

Machiavelli, the New World and the Republic

“I love the republic more than my own soul.”

Niccolo Machiavelli, in a letter to Francesco Vettori

A NECESSARY PROLOGUE

*I*t is May of 1469, in Florence, Italy. At the Battistero di San Giovanni, standing opposite the great Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, a young infant is Christened at the baptismal font. His parents name him Niccolo.

It is a mere twenty-three years since Brunelleschi’s completion of the cupola atop that Cathedral, the greatest scientific and engineering feat in more than 1,000 years. It is only thirty years since the ecumenical Council of Florence completed its work, under the influence of the greatest scientific genius of the age, Nicholas of Cusa. And in the very year of Niccolo’s baptism, the great Florentine astronomer and cosmographer, Paolo Toscanelli, is in communication with the Portuguese monarchy, concerning his proposal for a westward voyage of discovery across the Atlantic. This is a time of the profoundest hope and of unparalleled breakthroughs in science, art and music. It is, in short, the Renaissance.

But Brunelleschi dies in 1446; then Cusa dies in 1464. In 1453 the Venetian Empire orchestrates the downfall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks, an event which begets fear and pessimism throughout Italy. The medieval empire of Venice, nearly destroyed after the banking collapses, plagues, and mass deaths of the fourteenth century, is again on the ascendent. And in Florence, the previous virtues of the earlier Florentine republic are being extinguished by the growing power of the aristocracy under the rule of the Medici Family.

This is the environment within which the young Niccolo grows to maturity. And this is the city where the mature Machiavelli - together with Leonardo Da Vinci - fights for the creation of a republic, a fight thrilling in its reach and profound in its effect.

So we begin...

I. Whence America?

I sing of the Republic! Perhaps of all of the inventions to spring forth from the genius of man’s mind - the art, the music, the scientific achievements - it is the republic that is mankind’s greatest creation.

It is in the creation of the republic, that humanity has discovered a form of social organization and philosophical outlook which is fully coherent with those qualities which distinguish our species from the beasts.

And it is also in the republic, that there exists the economic, scientific, military, and cultural power to eliminate the evil of empire and oligarchical rule, forever.

This is the gift that Niccolo Machiavelli

and Leonardo Da Vinci have bequeathed to us.

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How is it, that in a world dominated by empires for the past two thousand years, the American republic burst on the world stage between 1775 and 1789?

The recorded history of humanity is primarily a history of empires, oligarchies, and their imperial monetarist systems; some perhaps more benevolent than others, but all based on an oligarchical principle. Beginning with the Roman Empire - and its evil bastard Byzantium - and then progressing through the Venetian Empire, and the Anglo-Dutch Empire, consolidated by William of Orange in

1688, we see evolutionary stages in the development of what is increasingly an empire of global domination.

How did America, at least up to the present day, escape this fate?

The republican idea came to our shores in 1620, with those courageous emigrants seeking to establish a Commonwealth in the land of the New World. Its genesis came earlier, in the idea of a "commonwealth," grounded in a commitment to the Public Good, defined in the works of Nicholas of Cusa at the time of the Council of Florence. It was the radiating effects of that Council, and Cusa's work, that led into the creation of modern nation-states under Louis XI in France and Henry VII in England.

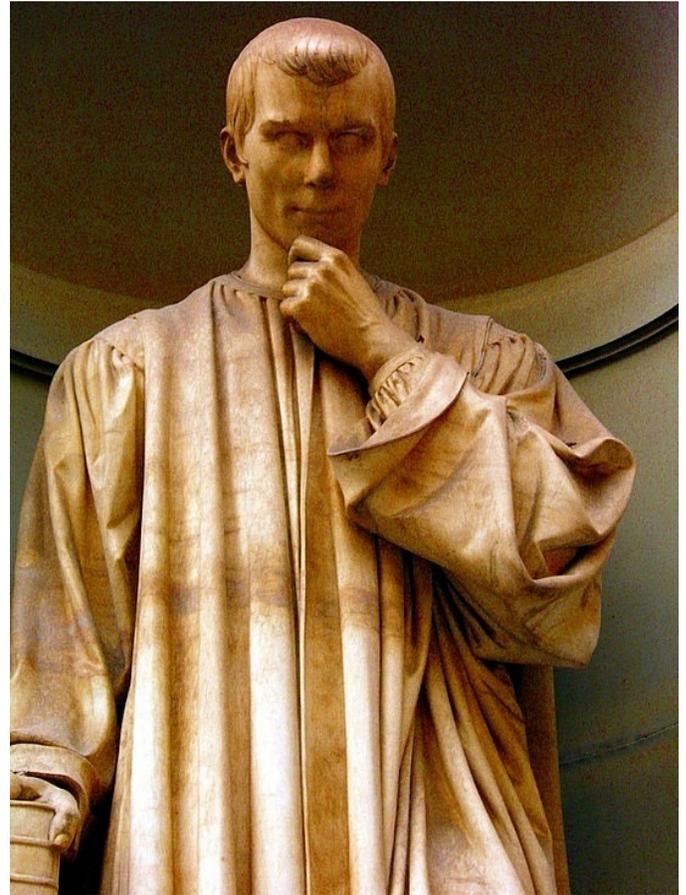
The difficulty, as Machiavelli saw it, is that even the best of monarchies are incapable of defending the general good, let alone the very existence of their nation, in perpetuity.

To defeat the forces of empire, a greater power is needed, and that power can only be found in a republic. That is why the British Empire has always recognized the United States as the greatest threat to its continued existence. It is only the United States, together with allies it recruits to its side, which has the **power** to defeat the London-based monetary interests of today.

The challenge is how to create, preserve, and utilize the power of such a republic. This is the issue that Machiavelli devoted his life to. So we ask ourselves: what is the method by which a commonwealth, capable of defeating the oligarchy, can be brought into existence; what is the nature of such a commonwealth; and how can its continued existence be secured?

- Florence: 1494 -

By the 1480s the mighty generation of Cusa and Brunelleschi was dead or dying. The scientific genius which had sparked the Renaissance was in decay, and everywhere



Niccolo Machiavelli

in Italy the forces of oligarchism were growing more powerful. In Florence, there were unmistakable signs of a cultural and moral degeneration. As Machiavelli put it, the young people cared for nothing but "to appear splendid in their dress and to be clever and smart in their speech."

Then in 1494, following the disastrous invasion of Italy by France, a political revolution in Florence drove the Medicis into exile, and a republic was formed. This republic would go through two profound changes - in 1498 and 1502 - before Machiavelli and his allies were able to take center stage, but then, from 1502 to 1512, Machiavelli, together with his partner Leonardo Da Vinci, set into motion a series of events which threatened the very existence of the Venetian Empire, and perhaps even more importantly, they demonstrated for future generations exactly the method by which mankind could at long last free itself from empire.

The particular quandary for both Machiavelli and Leonardo was that neither of them were of noble birth, and, hence, their access to direct power was almost completely blocked. They needed patrons. This was a difficulty that Leonardo suffered with throughout his life. Machiavelli, in *La Mandragola*, even writes about this problem, when he says that for those without powerful friends or influence in Florence, “there isn’t even a dog who will bark in your face.”

But in 1502, the pro-republican Florentine aristocrat Piero Soderini was elected as *Gonfalonier*-for-life,¹ a new post created to bring increased stability to the government of Florence; and for the next ten years Soderini forged a partnership with Machiavelli which elevated him far beyond both his station in life and his modest position in the Florentine government. Soderini bypassed the official channels of government and deployed Machiavelli, repeatedly, to deal with many critical matters. As a result, Machiavelli was able to exert far-reaching influence over Florentine diplomatic and military affairs. Between 1502 and 1512, all of the key initiatives to defend the Florentine Republic – the overtures to Cesare Borgia, the Arno River diversion project, and the creation of the civilian militia – were carried through by these three men, Machiavelli, Leonardo, Soderini.

