattering or unkind] book written by Aulus and Caecina and the highly abusive poems of Pitholaus.

However, other things he did and said outweighed these, so that it is thought he abused his power and was justly killed. Not only did he accept excessive honors—one consulship after another, the dictatorship in perpetuity, responsibility for morals, as well as the . . . title “Father of his Fatherland,” a statue displayed with those of the kings, and a raised seat at the theater—he even allowed privileges to be given to him which were greater than is right for mortals: a golden seat in the senate house and in front of the speaker's platform, a chariot . . . in the procession for the circus games, temples, altars, statues

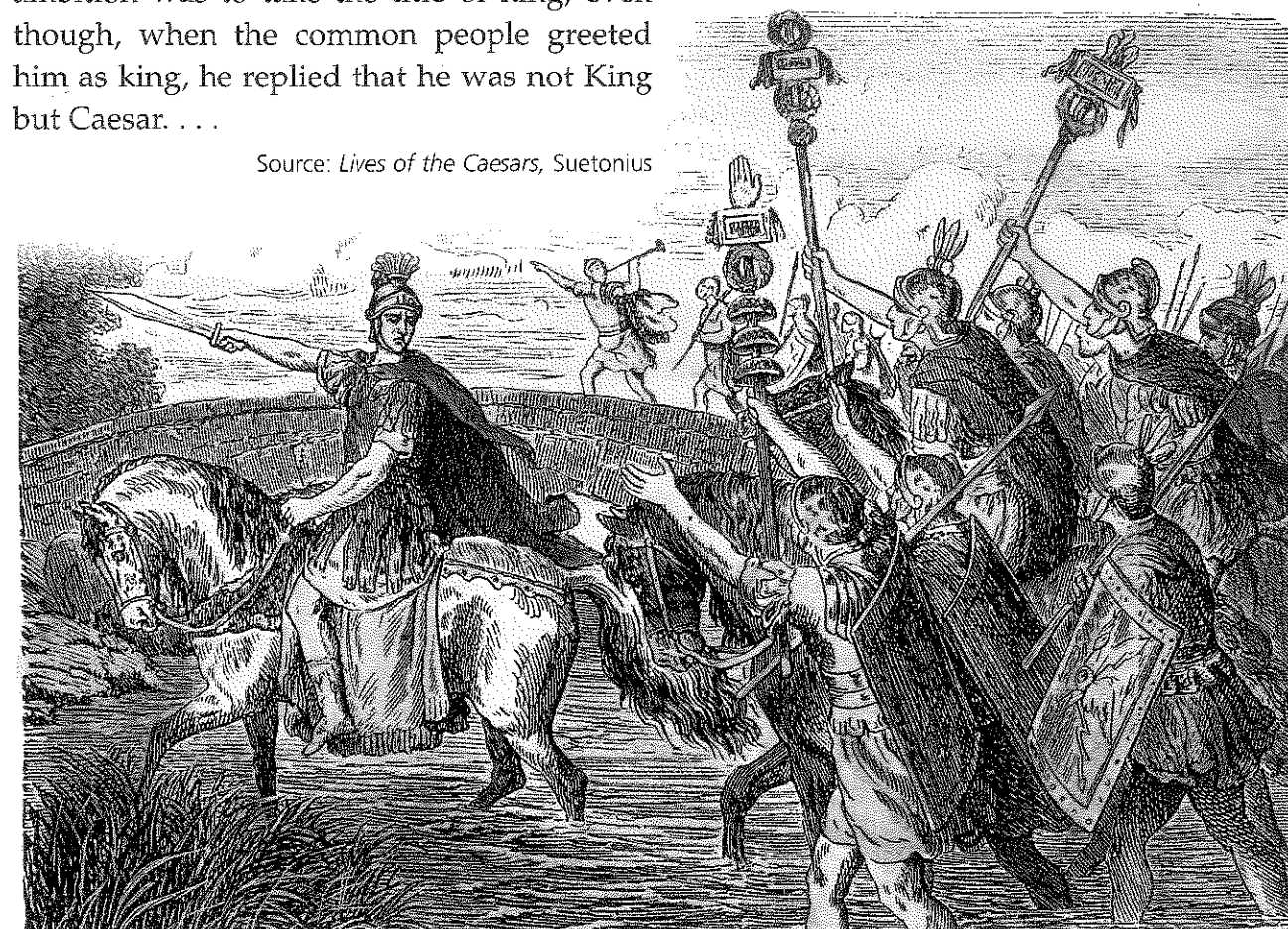
placed beside those of the gods . . . and a month of the year named after him. Indeed there were no honors which he did not either give to someone or receive as he willed.

