

Born and rose to
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Born in Florence on May 3, 1469, Machiavelli entered government service as a clerk and rose to prominence when the Florentine Republic was proclaimed in 1498. Machiavelli was an upright man, a good citizen, and a good father. He was not by any means a faithful husband but lived in affectionate harmony with his wife, Marietta Corsini (whom he had married in the latter part of 1501), and had five children by her. He loved his native city " more than his own soul," and he was generous, ardent, and basically religious.

He was secretary of the ten-man council that conducted the diplomatic negotiations and supervised the military operations of the republic, and his duties included missions to the French king (1504, 1510-11), the Holy See (1506), and the German emperor (1507-8). In the course of his diplomatic missions within Italy he became acquainted with many of the Italian rulers and was able to study their political tactics, particularly those of the ecclesiastic and soldier Cesare Borgia, who was at that time engaged in enlarging his holdings in central Italy. From 1503 to 1506 Machiavelli reorganized the military defense of the republic of Florence.

Although mercenary armies were common during this period, he preferred to rely on the conscription of native troops to ensure a permanent and patriotic defense of the commonwealth. In 1512, when the Medici, a Florentine family, regained power in Florence and the republic was dissolved, he was deprived of office and briefly imprisoned for alleged conspiracy against them. After his release he retired to his estate near Florence, where he wrote his most important works. Despite his attempts to gain favor with the Medici rulers, he was never restored to his prominent government position.

When the republic was temporarily reinstated in 1527, he was suspected by many republicans of pro-Medici leanings. Machiavelli's methodology involved the empirical observation of human nature and behaviour, which he believed to be changeless. His deep feelings about the degradation and corruption of Italy at his time led him to put his hope into the daring and the violence of a great man who would exercise power ruthlessly but with prudence. Power, Machiavelli apparently believed, legitimized the state, if rationally applied, by a man able to manipulate the people and use the army for his own purposes.

In his quest for a "new prince" and a new principle of policy he knew that he was opening "a road as yet untrodden by man." The road led to the absolute sovereign state. Machiavellianism, as a term, has been used to describe the principles of power politics, and the type of person who uses those principles in political or personal life is frequently described as a Machiavellian. Out of a desire to shock his contemporaries, Machiavelli liked to appear more wicked than he was. This, together with certain blunt maxims in his works, gave him a reputation for immorality. The maxims became a target for attacks by the Catholic Counter-Reformation; and the word "Machiavellianism" was coined as a term of opprobrium by the French, out of hatred for all things Italian. He "was a scapegoat because he was a great man and because he was unfortunate." Machiavelli's term *umanita* ("humanity") means more than kindness; it is a direct translation of the Latin *humanitas*.

Machiavelli implies that he shared with the ancients a sovereign wisdom of human affairs. He also describes that theory of reading as an active and
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even aggressive pursuit that was common among humanists. Possessing a text and understanding its words were not enough; analytic ability and a questioning attitude were necessary before a reader could truly enter the councils of the great. These councils, moreover, were not merely serious and ennobling; they held secrets available only to the astute, secrets the knowledge of which could transform life from a chaotic miscellany into a crucially heroic experience. Classical thought offered insight into the heart of things. In addition, the classics suggested methods by which, once known, human reality could be transformed from an accident of history into an artifact of will. Antiquity was rich in examples, actual or poetic, of epic action, victorious eloquence, and applied understanding. Carefully studied and well employed, classical rhetoric