II. The Republic is Established

When Lorenzo de’ Medici died in 1492, there were four primary political factions in Florence: the Medici party, the anti-Medici aristocrats, the republican faction (which also included many aristocrats), and the followers of the priest Savonarola. After two years of corrupt, abusive and

1. The *Gonfalonier* was the head of the Florentine government. Prior to 1502 *Gonfaloniers* served a term of only two years.

inept rule by Lorenzo’s son, and taking advantage of the crisis created by the French invasion, the last three of these four parties came together and drove the Medicis from Florence in November of 1494.

Among the leaders of this revolution was Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, a cousin of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and the head of the cadet branch of the Medici family. This Lorenzo had become associated with the republican opposition to *Il Magnifico’s* rule as early as 1486.

Lorenzo di’ Pierfrancesco, although closer to the aristocratic than the republican group, is important because he played a key role in sponsoring the careers of two men – Niccolo Machiavelli and Amerigo Vespucci. It was through the backing of Lorenzo that Machiavelli was brought into the government in 1498, and it was Lorenzo’s deployment of Amerigo Vespucci to Spain in 1492 which led to his voyages of discovery.²

Shortly after the establishment of the republic, political power began to pass into the hands of the priest Savonarola, who moved to establish a “popular democracy,” with all power vested in the newly created Great Council of the People (the *Consiglio Grande*). Initially, many of the republican faction supported, or at least tolerated, Savonarola, both because they upheld many of his political reforms, and also stemming from their fears that Florentine aristocrats intended to establish an oligarchical government modeled on Venice.

Savonarola’s rule, however, became increasingly demagogic and unstable, and in 1498 he is overthrown and a new republic proclaimed.

In the first post-Savonarola government Guido Antonio Vespucci, an uncle of Amerigo, is named *Gonfalonier*, and he,

2. More will be said of the Vespucci family later in this article, but for now, it is important to mention that both Leonardo Da Vinci and Machiavelli were on intimate terms with members of that family.

together with Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, sponsor the election of Machiavelli to two positions in the new government - Second Chancellor of the Republic and Secretary to the Committee of the Ten of War. Agostino Vespucci (Amerigo's cousin) is elected as the chief assistant to Machiavelli, and later he would become Machiavelli's liaison with Leonardo Da Vinci.

Within days of Savonarola's overthrow, the Venetian Army invades Florentine territory. The war lasts for almost a year, creating severe economic dislocation, and forcing the government of Florence to withdraw troops from the siege of Pisa, Venice's ally.

Then, in 1499, the army of France invades Italy, for the second time in five years, and, in the ensuing chaos, Florence suffers food shortages, famine, and economic collapse.

In 1502, to deal with this crisis, major constitutional changes are pushed through. Some of Savonarola's reforms, such as the Grand Council, are kept, but power is concentrated more in the executive council (*Signoria*), and the position of *Gonfalonier* is made a lifetime appointment. At a meeting of the Grand Council, the aristocrat Piero Soderini is elected to fill this new post. Within months Machiavelli becomes his chief agent.

III. Machiavelli and Da Vinci

Leonardo was the older of the two, by almost a generation. This places him much closer to the era of Cusa and Brunelleschi. While Machiavelli was still a youth, Leonardo had already become the greatest scientist and artist of his age.

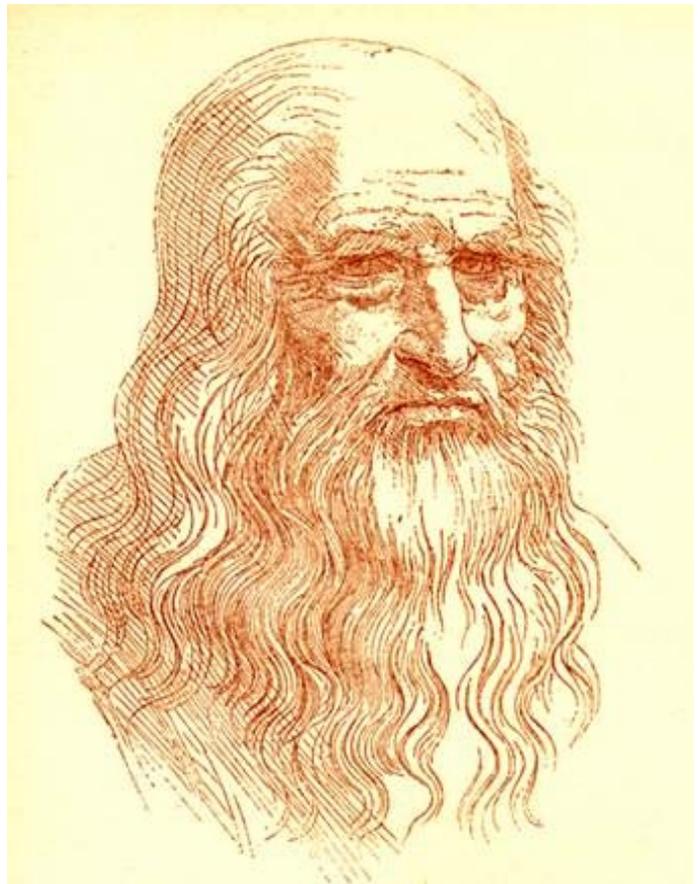
After 1502, it is Machiavelli, as Second Chancellor of Florence, who is Leonardo's superior, and who deploys him on several government missions. But, in reality, it is the younger Machiavelli who is the protégé. The emergence of Machiavelli's genius

begins with his association with Da Vinci.

It seems unlikely that the two met before 1500. In 1482, when Leonardo left Florence for Milan, where he spent the next 17 years, Machiavelli was only thirteen years old, and during those 17 years there is no record of Machiavelli having visited Milan.

What is certain is that they must have known each other prior to 1502, because in June of that year, at Urbino, it is Machiavelli, in a meeting with Cesare Borgia, who arranges for Da Vinci to be appointed Borgia's chief military engineer.

By the autumn of 1502 Machiavelli and Leonardo were together at the court of



Leonardo Da Vinci

Cesare Borgia at Imola, in the Romagna. There, for one month, they were in regular contact with each other, and each, individually, with Borgia. Then they spent the next two months traveling with Borgia's army. Upon returning to Florence in 1503, and continuing for the next ten years, they

worked as partners in a fight to defend and secure the Florentine Republic.

What is also known is that, prior to 1482, Leonardo was traveling in the same Florentine scientific and republican circles from which Machiavelli later emerged.

Sometime in the 1470s Leonardo developed a friendship with the scientist Paolo Toscanelli, and Toscanelli allowed Leonardo to examine many of his scientific papers, including his 1474 globe of the world. At about this time Leonardo also became friends with Amerigo Vespucci, and it is Vespucci who provides him with books on geometry and access to Toscanelli's library at the monastery of San Marco.

- With Borgia, and afterwards -

Da Vinci first met Cesare Borgia - the Duke Valentino - in 1499. During that year, Borgia, the son of Pope Alexander VI, invaded the Romagna, the area in Italy east of the Apennines Mountains, bordering Venice on the north and Florence on the west.

Leonardo was with Borgia from August, 1502 to March, 1503, employed primarily as his chief military engineer.

Machiavelli, as Florence's envoy, was with Borgia from October, 1502 to January, 1503.

No record of the discussions that took place between Machiavelli and Leonardo in those months exist; nevertheless, based on subsequent events, it seems certain that it is during this time that Leonardo recruits Machiavelli to the project for diverting the Arno River, an idea Leonardo had been working on for several years. Immediately upon Leonardo's return from Borgia's army, the Arno project is begun, and Machiavelli and Leonardo, working together, initiate a series of projects intended to strengthen and transform the military and strategic position of the Republic.