His public sayings, as recorded by Titus Ampius, were characterized by equal arrogance: “The republic is nothing—just a name, without substance or form. . . .” “Men should now have more consideration in speaking with me and regard what I say as law.” Such was the level of insolence he reached. . . .

. . . At the time of the Latin Festival he was returning to the city, among . . . demonstrations by the people, one member of the crowd had placed a laurel crown, bound with a white ribbon, on his statue and the tribunes . . . had given orders that the ribbon should be removed from the crown and that the man should be thrown into chains. Caesar, regretting, perhaps, that the reference to kingship had met with such a poor reception, or else, as

he claimed, that he had been robbed of the glory to be had from refusing the honor, took the tribunes severely to task and deprived them of their authority. And after that time he was never able to shake off the rumor that his ambition was to take the title of king, even though, when the common people greeted him as king, he replied that he was not King but Caesar. . . .

Source: *Lives of the Caesars*, Suetonius



Caesar crosses the Rubicon.

Analyze Primary Sources: Distinguish Facts From Opinions

1. Which statements in this excerpt about Julius Caesar are facts?
2. Read the following passage. Which statements are facts and which are opinions?
His public sayings, as recorded by Titus Ampius, were characterized by equal arrogance [self-importance]: “The republic is nothing—just a name, without substance or form. . . .” “Men should now have more consideration in speaking with me and regard what I say as law.”
3. What opinion do you think Suetonius had of Julius Caesar?
4. What can historians learn from this historical narrative?

Primary Source

The Government of the Roman Empire: The Persecution of Christians

Prepare to Read

Objectives

In this selection you will

1. Read two letters from Ancient Rome regarding the persecution of Christians.
2. Determine the purpose of the letters and describe the emperor's point of view on how people accused of being Christians should be tried.

Background

The Romans were tolerant of different religions. However, all Roman citizens had to honor the Roman gods and pay homage to the emperor. Christians, who worshiped only one god, often faced persecution. In the following letters, Pliny, a Roman governor, asks the emperor Trajan for advice about how to deal with the Christians.

Vocabulary Builder

repentance (rih PEHN tens) *n.* sorrow for doing wrong

denounce (dih NOWNCE) *v.* accuse; give information against

folly (FAHL lee) *n.* being foolish; unwise behavior

edict (EE dihkt) *n.* a decree or order proclaimed by an authority that has the force of law

warrant (WOR ihnt) *v.* to be a good enough reason for something

Pliny to Emperor Trajan

... I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I [questioned] these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third

