

## Power: The Rise of the Nation-State and Machiavelli

“Is it better for a prince to be loved more than feared or feared more than loved? The answer is that he should be both, but since it is difficult to be feared and loved at the same time, it is much safer to be feared.” These lines were written by Niccolò Machiavelli in his handbook for politicians called *The Prince*. He wrote other similarly disturbing suggestions: Humans will more quickly forgive

the killing of a family member than having property taken from them. Often, for the good of the community, people must suffer. A prince who is too merciful will be judged weak, so he should get used to the necessity of causing pain. The prince must learn to lie and cheat for the good of his subjects and recognize that he is above the laws he uses to govern others. In other words, the ends justify the means.

Machiavelli’s writings have often been judged as evil. However, he would have claimed that he was only giving practical advice based on his first-hand political experience. Politics was a dangerous game when he wrote his book in 1513. Rulers during the Renaissance were more likely to die violently on the battlefield or by the hands of an assassin than peacefully in their beds. Machiavelli’s diplomatic career put him in a position to observe this cut-throat world.

The government of Florence employed Machiavelli as an ambassador and sent him on 24 diplomatic missions, including four to the king of France and one to the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I. In the thirteenth year of his service, a French invasion toppled the Florentine government, and he was forced into exile. It was then that he wrote his book. By writing it, Machiavelli hoped to gain favor with the new rulers of Florence and win back his job. They ignored him. Nevertheless, *The Prince* became the most famous book on political science ever written, and it is still read by politicians today.

Machiavelli lived when ruthless kings and queens united territories with a shared language into larger centralized kingdoms. This was the first time in European history that this occurred. Prior to the fifteenth century, most of Europe was divided into countless small territories ruled by noblemen. In some instances, these territories were organized into kingdoms. However, the kings were often too weak to challenge the power of the nobility. As a result, people who lived in a region with the same language might find themselves governed by several different rulers. In the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, powerful monarchs emerged who could outsmart or defeat the nobility. The kingdoms created by these strong rulers are called **nation-states** because all the people of one nationality were finally joined together under one king. In his writings, Machiavelli included many useful and realistic lessons based on the success of these cunning rulers.



Niccolò Machiavelli

According to Machiavelli, one of the most effective monarchs was Ferdinand of Spain. He began his career as crown prince of Aragon, one of the four kingdoms that would later unite to become modern Spain. In 1469, he married Isabella, queen of Castile. In the Renaissance, diplomacy often revolved around marriage between monarchs because it was an easy way to expand territory and win trustworthy allies. By marrying Isabella, Ferdinand united Aragon with the larger and richer kingdom of Castile. He also found in Isabella a highly intelligent, energetic, and determined wife with the same desire to strengthen royal power as himself. Together they set about curbing the power of the nobility. Instead of appointing nobles to positions in their government, they hired university-trained lawyers and churchmen who owed allegiance only to them. They also set up the **Hermudad**, a rural police force, to tackle disorder and carry law into the countryside. To increase respect for the monarchy, Isabella added ceremony and formality to the royal court. The Spanish learned to hold their king and queen in awe because they viewed them as living symbols of Spain.

But Spain was not yet fully united. There was still the emirate of Granada in the south. In 711, Spain was invaded by Moslem warriors from North Africa. The **Moors**, as these invaders were called, brought great learning and sophistication to Spain. Much of what medieval Europe knew about medicine, music, and philosophy was learned from the Moors. In addition to the Moors, a large Jewish population lived in Spain. They played crucial roles in the Spanish economy and society as craftsmen, traders, financiers, doctors, and scholars. Nevertheless, this was an age of religious warfare because Christians viewed Moslems and Jews as their enemies and vice versa. By 1491, only Granada remained in Moslem control. Ferdinand and Isabella joined forces and together drove the Moors from Spain in 1492.

Even before the conquest of Granada, Ferdinand and Isabella realized that Christianity could be used to further bind the Spanish people together and strengthen royal power. To accomplish this, they set up a kind of religious police force called the **Inquisition**. It was the Inquisition's job to make sure that all Spaniards were Christian. The Jews and the defeated Moors were given a choice: convert, die, or leave. Not surprisingly, most left.

The loss of Moslem and Jewish skills, knowledge, and creativity hurt Spain in the long run. In the short term, however, Ferdinand and Isabella succeeded in concentrating power in their hands and advancing the unification of Spain beyond their marriage. To their contemporaries, the finance of Columbus's voyage in 1492 seemed to be the least of their accomplishments. Upon their deaths, their daughter, Juana, inherited a powerful and cohesive state. It was this state under Juana's son, Charles V, that sent Spanish soldiers called **Conquistadors** to explore and conquer the new world. Machiavelli would have nodded his head with approval.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Challenges

1. Who wrote *The Prince*? \_\_\_\_\_
2. In the view of *The Prince*, why should a ruler choose to be feared more than loved?

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3. Why should the Prince lie and cheat? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What was Machiavelli's job, and where was he sent? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What is a nation-state? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. What relationship was at the center of diplomacy in the Renaissance? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Who did the Spanish rulers depend on for advisors in governing? Who did they leave out?

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8. What professional contributions were made by the Jews in Spain? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. What choice did the Inquisition give to non-Catholics? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. What was the short-term benefit of driving the Moslems and Jews from Spain?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Points to Ponder

1. Was Machiavelli evil? Explain.

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2. How are the lessons of Machiavelli's *The Prince* still practiced by modern politicians today?

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3. How do you think the expulsion of the Moors and Jews hurt Spain in the long run?

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