Two months after Leonardo's return to Florence Machiavelli presents Leonardo's

plan to divert the Arno River to the Florentine government.

During the same month Machiavelli designs the successful military plan for the capture of the Pisan stronghold of La Veruca. After its capture, Machiavelli sends Leonardo to redesign that city's fortifications. The capture of La Verruca is an essential pre-condition to provide defense for the Arno diversion project to go forward.

In July Machiavelli secures the commission for Leonardo to paint the fresco of the Battle of Anghiari and assigns Agostino Vespucci to aid him.

In the autumn of 1504 Machiavelli sends Leonardo to Florence's ally, Jacopo d'Appiani, at Piombino, to help strengthen the fortifications of that city.

During the next two years Leonardo works intensively on several scientific projects, including those related to military and civilian technology. At the same time he and Machiavelli work together on the Arno project, the strengthening of military fortifications, and the creation of a citizen's militia.

- The Duke Valentino -

Much has been said and written about the brutality and cruelty of Cesare Borgia, but this is what Machiavelli says:

"If I summed all the actions of the Duke, I would not know how to reproach him; on the contrary, it seems to me he should be put forward, as I have done, to be imitated by all... For with his great spirit and high intention, he could not have conducted himself otherwise."³

In 1499 Borgia began his invasion of the Romagna. This went into an even more aggressive phase in 1502, exactly the time that both Leonardo and Machiavelli were

3. *The Prince*

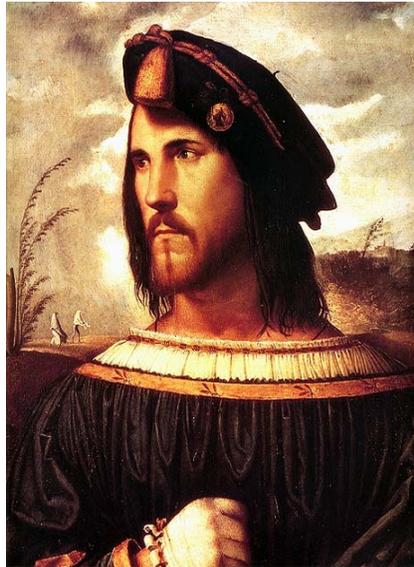
with him. During this period he captured almost all the major cities in the region, including Bologna, Ravenna, Imola, Ceri, Faenza, Rimini, Pesaro, Urbino, Camerino and Sinigaglia. Many of these cities were captured after sieges which utilized new machines designed by Leonardo.

In 1502 Borgia appoints Sansavino as the new Governor of the Romagna. Under Sansavino, sweeping political and tax reforms are instituted, along with economic development projects such as swamp drainage, creation of new industries, and water development.

In his letters to the Florentine government from Borgia's court at Imola, Machiavelli writes that for the first time in his life he has seen a Prince who builds roads, safeguards and improves ports, and supervises public works, not in the interest of the aristocracy, but the people; a ruler who fosters commerce, develops industry, and institutes sound methods of political administration.

Machiavelli did not disagree with anything Borgia did; his only argument is that it were better for these things to be done by a republic, than by a Prince. In later years, in retrospect, Machiavelli's only harsh criticism of Borgia is his failure to hold on to power after the death of his father, Pope Alexander, in 1503. Machiavelli also emphasizes that by 1502, at the latest, Valentino's goals had diverged markedly from those of the Pope.

What Cesare intended was the creation of an economic and technologically progressive centralized civilian state in central Italy. He also harbored plans for



Cesare Borgia

annexing the Kingdom of Naples, which would have put much of Italy under his control.

His primary strategic enemy was the Venetian Empire which financed and armed most of his local opponents in the Romagna. In 1502 representatives from the Venetian government, together with oligarchical families from both Rome and the Romagna, as well as local mercenary *condotieri*, organized the *Magione* conspiracy to carry out the assassination of Borgia and the dismemberment of his state.

Borgia crushed this conspiracy with, first, the execution of most of its leaders - an action which Machiavelli defends - and then by issuing the call for the creation of a new 6,000 man "Citizens Army," to be achieved by conscripting one man from each household in his domain.

At this time, Machiavelli writes to the Florentine government, urging they form an alliance with Borgia against the *condotieri*. In the letter, Machiavelli says, "The Duke (Borgia) has so much artillery and in such good order that he alone possesses almost as much as the rest of Italy put together." The Florentine *Signoria* rejects Machiavelli's proposal.

Borgia's artillery came from Alfonso d'Este's foundry at Brescia, and the organization and deployment of this artillery was done under the supervision of Leonardo Da Vinci.

Earlier, in December of 1501, Cesare's sister Lucretia had married Alfonso d'Este, the ruler of Ferrara. Ferrara was a bitter enemy of Venice, and Alfonso, later, was to play a leading role in the war against Venice by the League of Cambrai. Ferrara had the most advanced foundries and artillery in all of Italy, and it is clear that a unified Romagna under Borgia, allied with d'Este's Ferrara and (if Machiavelli's views had prevailed) Florence, would have had the potential means to directly challenge Venice.

IV. The Arno Project

The Arno River, at 241 kilometers, is the largest river in Tuscany, and serves as the basis for the water system of the entire region. It flows through Florence and reaches the sea at Pisa.

Leonardo's study of the Arno was a life-long project. His first painting of the Arno was in 1473. After his move to Milan in 1482, he continued these studies, and his notebooks from this period contain numerous sketches of the Arno.⁴

In the 1490s Leonardo began to explore the economic benefits to be achieved by controlling the flow of the Arno. The maps which Leonardo later drew in 1503 and 1504 clearly show the design for a number of locks, enabling the water flow of the Arno to be utilized for mills, flood control, irrigation, and increased food production.

In his notebooks, from that period, Leonardo writes: "By guiding the Arno above and below Florence a treasure will be found in each acre of ground by whomsoever will."

Between June of 1502 and March of 1503, while in the employment of Cesare Borgia, Leonardo traveled extensively along the route of the Arno, examining alternate routes, and mapping the headwaters in the Apennines Mountains.

As soon as Leonardo returned to Florence from Borgia's army he began drawing up engineering plans for the diversion of the Arno.

At this time Florence was in desperate military and economic straits. The city of Pisa was allied with Venice. Venice threatened Florence from the north and east, and, in the west, Pisa had blocked Florence's access to the Mediterranean, cutting off its economic lifeline. It was believed that by diverting the Arno past

4. Leonardo worked on several other water projects in his lifetime. In 1502 Cesare Borgia wanted him to build a 10 mile navigable canal from the city of Cesna to the Adriatic Sea. He also designed extensive water diversion projects both in France and Milan.

Pisa, this would not only give Florence access to the sea, but force Pisa to surrender.

In June of 1503 Machiavelli makes his first proposal to the *Signoria* for building the Arno project, emphasizing these military objectives. His proposal is rejected.

In July of 1503, in his capacity as chief hydraulic engineer, Leonardo visits the Florentine military camp outside of Pisa.



One of Da Vinci's sketches of the Arno project

This is the beginning of the active phase of the Arno project. During this summer he carries out extensive topographical studies, mapping out the preliminary engineering details.

Later in 1503, and into 1504, Leonardo prepares a series of maps and sketches to be used in public presentations on the Arno project. These presentations focused on the economic benefits of the project. It is not known if it was Machiavelli or Leonardo, or both, who delivered these presentations, but at least one of these lectures was given before the *Signoria*.

In August of 1504, at the urging of both Machiavelli and Piero Soderini, the government finally gives the go ahead to begin the project.

