**Julius Caesar – Early Life/Influences**

***INSTRUCTIONS: Read through the following information and   
categorise using the worksheet provided.***

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Caesar’s gens (clan), the Julii, were patricians—i.e., members of Rome’s  original aristocracy, which had coalesced in the 4th century BCE with a number of leading plebian (commoner) families to form the nobility that had been the governing class in Rome since then. By Caesar’s time, the number of surviving patrician  was small; and in the gens Julia the Caesares seem to have been the only surviving family.

Though some of the most powerful noble families were patrician, patrician blood was no longer a political advantage; it was actually a handicap, since a patrician was debarred from holding the paraconstitutional but powerful office of tribune  of the plebs. The Julii Caesares traced their lineage  back to the goddess Venus, but the family was not snobbish or conservative-minded. It was also not rich or influential or even distinguished.

The traditional competition among members of the Roman nobility for office and the spoils of office was thus threatening to turn into a desperate race for seizing autocratic power. The Julii Caesares did not seem to be in the running. It was true that Sextus Caesar, who was perhaps the dictator’s uncle, had been one of the consuls for 91 BCE; and Lucius Caesar, one of the consuls for 90 BCE, was a distant cousin, whose son and namesake was consul for 64 BCE. In 90 BCE, Rome’s Italian allies had seceded from Rome because of the Roman government’s obstinate refusal to grant them Roman citizenship, and, as consul, Lucius Caesar had introduced emergency legislation for granting citizenship to the citizens of all Italian ally states that had not taken up arms or that had returned to their allegiance.

Whoever had been consul in this critical year would have had to initiate such legislation, whatever his personal political preferences. There is evidence, however, that the Julii Caesares, though patricians, had already committed themselves to the antinobility party. An aunt of the future dictator had married Gaius Marius, a self-made man (*novus homo*) who had forced his way up to the summit by his military ability and had made the momentous innovation of recruiting his armies from the dispossessed peasants.

The date of Caesar the dictator’s birth has long been disputed. The day was July 12 or 13; the traditional (and perhaps most probable) year is 100 BCE; but if this date is correct, Caesar must have held each of his offices two years in advance of the legal minimum age. His father, Gaius Caesar, died when Caesar was but 16; his mother, Aurelia, was a notable woman, and it seems certain that he owed much to her.

Despite the inadequacy of his resources, Caesar seems to have chosen a political career as a matter of course. From the beginning, he probably privately aimed at winning office, not just for the sake of the honours but to achieve the power to put the misgoverned Roman state and Greco-Roman world into better order in accordance with ideas of his own. It is improbable that Caesar deliberately sought monarchical power until after he had crossed the Rubicon in 49 BCE, though sufficient  power to impose his will, as he was determined to do, proved to mean monarchical power.

In 84 BCE Caesar committed himself publicly to the radical side by marrying Cornelia, a daughter of Lucius Cornelius Cinna, a noble who was Marius’s associate in revolution. In 83 BCE Lucius Cornelius Sulla returned to Italy from the East and led the successful counter-revolution of 83–82 BCE; Sulla then ordered Caesar to divorce Cornelia. Caesar refused and came close to losing not only his property (such as it was) but his life as well. He found it advisable to remove himself from Italy and to do military service, first in the province of Asia and then in Cicilia.

In 78 BCE, after Sulla’s death, he returned to Rome and started on his political career in the conventional way, by acting as a prosecuting advocate—of course, in his case, against prominent Sullan counter-revolutionaries. His first target, Gnaeus Cornelius Dolabella, was defended by Quintus Hortensius, the leading advocate of the day, and was acquitted by the extortion-court jury, composed exclusively of senators.

Caesar then went to Rhodes to study oratory under a famous professor, Molon. En route he was captured by pirates (one of the symptoms of the anarchy into which the Roman nobility had allowed the Mediterranean world to fall). Caesar raised his ransom, raised a naval force, captured his captors, and had them crucified—all this as a private individual holding no public office. In 74 BCE, when Mithradates VI Eupator, king of Pontus, renewed war on the Romans, Caesar raised a private army to combat him.

In his absence from Rome, Caesar was made a member of the politico-ecclesiastical college of pontifices; and on his return he gained one of the elective military tribuneships. Caesar now worked to undo the Sullan constitution in cooperation with Pompey  (Gnaeus Pompeius), who had started his career as a lieutenant of Sulla but had changed sides since Sulla’s death. In 69 or 68 BCE Caesar was elected quaestor (the first rung on the Roman political ladder). In the same year his wife, Cornelia, and his aunt Julia, Marius’s widow, died. In public funeral orations in their honour, Caesar found opportunities for praising Cinna and Marius. Caesar afterward married Pompeia, a distant relative of Pompey. Caesar served his quaestorship in the province of Farther Spain (modern Andalusia and Portugal).

Caesar was elected one of the curule aediles for 65 BCE, and he celebrated his tenure  of this office by unusually lavish expenditure with borrowed money. He was elected pontifex maximus in 63 BCE by a political dodge. By now he had become a controversial political figure.

Caesar was elected a praetor for 62 BCE. Toward the end of the year of his praetorship, a scandal was caused by Publius Clodius (Roman Politician)  in Caesar’s house at the celebration there of the rites, for women only, of Bona Dea  (a Roman deity of fruitfulness, both in the Earth and in women). Caesar consequently divorced Pompeia. He obtained the governorship of Farther Spain for 61–60 BCE. His creditors did not let him leave Rome until Crassus had gone bail for a quarter of his debts; but a military expedition beyond the northwest frontier of his province enabled Caesar to win loot for himself as well as for his soldiers, with a balance left over for the treasury. This partial financial recovery enabled him, after his return to Rome in 60 BCE, to stand for the consulship for 59 BCE