

## **Cicero- On Duties “Justifying the Assassination of Julius Caesar”**

*This selection from Cicero’s On Duties provides a justification for the assassination of Julius Caesar (44 BCE). Some senators feared that Caesar aimed to establish a typical Hellenistic monarchy over Rome with himself as absolute king. The very word king was abhorrent to patriotic Romans, who gloried in their status as free citizens of a five-centuries-old republic. On March 15, 44 BCE, Caesar was slain by some sixty senators, who acted, they said, to restore the liberty of the Roman people. Cicero did not participate in the assassination.*

BOOK III xxi.

Our tyrant deserved his death for having made an exception of the one thing that was the blackest crime of all. Why do we gather instances of petty crime - legacies criminally obtained and fraudulent buying and selling? Behold, here you have a man who was ambitious to be king of the Roman People and master of the whole world; and he achieved it! The man who maintains that such an ambition is morally right is a madman; for he justifies the destruction of law and liberty and thinks their hideous and detestable suppression glorious. But if anyone agrees that it is not morally right to be kind in a state that once was free and that ought to be free now, and yet imagines that it is advantageous for him who can reach that position, with what remonstrance or rather with what appeal should I try to tear him away from so strange a delusion? For, oh ye immortal gods! can the most horrible and hideous of all murders - that of fatherland -bring advantage to anybody, even though he who has committed such a crime receives from his enslaved fellow-citizens the title of "Father of his Country"? Expediency, therefore, must be measured by the standard of moral rectitude, and in such a way, too, that these two words shall seem in sound only to be different but in real meaning to be one and the same.

What greater advantage one could have, according to the standard of popular opinion, than to be a king, I do not know; when, however, I begin to bring the question back to the standard of truth, then I find nothing more disadvantageous for one who has risen to that height by injustice. For can occasions for worry anxiety, fear by day and by night, and a life all beset with plots and perils be of advantage to anybody?