This official 1504 project was entirely designed by Leonardo Da Vinci, and it contained three phases: 1) divert water from Pisa, forcing its surrender; 2)

construct a series of tributary irrigation canals to increase Florence's strategic food supply; 3) build a second canal through Prato and under Mount Serravalle, transforming Florence into a seaport.

It is clear from his later drawings and maps, that this third objective became increasingly important to Leonardo as he developed the project.

The *Signoria* immediately blundered by appointing an engineer named Colombino to oversee all of the construction. Colombino considered Leonardo's plans too ambitious and too expensive, and he began to cut costs and drastically alter Leonardo's engineering designs.

The Florentine government was only too happy to cut costs and to follow the advice of Colombino, who stated that he could "build it cheaper." In addition, the *Signoria* contained many oligarchical enemies of Machiavelli, and their desire was to see the plan fail.

The first change Colombino made was to abandon Leonardo's design for one very deep diversion canal and to replace it with two very shallow canals. This ultimately proved ruinous.

On September 3, 1504 Machiavelli writes a letter to the *Signoria*, warning that Colombino's plan contains disastrous defects, and insisting that Leonardo's original design be followed. During the next four weeks Machiavelli bombards government officials with a series of letters and memos, warning against Colombino's engineering changes. On Sept 29th Machiavelli sends Marcantonio Colonna, a friend of Leonardo Da Vinci, to the site in an attempt to convince Colombino to return to Leonardo's original plan. During all of this, the government continues to back Colombino.

On October 3rd, a violent storm floods and destroys all of Colombino's works, eliminating everything built in the previous two months.

On October 12, 1504 the Government of Florence lifts the siege of Pisa and officially abandons the Arno project; the

next day Machiavelli is dismissed from the government.

V. The Militia

Throughout 1503 many of Florence's leading aristocratic families who had been active in overthrowing Savonarola, began to turn against both *Gonfalonier* Soderini and his ally Machiavelli. This included a number of Machiavelli's sponsors from 1498. Some were merely unhappy that Soderini had retained many of Savonarola's democratic reforms, but others were conspiring openly for a return of the Medicis, and/or were in league with the new Pope Julius II and his ally Venice.

During this time Machiavelli's energies were focused on three objectives: the Arno project; an attempt to rescue Cesare Borgia from the clutches of Julius II; and the proposal for abolishing the practice of hiring mercenary armies, and, instead, to create an armed militia of Florentine citizens.

After Borgia was removed from command in the summer of 1503, Venice invaded the Romagna and began gobbling up many of Borgia's cities, including those bordering Florentine territory.

On August 20th Machiavelli writes a circular on behalf of the Committee of the Ten, calling for the immediate reinstatement of Borgia to the command of the Romagna army to stop the Venetian advance.

Then in October, following the collapse of the Arno project, the aristocratic *Ottomati* party revolts against Soderini and forces the dismissal of Machiavelli from all of his government posts.

On November 1st the Venetian Ambassador Giustinian engineers the election of Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, a sworn enemy of Cesare Borgia, as Pope Julius II. During the month of October Machiavelli is in Rome, not as a government envoy but as a personal representative of Soderini, organizing

against Giustinian and attempting to prevent the selection of della Rovere.

Later in the month of November Machiavelli writes a memo to the Florentine government, stating that Venice is attempting “to turn the Pope to her purposes, in order to rule over all the others.”

After his election Pope Julius II immediately takes steps to destroy Borgia, and Cesare appeals to Florence for safe conduct through her territory so that he may escape. Both Machiavelli and Cardinal Soderini (brother of the *Gonfalonier*) urge the government to grant this request, but they are voted down by the Council of 80 (roughly, Florence’s equivalent of the U.S. Senate).

On November 23rd Borgia is arrested and imprisoned on orders from Julius II, as Venice continues its offensive, capturing the city of Faenza.

At about this time a major financial and economic crisis strikes Florence, and there is much debate on what to do. Machiavelli writes a letter to the government, advising that their actions must be guided by national security, particularly against their primary enemy, Venice, because “they hate you and seek to obtain money from you for the purpose of attacking you; it is better that you should spend it making war on them.”

- Recruiting the Troops -

In November of 1504 Machiavelli authors a long poem, written in the *terza rima* style of Dante’s *Commedia*. It is called ***Decennale Primo*** (The First Decade). The poem is written as a celebration of the first ten years of the Florentine Republic, but, in reality, it is principally a critique of all the mistakes – particularly military mistakes – made by the government during those ten years. It is remembered today, because it is in the closing lines of this poem that Machiavelli calls for abandoning mercenary armies, and, for the first time, proposes the

creation of a citizen’s army to defend the republic.⁵

There is no question that Machiavelli’s 1504 proposal for creating a citizen’s militia was greatly influenced by what he witnessed Valentino accomplish in the Romagna in 1502, but Machiavelli’s understanding of the issue was far more profound than that of Cesare.

Much later, in his ***Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius***, Machiavelli returns to this idea of a citizens army repeatedly. One of the most powerful passages from that work is the in-depth discussion of the Roman citizen-soldier Cincinnatus, and Machiavelli forcefully makes the point that one of the leading causes for the destruction of the Roman Republic was the gradual replacement of citizen-soldiers with hired mercenaries.

But Machiavelli goes even further. He not only sees a citizen’s army as key to the military salvation of Florence, but this idea is actually subsumed in his concept of creating a **republican citizenry**, of breaking the aristocratic power both outside and inside Florence, and establishing a new republican culture.

Needless to say, Machiavelli’s 1504 trial balloon was not acted on, but events soon forced the hand of the *Signoria*.

In March of 1505 Florence’s mercenary army at Pisa is defeated; then, in the following months, a combined Papal-Venetian military force, this time joined by the Spanish, makes several military incursions into Florentine territory, capturing towns that are part of the Florentine State.

Shortly thereafter Machiavelli is recalled into the government and restored to all of his previous posts.

In early August a second Florentine mercenary army at Pisa is defeated, and later that month, a Venetian-Papal invasion force is stopped by Florence only

5. The ***Decennale*** was later published in 1506 by Agostino Vespucci.

60 miles from the city.

Weeks later, in September of 1505, Machiavelli officially proposes the creation of a citizen's militia, modeled on what Valentino had created in the Romagna. The *Signoria*, out of military necessity, and at the urging of Piero Soderini, accepts Machiavelli's proposal.

In January of 1506 Machiavelli takes personal charge of organizing the militia. His goal, never fully realized, is to create a militia of 10,000 men. Formed into 30 companies, each company is to meet, exercise, and train 16 times per year. The uniforms for the new militia are designed by Leonardo Da Vinci.

In April Machiavelli appoints Don Michetto, Cesare Borgia's former chief-of-staff, as the Commander of the Militia.

Machiavelli spends most of the next year personally overseeing the recruiting and training of the Militia. By the end of 1506 there is mounting opposition from the party of the *Ottimati* to the "democratizing" influence of the militia project.

In December of 1507 Machiavelli is sent by Soderini to the Court of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I to negotiate an alliance against Venice.

In February of 1508 the army of the Emperor Maximilian attacks Venice.

In December of 1508 the League of Cambrai is formed to destroy Venice. Florence is not an official member, but it finances the war with cash payments to both Louis XII of France and Maximilian.

In February of 1509 Machiavelli personally leads 1,000 soldiers of the Florentine Militia to begin a siege of Venice's ally Pisa.

On April 15th the army of French King Louis XII invades Venetian territory, and causes the near annihilation of Venice.

On June 4th, 1509 the Florentine Militia of Niccolo Machiavelli captures Pisa, a feat which Florence's mercenary armies had repeatedly failed to do over the previous 20 years. The capture of the city is preceded by a successful effort,

designed by Leonardo Da Vinci, to blow-up sections of the walls of Pisa.