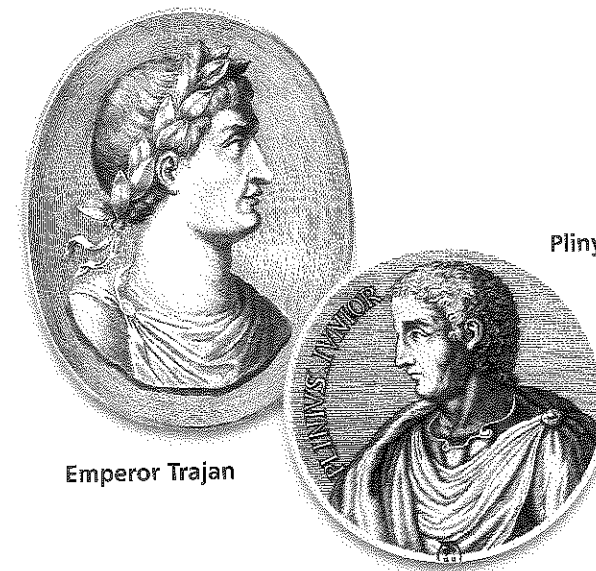
time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their beliefs, ... [they] surely deserved to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous [written by an unknown person] document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they prayed to the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer ... to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover ... none of ...

those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do—these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshiped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They asserted, however ... their fault ... had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing ... a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath. ... When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food. ... Even this, they agreed to, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in agreement with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. ... I discovered nothing but ... excessive superstition.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For ... this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that ... the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed. ... Hence it is easy to imagine what a great number of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is given.



Emperor Trajan

Pliny

Trajan to Pliny

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced [formally accused] to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought [gone after] out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it—that is, by worshiping our gods—even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is ... out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

Source: *Ancestors: Medieval Sourcebook: Pliny on the Christians*

Analyze Primary Sources: Detect Point of View

1. What problem was Pliny trying to solve in this excerpt?
2. What is Trajan's point of view on the prosecution of the Christians?
3. What information does Pliny give about his sources in the letter?
4. How might historians use these letters?

Roman Engineering

Prepare to Read

Objectives

In this selection you will

1. Read first-person accounts of some of the Romans' engineering accomplishments.
2. Determine which statements in the accounts are fact and which are opinion.

Background

The Romans were well known for their achievements in engineering, especially for their roads and aqueducts. Roads connected distant parts of their empire and helped in spreading Roman culture. Aqueducts carried fresh water to cities for drinking and bathing. The roads and aqueducts were so well built that many are still in use today. Following are some eyewitness accounts of the building of Roman roads and aqueducts. As you read, try to distinguish the facts from the opinions.

Vocabulary Builder

intensify (ihn TEHN suh fi) *v.* to increase in size or strength
eddy (EHD ee) *v.* to circle
ventilation (vehnt uhl AY shuhn) *n.* fresh air
treacherous (Trehch uhr uhs) *adj.* dangerous
divert (duh VERT) *v.* to change direction
despondent (dih SPAHN duhnt) *adj.* hopeless
attribute (uh TRIHB yoot) *v.* to assign responsibility for
blunder (BLUHN duhr) *n.* mistake
diverge (dī VERJ) *v.* to go in different directions

The network of roads near Naples included a 2,300-foot-long tunnel. The Roman philosopher and playwright Seneca described his passage through this tunnel.

[After enduring a mud-soaked overland walk] we then faced a sand-dusting in the Naples tunnel. Nothing is longer than that prison, nothing more gloomy than the torches [sold to travelers at the entrance] there, which intensify the darkness rather than enabling us to see through it. In any case, even if the place had any light, the dust would conceal it. Dust is a serious nuisance even in the open. You can imagine what it's like in that place, where it just eddies around, and since there's no ventilation, it settles on those who have stirred it up.

Statius, a Roman poet, wrote this account of workers building part of the Via Appia, the road from Rome to southern Italy.

