

Niccoló Machiavelli

Name: _____

Niccoló Machiavelli (MOCK-ee-uh-VELL-ee) was an Italian thinker and politician who lived from 1429 - 1527, a time when Italy was made up of many city-states that each had independent governments. For years, Machiavelli worked for the government of Florence, a powerful city. But he lost his job when the ruling family was forced out of power. Afterward, Machiavelli began to think and write about how governments should operate. He brought the idea of **realism** into the discussion of politics, meaning that he wrote about how the world *really* worked instead of how it *could* work.

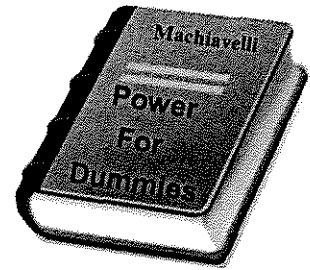


It's All About Power

Machiavelli is most famous for his 1513 book called *The Prince*. In this book, Machiavelli discusses what it takes for a leader to get power and keep it. He rejected the idea that leaders can earn the right to rule by being morally good. Instead, Machiavelli argued that a leader's authority to rule comes from power. He believed that only a ruler who has power can stay in charge, and being morally good has nothing to do with being powerful. Machiavelli thought power was very important because without a powerful ruler, a country could not be secure and safe.

The End Justifies the Means

Machiavelli wrote that the *end*, or goal, of keeping power was so important that it was okay to use any *means*, or method, to keep it. A ruler who wants to stay in power must be prepared to do anything — even things that are evil or cruel. According to Machiavelli, the only thing that makes people obey laws is the threat of force. Therefore, in order to stay in charge, a ruler had to keep people afraid. Today, we use the word *Machiavellian* to describe people who seem to follow this way of thinking.



REPUBLIC:

A government where citizens elect representatives to make laws.

MONARCHY:

A government ruled by a king or queen who makes the laws.

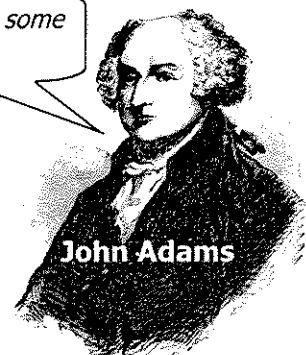
Balanced Government

In 1517, Machiavelli wrote a very different book called *Discourses on Livy*. In this book, Machiavelli discussed the form of government called a *republic*. He admired the government of France, where the power of the king was *checked*, or limited, by laws. A separate body called *parliament* enforced the laws and could even reject laws. This was a very early version of the idea of checks and balances — allowing different branches of government to limit each other's power. Machiavelli also argued in favor of liberty. He believed people, not rulers, are best able to choose leaders and make decisions for the common good.

Influence on the United States

In *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli said that "governments of the people are better than those of princes." The Founding Fathers of the United States agreed. After the Revolutionary War, the Founding Fathers wanted to make sure a ruling class of people would not take power. When they set out to form a republic, they paid attention to Machiavelli's work. In fact, John Adams, who helped write our Constitution, praised Machiavelli's ideas about mixed government. The idea of checks and balances is central to the form of government they created, and it still works today.

Machiavelli made some good points!



Niccolo Machiavelli



In 1513, Niccolo Machiavelli wrote a book about the realities of political life as determined by a study of history. The following are ideas from his work, The Prince.

Directions: Underneath each quote, decipher the meaning of Machiavelli's message.

1. "A prince ought not to keep his word if doing so would go against his interests..."

2. "Still, a prince should make himself feared in such a way that if he does not gain love, he does at any rate avoid hatred."

3. "It is not necessary for a prince to have all the good qualities that I have named, but it is necessary that he *seems* to have them."

4. "We have not seen great things done in our time except by those who have been considered mean, the rest have failed."

5. "A prince must be ready to shift with the wind as the ups and downs of fortune require. He should not go against what is good if he can avoid it, but should be ready to do evil when necessary."

Answer the following questions according to what you just read about Machiavelli:

6. What character traits must a leader possess to be effective?

7. Explain, is it better to be feared or loved? Why?

8. How do Machiavelli's observations and suggestions apply to the modern world in a political, business and personal sense? Do you agree with his tactics?