VI. The New World

At the end of his life, Nicholas of Cusa, recognizing that the resurgent forces of empire were once again becoming too powerful, urged that the fight to establish commonwealths be taken across the oceans to foreign shores. Attending Cusa at his deathbed in 1464 were the Florentine scientist Paolo Toscanelli and the Canon of the Cathedral of Lisbon Fernão Martins.

After Cusa's death the leadership for this perspective - of exploration and discovery - would be based in Florence. Toscanelli was the leader, but this fifty year project also involved several key individuals in the Florentine Republic, including friends of Machiavelli, the role played by Leonardo Da Vinci, and the initiatives from members of the Vespucci family.

- Toscanelli -

Toscanelli's lifelong friendship and partnership with Nicholas of Cusa began when they were both students at the University of Padua, about the year 1420. Later, in Florence, Toscanelli became renowned as the greatest scientist, mathematician, astronomer and cosmographer of his era.

On June 25, 1474, in response to a letter from Fernão Martins, the Canon of the Cathedral of Lisbon, Toscanelli sends Martins a map, together with his proposal for a westward voyage across the Atlantic. At that time Martins is acting as the agent of King Alfonso V of Portugal, with whom Toscanelli had already corresponded on the subject of an Atlantic voyage. Later, between 1480 and 1482, when he hears of Toscanelli's proposal, Christopher Columbus initiates a correspondence with Toscanelli and receives from him copies of

both the 1474 map and the letter sent earlier to Martins.

Toscanelli's map then becomes the guidepost for Columbus' heroic 1492 voyage of discovery.

- The Vespuccis -

After the death of Nicholas of Cusa, it was Georgio Antonio Vespucci, an uncle of the famous explorer, who became Toscanelli's closest scientific collaborator.

Earlier, Georgio Antonio had been taught Greek by Filippo Ser Ugolino Pieruzzi, Toscanelli's partner in the intellectual study group at the *Santa Maria degli Angeli* (Convent of the Angels).

Later, Toscanelli would reorganize this group at the Abbey of Settimo, in Florence, this time with Georgio Antonio Vespucci as his partner.

In 1453 Georgio Antonio established a school for hand-selected pupils at the monastery of San Marco, and educated them in a curriculum of mathematics, astronomy, cosmography, Dante, Petrarch, Plato, Cicero, Heraclitus, and Livy. Among his pupils were his nephew Amerigo, and the future *Gonfalonier* of the Florentine Republic - and political partner of Machiavelli - Piero Soderini.

From among Georgio Antonio's pupils, Toscanelli selected a smaller number to personally tutor. These included Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, Machiavelli's patron in 1498, and also Amerigo Vespucci, who ended up studying under Toscanelli for twenty years. Following Toscanelli's death in 1482, Amerigo was considered the greatest cosmographer and map-maker in Florence, and the recognized successor to Toscanelli in those fields.

In 1481 the *Chiesa Ognissanti* (All Saints Church) in Florence commissioned Sandro Botticelli to paint a portrait of St. Augustine. It was said at the time that this painting could rightfully be called "St. Augustine in Toscanelli's Study." It portrays St. Augustine, sitting amidst

scientific, navigational, and mathematical objects, including an astrolabe, an armillary sphere, and a book on geometry. In the corner of the canvass Botticelli painted in the Vespucci family coat-of-arms.

In 1474, when Toscanelli began his correspondence with Christopher Columbus on the possibility of a "western voyage," he was simultaneously training the young Amerigo, and it seems very unlikely that Amerigo did not read that correspondence, particularly since he had full access to Toscanelli's scientific papers and maps.

It is also a telling point that all of the letters which Vespucci later wrote, describing his voyages to the "new world," were addressed to only two men, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and Piero Soderini, his former schoolmates with Toscanelli and Georgio Antonio Vespucci.

-The Vespuccis and Machiavelli -

The Vespucci family were minor Florentine nobility, associated since the mid-15th century with the cadet (Pierfrancesco) branch of the Medici family. They were involved in banking, navigation, and commercial trading.

Among the closest friends of Amerigo's parents was Bernardo Machiavelli, the father of Niccolo, and it seems apodictical that Niccolo and Amerigo must have known each other, given the intimacy of their families, and the close proximity of the two households, in the same neighborhood.

In 1479 Guido Antonio Vespucci, another of Amerigo's uncles, was appointed Florence's Ambassador to France, and the young Amerigo accompanied him there. As a result, he spent two years at the Court of Louis XI, precisely at the time that monarch was creating the first sovereign nation-state in the wake of the Council of Florence

Later, in 1498, this same Guido Antonio - together with Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco -

played the key role in elevating the previously obscure Niccolo Machiavelli to the post of Second Chancellor of the Florentine Republic.

- Columbus -

In 1483 Amerigo Vespucci goes to live in Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's household, and shortly thereafter he is appointed the general manager of all of Lorenzo's business and commercial interests.

In 1488 Amerigo is sent by Lorenzo to Spain. It is there, in Seville, that he first meets Christopher Columbus.

After returning to Florence for two years, in 1492 Amerigo returns to Seville where he and Gianetto Berardi form a business partnership to run the affairs of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco in Spain, including the general management of the Seville branch of Lorenzo's bank.

Earlier, while Amerigo was still in Florence, Berardi had helped fund Columbus' first voyage. After 1493 Vespucci and Berardi became the **primary** financial backers of Columbus' second and third voyages. Berardi and Vespucci handled all of Columbus' business affairs in Seville and equipped and outfitted his ships.

Vespucci lived in Berardi's home, and this residence became the headquarters for Columbus when he was in Seville. The second and third voyages of Columbus were mapped out in Berardi's parlor, and one can only imagine the discussions which took place between Columbus and Vespucci during those years.

In the years since Vespucci's death he has been routinely defamed; perhaps only Machiavelli has had to bear more calumny. The dean of the American "transcendentalists," Ralph Waldo Emerson, had this to say: "Strange that broad America must wear the name of a thief. Amerigo Vespucci, the pickle-dealer at Seville, whose highest navel rank was boatswain's mate in an expedition that never sailed, managed in this lying world to... baptize

half the world with his own dishonest name."

To set the record straight, perhaps the best witness is Christopher Columbus, himself, who after his return from his fourth voyage met with Vespucci and gave him a letter to deliver to his son, Diego. The letter says, in part:

"I talked with the bearer of this letter, Amerigo Vespucci who is going to court where he has been summoned by King Ferdinand in connection with matters of navigation. It has always been his desire to give me pleasure; he is a man of good will; fortune has proved contrary to him; he has not profited from his labors as justice would demand. He is acting in my behalf moved by a great desire to do something which shall be to my benefit if it lies within his power."

In fact, from Vespucci's first meeting with Columbus in 1488, up until the time of Columbus' death, they remained, always, collaborators and friends.

- The Voyages -

Berardi died in 1495, and for a time Vespucci continued to manage the business, but in 1497 he set out on discoveries of his own.

Between 1497 and 1503 Vespucci made four voyages. One of the charges made against him is that, unlike Columbus, he did not command any of those voyages, and, in fact, only piloted a single ship on one occasion.



Amerigo Vespucci

Vespucci was not, by training or inclination, a sea captain. He was a navigator, cosmographer, astronomer, and map-maker... in short, he was a scientist.

Vespucci's voyages explored the coast of Venezuela, the entire coast of Brazil, and sailed down the length of Argentina almost 2,500 miles, to 53° south latitude, 18 years before Magellan reached that spot. Vespucci's ships were the first to explore the Amazon River, and the first to discover the Rio de la Plata. Vespucci was the chief navigator and directed the course of all of these voyages.