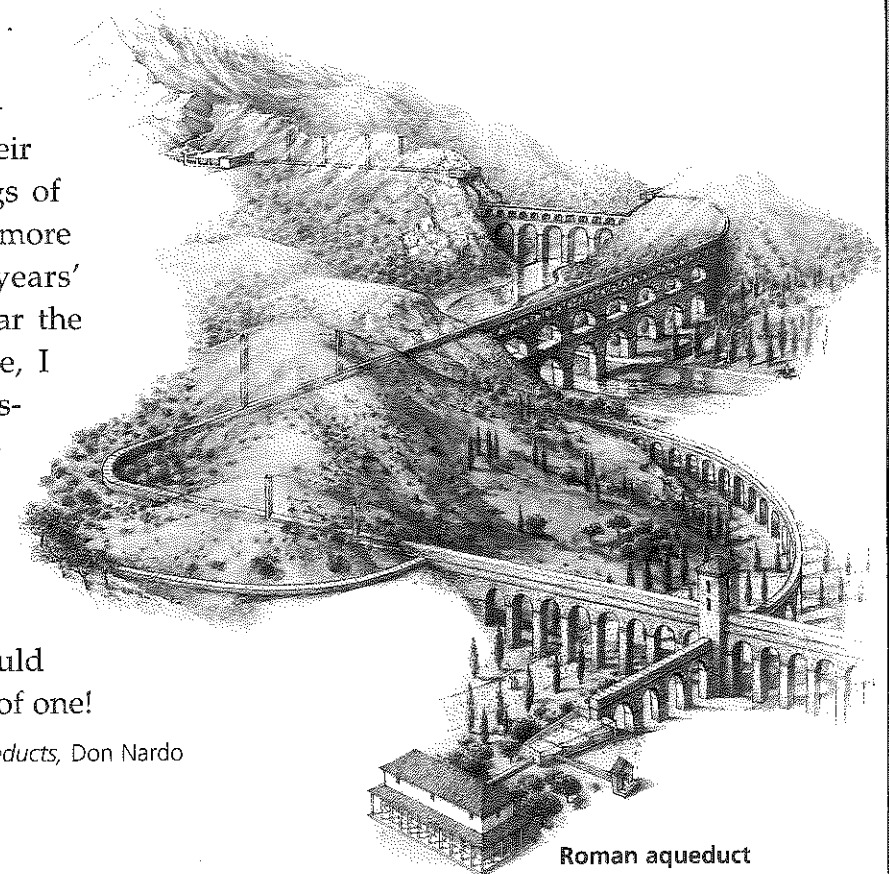
Here the first task is to start with [a long trench], cut back the edges and hollow out the earth far down with deep excavation; next, to refill the scooped out trenches with other material and prepare a bed . . . so that the earth shall not wobble nor the spiteful ground provide a treacherous bed for the weight of [the paving] slabs; then to bind the road with blocks rammed in on both sides and numerous pegs. How many hands labor together! Some cut down [trees] and strip moun-

tains, some smooth stakes and beams with iron; others bind together the slabs . . . [while] some dry up thirsty pools by hand and divert lesser streams far away.

I found everybody sad and despondent. They had given up all hopes that the opposite sections of the tunnel would meet, because each section had already been excavated beyond the middle of the mountain. As always happens in these cases, the fault was attributed to me, the engineer, as though I had not taken all precautions to ensure the success of the work. What could I have done better? For I began by surveying and taking the levels of the mountain, I drew plans and sections of the whole work. . . . And to take extra precaution, I summoned the contractor and his workmen and began the excavation in their presence with the help of two gangs of experienced veterans. . . . What more could I have done? After four years' absence, expecting every day to hear the good tidings of the water at Saldae, I arrived. The contractor and his assistants had made blunder upon blunder. In each section of the tunnel they had diverged from the [straight] line, each towards the right, and had I waited a little longer before coming, Saldae would have possessed two tunnels instead of one!

—Source: *Roman Roads and Aqueducts*, Don Nardo

The Roman engineer Nonius Datus designed an aqueduct near Saldae, in North Africa. Returning to the construction site after some time away, he described mistakes by workers digging a tunnel for the aqueduct.



Roman aqueduct

Analyze Primary Sources: Distinguish Facts From Opinions

1. Read the following statement: "Nothing is longer than that prison, nothing more gloomy than the torches [sold to travelers at the entrance] there, which intensify the darkness rather than enabling us to see through it." Is this a fact or an opinion? Explain your answer.
2. Which statements in Statius' account of building the Via Appia are facts? Which are opinions?
3. Which statements in Nonius Datus' excerpt are facts? Which are opinions?

