How Augustus Caesar Learned from Julius Caesar’s Actions

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Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar both had pronounced effects on Rome during their period of ruling. Born in 100 BC, Julius Caesar was born into a family’s history that traced back to the goddess Venus. It was not until 46 B.C. that Caesar became ruler. Although his reign only lasted until 44 BC, he certainly still utilized his power during this time. On the other hand, Augustus Caesar ruled for quite longer then Caesar did, approximately 27 BC to 14 AD. The story of how Augustus came to power is outright interesting. The two men previously mentioned were originally cousins, however, before Julius died, he adopted Augustus as his son so that he would have the ability to be his heir. Augustus learned numerous things while observing Julius Caesar’s period of rule. In particular, Caesar Augustus learned what to do, as well as what not to do, based on Julius Caesar’s actions during his governing.

Both of these men expressed different styles in which they ruled, which had an immense effect on how successful they were at governing. Julius Caesar was openly a dictator; in fact, in January of 44 BC, he was voted dictatorship for life. Julius Caesar ultimately aimed to have monarchial rule, in other words desired worship of the ruler, however he was continuously being forced into an autocratic position. If Julius were to become an autocrat, then that would mean lasting domination for one man, which would in fact be him; however, the Roman people were not too fond of this idea. Because of this struggle of position that Julius dealt with, Caesar Augustus was able to use this instance as a lesson and decided to conceal the fact that he was an autocrat. Ultimately, Augustus took advice from a fellow friend Maecenas, who in a book by Ronald Mellor, persuades him that “Now I think you have long since been convinced that I am right in urging you to give the people a monarchial government. If this is the case, accept the leadership over them readily and with enthusiasm—or rather do not throw it away.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This advice, along with plenty of other suggestions had an immense influence on the types of reforms that Augustus produced.

One of the specific reforms created by Augustus revolved around politics. Although Julius Caesar was superior in military, he was not as successful with politics and governing. Augustus analyzed the problems within Julius’s system of ruling and ended up creating a new system of government that administered more effectively to the 60 million people under the rule of Roman law. During Maecenas’s speech about governing advice, he mentions who should be in control of the state. During Julius Caesar’s time, he was the one in charge, however, Augustus decided that it was a better idea to transfer “the republic from my own control to the will of the Senate and the Roman people” which he described in his autobiography, Res Gestae.[[2]](#footnote-2) While implementing this handing over of power, Augustus also fixed what Julius Caesar had done to the group of officials within the senate. While Julius had complete disregard for law, which was evident when he assigned his own slaves with charge of the mint and public revenues, Augustus decided to change this policy. He gradually replaced unqualified members of the senate with officials who actually met the necessary requirements. In doing so, the government was able to carry out things more effectively than they had under Julius Caesar’s reign and ultimately Augustus successfully reformed the Roman rule of law.

Another area in need of serious improvements was the way in which money was handled by the ruler. Julius Caesar’s negative actions revolving finances are spelled out in an article written by Suetonius who portrays Julius as someone who “…not only begged money from the allies, to help pay his debts, but also attacked and sacked some towns of the Lusitanians although they did not refuse his terms and opened their gates to him on his arrival. In Gallia [Gaul] he pillaged shrines and temples of the gods filled with offerings, and oftener sacked towns for the sake of plunder than for any fault.” [[3]](#footnote-3) As for Caesar Augustus, he realized that these actions were ill fated, and decided not to follow in Julius’s footsteps. In fact, in some instances Augustus took the liberty in feeding Rome at his own expense which portrayed him as selfless. Augustus successfully pleased the people by funding countless public services that both appealed to and benefited the Roman people as well.

Although Julius Caesar was successful in the area of military power, Augustus realized that the military must be well taken care of if they are to be loyal to the commander. It is for this reason, that Augustus reformed yet another area of trouble that was relevant during Julius Caesar’s period of rule. Caesar Augustus established a central military treasury in which after twenty years of serving, retired military personnel received a retirement grant that aided them in buying land in order to support their families. Non-Roman men were able to gain Roman citizenship for himself as well as his family after he was discharged from active duty. These incentives did in fact ensure that there were always plenty of members of the military, however it came at a price. Augustus implemented the first system of direct taxation in over two centuries, where a one percent sales tax on all auctions, as well as a five percent death tax on large estates went directly to the military treasury to ensure its survival in the future which the Roman citizens being charged were not very happy about. Caesar Augustus made significant headway in the progress of reimbursing soldiers at somewhat of an adequate level.

The actions involving both Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus can be somewhat of a determinant of how their lives came to an end. Julius Caesar was ultimately assassinated by members of the Senate, including one of his close friends, Brutus. The main determinant in the killing of Julius involved a reason included in a Roman history collection about Julius Caesar which entailed that “Caesar’s autocracy appeared to be much more than a temporary expedient to liquidate the heritage of the civil war and reinvigorate the organs of the Roman state. It was going to last—and the Roman aristocracy was not to be permitted to govern and exploit the Empire in its own fashion.” [[4]](#footnote-4) In other words, the Senate wanted to get rid of Julius because they predicted that his rule would be permanent and lasting, which was an unpopular opinion among the members. Caesar Augustus on the other hand, died peacefully of natural causes in his own bed. More often than not, Augustus had done plenty of good deeds that pacified the Roman people under his rule. All of the factors mentioned throughout, explain the reasons in which Caesar Augustus altered his actions during his reign based on the mistakes made by Julius Caesar.

1. . Munson, ed., *Ronald Mellor* Augustus and the Creation of the Roman Empire pg. 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. J. Munson, ed., *Caesar Augustus* Res Gestae pg. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. J. Munson, ed., *Suetonius* pg. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. J. Munson ed., *J. Kelly Sowards* Julius Caesar: The Colossus pg. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)