- Navigation: a willful act of discovery -

In the letters which Amerigo writes to both Piero Soderini and Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici,⁶ he describes in great detail his astronomical and scientific observations.

On his second voyage Vespucci makes an intensive study of how to determine longitudinal position at sea. Previously, navigation was based on using the phases of the moon to determine tides, using the meridian altitude of the sun to steer by day, and the positions of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor to steer by night. Vespucci became the first to determine longitude at sea, by making precise measurements of the conjunction of the moon with the planets and constellations.

During Vespucci's third voyage⁷ his ship spent 10 months below the equator, and he conducted extensive studies of the southern constellations. In his letter to Lorenzo di' Pierfrancesco he recounts the

6. It is important to understand the role of "letters" during this period. At a time when there were no newspapers, letters were the indispensable source of news from around the world. Except for those most personal of nature, most letters were recopied by hand over and over again, and circulated quite freely. These were known as "familiar" letters, and authors of these letters, often, consciously designed their messages to reach a much broader audience.

7. Vespucci's first two voyages were for Spain. His third and fourth voyages were for Portugal.

many sleepless nights he devoted to the examination of the Southern Cross, and the many laborious calculations which he entered into, quoting from his favorite poet,

Each star of the other pole, night
now beheld

And oars so low, that from the
ocean floor

It rose not;

(Dante, *Purgatorio*, Canto xxvi)

It is in this voyage, based on precise measurements of longitude, that Vespucci determines that the sphere of the earth is much larger than previously thought, and that they have discovered a new continent.

As he says in his letter to Lorenzo: "We reached a new land which we discovered to be the mainland... I reached the region of the antipodes, which according to my navigation is the fourth part of the world."⁸

Based on this voyage, Vespucci is recognized as the greatest navigator of his time. By the end of his voyages in 1504 Vespucci's explorations were more extensive than any other mariner up to that time, and his scientific readings were more accurate.

- Mundus Novus -

In December of 1502 a manuscript was circulated in Florence, which, although not written by Vespucci, was based on a (now lost) letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco about the Third Voyage into the southern hemisphere. A Frenchman, Giovanni Giocondo, translated the manuscript from the Italian into Latin, elaborating and expanding it, and published it in 1503, under Vespucci's name, giving it the title of *Mundus Novus* (The New World). It created a sensation, and was rapidly republished in Lisbon, Cologne, Strasbourg, Antwerp, Venice, Augsburg,

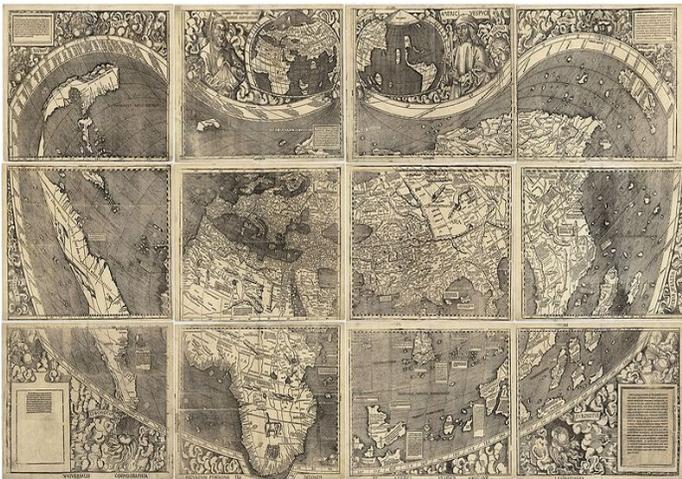
8. It was commonly held, at that time, that there were three parts to the world: Europe, Asia, and Africa.

and other cities.

It begins with these words:

“In days past I have written to you (Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco) at some length concerning my return from those new regions which we discovered and explored with the fleet..., and which we can rightly call the New World since our ancestors had no knowledge of them, and it will be a matter wholly new to all those who hear about them. We learned that this land is not an island but a continent... Most of our ancient authorities assert that there is no continent south of the equator, but merely the sea... but this last voyage of mine has demonstrated that this opinion is false and contradicts all truth, since I have discovered a continent in those southern regions.”⁹

Following this, in 1504, six letters which Vespucci had written to Florence’s *Gonfalonier* Piero Soderini, describing all four of his voyages, were published in Florence, and then translated into Latin and republished elsewhere throughout Europe.



The Waldseemüller map with the eastern coastline of South America, as mapped by Vespucci

9. It should be noted that all of the existing copies of Vespucci’s letters are corrupt. The originals are lost. In the words of one scholar, Vespucci's "private letters... were pirated, misquoted, ... printed, translated, [and] reprinted. The texts on which we base our judgments are vastly different from those which left the authors hand."

In April of 1507 one Martin Waldseemüller published a work named ***Cosmographiae Introductio***, which included a Latin translation of Vespucci’s 1504 letters to Piero Soderini, as well as the famous Waldseemüller Map, where, for the first time, the new world is named America.

- The Arno Project and the New World-

Had Leonardo’s original design for the Arno River project been realized, the Arno would have become navigable, and Florence would have been able to engage, not just in Mediterranean traffic, but, potentially, also in trans-oceanic activity. Consider the following:

In 1502 Vespucci’s letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, announcing that he had discovered a new continent in the southern hemisphere, reaches Florence, is immediately circulated in manuscript form and communicated to the government. The *Signoria* declares a national holiday to celebrate the news, and for three days festivities are conducted in front of the Vespucci home.

At this time, Leonardo Da Vinci, working as Valentino’s engineer, makes several trips to explore the headwaters of the Arno River.

In the winter and spring of 1503, manuscripts of the ***Mundus Novus*** circulate widely in Florence, just as both Machiavelli and Leonardo return to Florence from Borgia’s court. Their first initiative is to begin work on the Arno project.

Throughout 1503 and into 1504, Leonardo continues to improve his designs. Several of his mature sketches, from that period, are now in the *Codex Madrid* and the Windsor Royal Library, and show detailed plans that would have made the Arno navigable and transformed Florence into a seaport.

In 1504 Machiavelli begins a correspondence with Bartolomeo Vespucci, nephew of Amerigo and a professor of

Astronomy at the University of Padua, on the subject of astronomy. About this time Leonardo's notebooks contain references to writings and maps on astronomy and cosmography. Also in Leonardo's notebooks from this period are studies in measuring longitude, so as to enable navigators to make accurate astronomical readings of a ship's location. This is the exact problem that Amerigo Vespucci worked on during his voyages to South America.

In 1504 *Gonfalonier* Piero Soderini receives six letters from his lifelong friend Vespucci, describing his four voyages. These letters are immediately published and widely circulated.

In August of 1504, Machiavelli, this time with the strong backing of Soderini, succeeds in obtaining the backing of the *Signoria* for the Arno Project.

For myself, the conclusion, if speculative, is clear. In addition to the military and economic benefits of the Arno project, is it not the case - at a time when the New World was everywhere being discussed in Florence, particularly among some of their closest political associates - that Machiavelli and Leonardo must have envisioned a vital role for republican Florence in this trans-Atlantic enterprise?¹⁰

VII. The Empire's Nemesis

Now we come to the most important issue of this whole study, which is the question of why the imperial oligarchy, for 500 years, has heaped such opprobrium on Machiavelli, why he has been, and

10. It is interesting to note that while the Florentine Vespucci was the first European to explore the entirety of the South American coastline, it was another Florentine, Giovanni da Verrazano, in 1524, who first explored the length of the North American coast, from Florida to Newfoundland, on a voyage backed by the French King Francis I, the same monarch who was the benefactor of Leonardo Da Vinci, during the final years of his life.

continues to be, the target of such venomous hatred and fear for the forces of empire.