The Bubonic Plague

Prepare to Read

Objectives

In this selection you will

1. Read an account of the bubonic plague in Florence during the 1300s.
2. Draw conclusions about the impact of the plague on society and culture.

Background

From 1347 to 1352, the bubonic plague, or Black Death, devastated Europe. Giovanni Boccaccio described what he saw when the plague struck Florence. As you read his account, think about how the disease changed the lives of the people of Florence.

Vocabulary Builder

pestilence (PEHS tuh luhns) *n.*
deadly disease

infirmity (ihn FER muh tee) *n.*
sickness

affirm (uh FERM) *v.* to say that something is true

affliction (uh FLIHK shuhn) *n.*
something that causes pain or suffering

ferocity (fuh RAHS uh tee) *n.*
fierceness

There came into the noble city of Florence, the most beautiful of all Italian cities, a deadly pestilence, which . . . had originated in . . . [China], where it destroyed countless lives, scarcely resting in one place before it moved to the next, and turning westward its strength grew monstrosly. . . .

To cure these infirmities neither the advice of physicians nor the power of medicine appeared to have any value or profit; . . . as a consequence, very few were ever cured; all died three days after the appearance of the first outward signs. . . . But what gave this pestilence particularly severe force was that whenever the diseased mixed with healthy people, like a fire through dry grass or oil it would rush upon the healthy. And this wasn't the worst of the evil: for not only did it infect healthy persons who [talked] or mixed with the sick, but also touching bread or any other object which had been handled or worn by the sick

would transport the sickness from the victim to the one touching the object. . . .

Because of all these things . . . fears and imaginings were born in those left alive, and all of them took . . . the most cruel precaution: to avoid and run away from the sick and their things; by doing this, each person believed they could preserve their health. Others were of the opinion that they should live moderately and guard against all excess. . . . Others, who disagreed with this, affirmed that . . . enjoying oneself . . . was the best medicine. . . . With so much affliction and misery, all reverence for the laws, both of God and of man, fell apart and dissolved, because the ministers . . . of the laws were either dead or ill like everyone else, or were left with so few officials that they were unable to do their duties; as a result, everyone was free to do whatever they pleased. Many other people steered a middle course between these two extremes, neither restricting their diet

like the first group, nor indulging so liberally . . . like the second group . . . and, instead of locking themselves away, these people walked about freely, holding in their hands a posy of flowers, or fragrant herbs . . . which sometimes they pressed to their nostrils, believing it would comfort the brain with smells of that sort because of the stink of the corpses, sick bodies, and medicines polluted the air all about the city. Others held a more cruel opinion, one that in the end probably guaranteed their safety, saying that there was no better or more effective medicine against the disease than to run away from it. . . .

One citizen avoided another, everybody neglected their neighbors and rarely or never visited their parents and relatives unless from a distance; the ordeal had so withered the hearts

of men and women that brother abandoned brother, and the uncle abandoned his nephew and the sister her brother and many times, wives abandoned their husbands, and, what is even more incredible and cruel, mothers and fathers abandoned their children and would refuse to visit them. . . .

How much more can be said of the cruelty of heaven, and possibly, in part, that of humanity, which between March and July of that year, because of the ferocity of the pestilence and the fact that many of the sick were poorly cared for or abandoned in their hour of need by people frightened for their health, killed off one hundred thousand human creatures for certain within the walls of the city of Florence.

—Source: *The Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio



Painting of the Black Death

Analyze Primary Sources: Draw Conclusions

1. Is this description of the plague believable or exaggerated? Explain.
2. What questions might historians want to ask before accepting this as an accurate description of what happened in Florence?
3. What can you conclude from this description about how life changed in Florence as a result of the plague?