

Book Review

Ferdinand Mount (2023). *Big Caesars and Little Caesars: How They Rise and How They Fall* – From Julius Caesar to Boris Johnson. Bloomsbury Publishing.

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Ferdinand Mount's "*Big Caesars and Little Caesars: How They Rise and How They Fall - From Julius Caesar to Boris Johnson*" is a thought-provoking exploration of the rise and fall of political leaders throughout history. Published by Bloomsbury Publishing in 2023, the book delves into the fascinating parallels between the lives and trajectories of ancient Roman emperors and contemporary political figures, with a particular focus on Boris Johnson, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. This review aims to provide an overview of the book's content, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, compare it to the existing scholarship and offer a final assessment of its significance.

The book comprises four chapters. Mount begins by providing an overview of the history of the Roman Republic and the political landscape during that time. He then delves into Julius Caesar's life journey emphasizing his triumphs and pivotal role in transforming Rome from a republic into an empire. In this chapter, the author skillfully portrays how Mount goes beyond depicting Caesar as a ruthless conqueror. The second chapter of the book focuses on Augustus Caesar, Julius Caesar's adopted son and successor. Mount elucidates the challenges Augustus faced in consolidating his power and establishing the foundations of the Roman Empire. He explores Augustus' political strategies, his cultural initiatives, and his careful construction of a public image that portrayed him as a ruler worthy of reverence.

In Part Three, Mount deals with the idea of Caesar-ism and the traits of "Caesars" in politics, both big and little. Mount explores the ascent and decline of would-be autocrats, identifying large Caesars, those who desire complete social control, and little Caesars, those who aspire to be more

individualized, self-serving kind of leaders. The strategies used by these leaders are discussed in the book; for big Caesars, these strategies include widespread violence, breaching the law, and lying; for little Caesars, they involve more subdued manipulation of the established institutions. Mount's research takes into account both historical and modern characters, providing insights into the aspirations, achievements and social effects of many "Caesars."

The main argument of Part Four of "Big Caesars and Little Caesars" by Ferdinand Mount is an exploration of the resurgence of authoritarian leadership, encompassing both historical and contemporary figures. Mount draws a parallel between ancient Caesars like Julius Caesar and modern leaders such as Boris Johnson, highlighting the common traits and tactics employed by these "Caesars" to attain and maintain power. The book delves into the dynamics of authoritarianism, the manipulation of democratic institutions and the consequences of unchecked leadership. Mount's analysis offers a thought-provoking commentary on the enduring nature of autocratic tendencies and their impact on society. Moreover, Mount's book exhibits several strengths. The author's extensive knowledge of history and politics shines through his vivid and engaging writing style. He skillfully weaves together historical anecdotes and modern examples to create a compelling narrative that captivates the reader's attention. Mount's meticulous research is evident, as he draws upon a wide range of primary and secondary sources to support his arguments. The book's comparative approach allows for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of power, shedding light on both the timeless and unique aspects of political leadership.

I would criticize Mount's book for being overly intricate and thick. Although historical studies should strive for depth and thoroughness, Mount occasionally gets bogged down in unnecessary detail, which hinders the narrative and makes it difficult for casual readers to fully engage with the content. It might be confusing and even cause someone to lose interest when there is an overwhelming amount of names, dates and events. To appeal to a larger readership, the book might have benefitted from a more simplified and approachable style.

The book contributes to the existing scholarship on political leadership by providing a comparative perspective that spans across centuries. Mount's work echoes the ideas explored in historical biographies such as Robert Harris's "Imperium" and Mary Beard's "SPQR," but it distinguishes itself by exploring the connections between the past and the present. The book's interdisciplinary

approach, drawing from history, political science, and psychology, enriches the scholarly discourse on leadership studies.

Ferdinand Mount's "Big Caesars and Little Caesars" is a captivating and insightful exploration of political leadership throughout history. While the book's focus on Boris Johnson may limit its generalizability, its comparative analysis of ancient Roman emperors offers valuable insights into the dynamics of power and the complexities of leadership. Mount's engaging writing style and extensive research make this book accessible to both academic and general readers interested in history, politics and leadership studies.

References

- Beard, M. (2016). SPQR: History of ancient Rome (2015). Beard, M. (2015). SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome. Liveright Publishing Corporation.
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