The answer is found in what Machiavelli wrote. If one examines Machiavelli's major works, as a totality, a very clear unity of purpose and vision is self-evident. For Machiavelli the Republic is everything. His discovery is that, in the development of the republic, a new type of power has been created, a power coherent with the creative nature of the human species, and a power with the capability to destroy empire and oligarchy.

This is not Machiavelli's mere opinion. This is Machiavelli's **discovery**, a means whereby the power of empire can be defeated!

Most of Machiavelli's major writings were written in exile, after the destruction of the Republic in 1512. It is impossible, without succumbing to prolixity, to do justice to all of them, so this article will focus on *The Prince* and the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*, which were both written in the years 1513 to 1515.

For brevity's sake, this can not be helped, but it does leave out a lot, including *The Art of War*, and his comedies *Clizia* and *La Mandragola* - both of which are not only hilarious, but hilarious censures of the moral degeneration of the Italian feudal aristocracy. It leaves out his *History of Florence*, which is practically an autopsy of the failure of oligarchic rule in Florence. It also leaves out his poetry, much of it modeled on Dante's *terza rima* style. His *Tercets on Ambition* is one of the most powerful indictments of oligarchical war ever written.

- Il Principe -

Machiavelli began writing *The Prince*¹¹

11. The actual name is *Il Principe* or "On Principalities," which, as the Italian implies, is about the art of governing. The English mistranslation

only weeks after his release from prison, and what is clearly uppermost in his mind is the catastrophic failure of Florence's leadership in 1512, including the failures of his friend Piero Soderini.¹²

Only months earlier Machiavelli had seen the Florentine Republic crushed, and his and Leonardo's work of the previous ten years destroyed.

The subject of *The Prince*, therefore, is leadership and the indispensable quality of *virtù*. To establish a republic, to defend it, to do battle with the most powerful oligarchical forces on the planet, this, Machiavelli is saying, is not a feat for the squeamish or faint of heart.

As Machiavelli says: "When the entire safety of our country is at stake, no consideration of what is just or unjust, merciful or cruel, praiseworthy or shameful, must intervene. On the contrary... that course alone must be taken which preserves the existence of the country and maintains its liberty."

In the *Discourses* Machiavelli provides an example of the quality of leadership needed to secure liberty. Machiavelli asks the following hypothetical question: If one's army captures and occupies a hostile city, what should be done with the local ruling class? There are three choices: attempt to win them over as allies; send them into exile; kill them. Machiavelli says the answer is obvious... kill all of them. And he is not being metaphorical.

Today we either kill the British Empire, or it will kill us.

But the target of this ruthlessness is the oligarchy, and the same approach should never be extended to dealings with the people. In Chapter IX of *The Prince* Machiavelli says the following:

suggests, wrongly, that the work is about how to be an absolute ruler.

12. Despite their close relationship, Machiavelli's one criticism of Soderini was his caution and indecisiveness, and, conversely, when a crisis arose, his tendency for rash action, rather than having taken decisive action from the beginning.

"A prince cannot by fair dealing, and without injury to others, satisfy the nobles, but he can satisfy the people, for their object is more righteous than that of the nobles, the latter wishing to oppress, while the former only desire not to be oppressed."

Virtù and Fortuna

Reams have been written on Machiavelli's concept of *Virtù*. However, almost all of the armchair academic analysis generally ignores what Machiavelli was actually doing with his life. In speaking of *Virtù*, he is discussing the quality necessary, in citizens and leaders, to bring a republic into existence and to defend it. This involves boldness, foresight and courage, yes, but for a higher universal purpose. *Virtù* is the quality which Abraham Lincoln evokes in the Gettysburg Address.

Virtù is also discussed by Leonardo Da Vinci, in his Notebooks, in describing the motive force in dynamics, from the standpoint of physical science.

Machiavelli counterposes *Virtù* to *Fortuna*, i.e., unforeseen events, or developments beyond our control. An example of *Fortuna* today would be the current trajectory of our solar system above the galactic plane, into a region, which in the past, has produced mass extinctions on Earth. The quality, or lack, of our *Virtù* will determine how we deal with this.

An example of the absence of *Virtù* can be found in the old baby-boomer folk song, "There but for fortune go you or I." Events in the universe are mysterious and uncontrollable, and we bear no responsibility for what will occur. And, of course, the modern existential notion that we have been "thrown into" a meaningless impotent existence, is nothing but a surrender to *Fortuna*.

Machiavelli is not writing some textbook advice for woolgathering academics. There is an oligarchical enemy, an oligarchical system, and victory over it is only possible if you possess the fortitude to destroy it.

Chapters XII and XIII of *The Prince* again deal with the paramount issue of creating a Citizens Army and the insanity of relying on mercenary soldiers, and once more Machiavelli cites Borgia:

"I shall never hesitate to cite Cesare Borgia and his actions. This

duke entered the Romagna with auxiliaries, taking there only French soldiers... but afterwards, such forces not appearing to him reliable, he turned to mercenaries, discerning less danger in them, and enlisted the Orsini and Vitelli; whom presently, on handling and finding them doubtful, unfaithful, and dangerous, he destroyed and turned to his own men. And the difference between one and the other of these forces can easily be seen when one considers the difference there was in the reputation of the duke; he was never esteemed more highly than when every one saw that he was complete master of his own forces."

- A Republican Primer -

The *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius* is Machiavelli's greatest work.

Using as his subject Livy's original examination of the Roman Republic, Machiavelli not only dissects that work, but provides an in-depth study of how a republic can be created, governed and defended.

At over 800 pages, it is not possible to discuss the *Discourses* in depth, but let it be said that on almost every page there are gems of wisdom worth contemplating.

Two of the primary themes of the *Discourses*, which are woven throughout the work, are the danger to freedom emanating from the oligarchy, and the fatal problem arising from a moral corruption of the population.

Repeatedly Machiavelli makes the point that it is only the people who are able to defend freedom, but, he says, "if the people are corrupt, there is NO possibility of establishing a republic, and laws to preserve order are useless... The most dangerous corruption is the corruption of the people. It is the corruption of the people which leads to the corruptions of

the institutions of state. It is very difficult to overcome this problem."

However, Machiavelli states, it is not from the people whence this corruption arises, but from tolerating a wealthy oligarchical class. He says that a republic is governed easily if the people are not corrupted. But a republic is impossible in a state which tolerates an idle nobility, living off estates or in control of castles and vassals. It is the abundance of this class in Naples, the Romagna, Lombardy, and the region around Rome which has been the ruin of Italy. To found a republic in such a territory requires the extermination of the nobility.

In an existing state Machiavelli declares: "It should be the object of every well-governed commonwealth to make the state rich and keep individual citizens poor," i.e., a republic should encourage actions which benefit the republic, and penalize actions which benefit private oligarchical interests.

Or, as Machiavelli puts it in Book II of the *Discourses*: "It is the well being, not of individuals, but of the community which makes a state great; and, without question, this universal well-being is nowhere secured save in a republic."

- Citizenry in a Republic -

The three books of the *Discourses* contain many brilliant specific pieces of advice on how to conduct successful war, e.g., Machiavelli's advice against both limited war and long wars, his discussion of flanks and the foolishness of attempting to hold indefensible positions, his instructions on the use of artillery in battle, and much, much more

However, Machiavelli returns again and again to the central question of the citizenry. His unwavering view is that the key to victory in war is not money or position, but a good army composed of good soldiers. In discussing the importance of the breakthroughs then being made in the use of artillery, he goes

so far as to say that artillery will not replace a well-trained citizen soldiery, and that artillery, without such a soldiery, is useless.

