

Howard University College of Arts and Sciences Symposium on Undergraduate Research 2011

Political Imagery from Rome to the United States

This research compares the work of the ancient Roman historian Suetonius with the work of British historian Nigel Hamilton. I compare the structural format of Suetonius' *Lives of Illustrious Men (De Vita Caesarum)* with that of Nigel Hamilton's *American Caesars*, chosen for their similar approach to profiling the lives of Roman Emperors and American Presidents respectively. Scholars such as Bill Thayer have looked closely at other aspects of Suetonius' work, but there has been little scholarly work done focusing on the political writings of Suetonius and Hamilton. This study gauges each book's effect on the public political discourse of its era. The presentation scrutinizes the leadership profiles of Claudius in *De Vita Caesarum* and Harry Truman in *American Caesars*. I also incorporate the public perception of each leader into my analysis in the form of Tacitus' perspective on Claudius and David McCullough's 1992 biography *Truman*. Both Claudius and Truman were thrust into their positions as a result of their predecessors' deaths, and are remembered for their personal humility, progressive political agendas, and contentious relationships with their legislative bodies. The aim of my work is to highlight how the presentation of leadership images in political biography spins the public discussion of what leadership means.