

Activity 5. Cicero Defends the Roman Republic (44 BC)

Source: M. Cicero, M. Griffin, E. M. Atkins (1991). *On Duties*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Background: Marcus Tullius Cicero wrote *De Officiis* (On Duties) at a time when the Roman Republic was being challenged by supporters of the recently assassinated Julius Caesar and dictatorial government. During his long career, Cicero held most of the major offices of the Roman Republic. In this work he explains his views on leadership in a republic. While Cicero opposed dictatorship, he did not support democracy. His notion of a republic was much closer to oligarchy or rule by elites. He was murdered by anti-Republican soldiers loyal to Marc Antony and Octavius Caesar soon after it was written. Examine excerpts A – D and answer questions 1 – 3.

A. Those who are about to take charge of public affairs should hold fast to Plato's advice: first fix their gaze so firmly on what is beneficial to the citizens that whatever they do, they do with that in mind, forgetful of their own advantage. Secondly, let them care for the whole body of the republic rather than protect one part and neglect the rest (33).

B. We may exercise severity for the sake of the republic; for without that the city cannot be governed. Punishment and correction should never be insulting. It should be undertaken in accordance with what is useful to the republic, not to the one who administers the punishment or reprimand . . . Our prayer should be that those in charge of the republic be like the laws, which are led to punish not through anger, but through fairness (35).

C. Our judgment should be that the achievements which are greatest and show the greatest spirit are those of the men who rule the republic. For their government reaches extremely widely and affects the greatest number (36).

D. For my part, when the republic was being run by the men to whom it had entrusted itself, I devoted all my concern and all my thought to it. But then a single man came to dominate everything, there was no longer any room for consultation or for personal authority, and finally I lost my allies in preserving the republic . . . I only wish that the republic had remained in its original condition (63).

Questions

1. What should be the priority for an effective leader in a republic?
2. How should the law and punishment be implemented?
3. Who should be chosen for leadership?
4. Why is Cicero concerned about the future of the republic?