This is why he returns several times to the subject of Cincinnatus, and it is also why he repeats several times that, "No ordinance is of such an advantage to a commonwealth, as one which enforces poverty on its citizens."

This is not just about soldiers; what Machiavelli is actually describing is a new type of **universal power**, a power which does not, and can not, exist in an



Gen. Washington, taking command of his Citizens Army in 1775

oligarchical state, no matter its wealth or money.

The issue is the development of the cognitive abilities, the cognitive power of the citizenry, organized through urban-based republican institutions.

This is why he spends so much effort on discussing the constitutional system of such a state and the crucial importance of just laws, and why the state must always act on behalf of the common good.

Through such an urban-based technologically progressive commonwealth, a power to transform the universe can be unleashed which no oligarchy can defeat.

This is the secret of Machiavelli's collaboration with Da Vinci, who through both his paintings and his scientific studies reflected precisely the recognition of the

power of human creativity.

VIII. The Denouement... and the Future

In the words of the Florentine historian Francesco Guicciardini, the year 1509 began a "dark chapter" in the history of Italy:

"There followed throughout Italy, and against the Italians themselves, the cruelest accidents, endless murders, sackings, and a destruction of many cities and towns, military licentiousness, and religion violated... These actions originated from the rash and overly insolent actions of the Venetian Senate."

In June of 1510 the duplicitous Pope Julius II betrayed his allies in the League of Cambrai's war against Venice and switched sides, joining with Venice in a military alliance against France, Florence, and the latter's ally Ferrara.¹³

Following the break-up of the League, the oligarchical faction in Florence began to move against Machiavelli and Soderini. By the end of the year there were calls for Machiavelli's ouster from office, and, late in the year, a plan to assassinate Soderini was discovered and thwarted at the last minute.

From June to October of 1510, Machiavelli is at the French Court at Lyons, where he proposes an alliance of France, Florence, Ferrara, and the German Emperor Maximilian against Venice and the Pope.

In December of 1510, the artillery of Alfonso d'Este destroys a Venetian

13. In truth, Julius II was allied with Venice both before and after the League of Cambrai. His participation in the League was solely for the purpose of annexing some of Venice's possessions in the Romagna to the Papal States.

invasion fleet at Ferrara, sinking 200 ships.

In June of 1511, the Holy League is founded, including the Papacy, Venice, King Ferdinand of Spain and Naples, the German Emperor Maximilian, Henry VIII of England, and Swiss mercenaries, all arrayed against France and Florence.

The attacks on Soderini and Machiavelli escalate, and, in September, the Pope places an Interdict on Florence, and calls for the death of *Gonfalonier* Piero Soderini.

On April, 11, 1512, despite their victory over the combined armies of the Holy League at the Battle of Ravenna, the French are forced to retreat north when 18,000 Swiss mercenaries, paid by Rome, invade French territory. This leaves both Florence and Milan without French protection.

In the summer of 1512 Spanish and Papal troops occupy Milan. Leonardo Da Vinci, then residing there, flees to Florence. Shortly thereafter forces of the Holy League occupy Parma, Bologna and Genoa.

In July the Pope demands Piero Soderini's resignation and the submission of Florence to the Papacy. The Spanish Army marches on Florence; Machiavelli, commanding a militia of 12,000 men, is put in charge of the city's defense.

In August a meeting of the Holy League at Mantua demands the destruction of Florence's republican government and the immediate restoration of the Medici.

The Spanish Army defeats the Florentine Militia at Prato (after Soderini, in disagreement with Machiavelli, refuses to negotiate with them). Days later Spanish troops enter Florence. Soderini resigns and goes into exile. 5,000 Florentines are killed. The Republic is abolished, the Great Council dissolved, and the Militia disbanded.

Leonardo Da Vinci flees Florence and goes into the countryside.

On September 3rd, the new Florentine government, under Giuliano de' Medici, officially joins the Holy League and allies with Venice against France.

On November 7th, Machiavelli is fired from all government posts and banned from entering any government building

On February 12, 1513, Machiavelli is arrested, imprisoned and tortured for 30 days.

- Afterwards -

In March of 1513, Machiavelli is released from prison after a general amnesty is declared, following the death of Pope Julius II. He is immediately forced into exile and ordered to live outside the city limits, but he is forbidden to leave Florentine territory, upon penalty of death.

Leonardo flees to Rome, where for the next three years he is, for all practical purposes, under house arrest, not harmed, but not allowed to work or carry out scientific experiments. He is denied all painting commissions, at a time when Michelangelo and others are given work in the Vatican. In 1516 Leonardo is rescued by King Francis I of France, and spends the last three years of his life, under protection, in the household of the French king.

Between 1513 and 1525, in exile, Machiavelli produces *The Prince*, the *Discourses* on Livy, the *Art of War*, *La Mandragola*, and his *History of Florence*.

In 1525 the Imperial Army of Charles V (Hapsburg) crushes the French and prepares to invade Italy. Facing catastrophe, the Florentine government recalls Machiavelli from his 12 year exile and names him as chief military advisor to the government.

In November of 1526, Charles V invades Italy, and Machiavelli is placed in charge of Florence's defense. The invaders ravage the countryside, occupy many cities, and in May of 1527, occupy and sack Rome. However, they bypass the heavily fortified Florence, which is under the command of Machiavelli.

The next month, on June 21, 1527, Machiavelli dies.

Less than ten years after his death,

Venice launches a campaign to defame, vilify and destroy Machiavelli's influence. In 1539 the Venetian agent Cardinal Reginald Pole condemns Machiavelli as "an enemy of the human race." In 1557, following the 16th session of the Council of Trent, all of Machiavelli's writings are placed on the Index of banned books by Pope Paul IV.

In the years, even centuries, since Machiavelli's death, it has become commonplace to portray Machiavelli - or the "*Machiavel*" - as a near-Satanic figure.

This hatred - and fear! - of Machiavelli was not an act of revenge, stemming from his actions on behalf of the Florentine Republic from 1502 to 1512. What the Venetian empire understood was that Machiavelli had discovered a means by which their old feudal imperial system could be destroyed. For the oligarchical gods of empire, it is the Promethean mind of Machiavelli, and the ideas he set into motion, which represent a death sentence to their existence.

The emergence of sovereign nation-states, parallel with the Cusa-Brunelleschi-Kepler revolution in science, when combined with the discoveries of Machiavelli, created an enormous crisis in Venice, which played itself out during the 16th century, and culminated with the seizure of power, in Venice, by Paolo Sarpi and his allies in 1588. With Sarpi, the nature of the Empire was transformed, and the old feudal ways abandoned, all leading into the creation of the Anglo-Dutch Empire in 1688. But that is another story.

But then...

In 1620, only 93 years after Machiavelli's death, forty-one passengers on board the Mayflower signed a Compact in which they committed to "combine ourselves together into a civil body politic." Ten years later John Winthrop and his allies established the great Commonwealth in Massachusetts Bay, founded on the

principle of the Common Good.

Between 1630 and 1688, under Winthrop's leadership, Massachusetts enacted measures for public education, internal improvements, and a citizen's



The Saugus Iron Works

militia. They established a credit system, through the Pine Tree Shilling, and used it to finance science and industry, such as the Saugus Iron Works, independent of the imperial center in London.

This is Machiavelli's Republic! This is the vision of Renaissance Florence, reborn on the shores of the New World, just as Cusa had envisioned.

Did the colonists read Machiavelli? Perhaps. It really doesn't matter. This is the miracle of the human mind; this is the invisible tangibility of ideas.

Machiavelli discovered a valid scientific principle, and in the years following his death, his ideas became the paramount threat to oligarchical rule, and, everywhere in Europe where peoples were attempting to free themselves from empire, the power of Machiavelli's mind resonated.

Today we face a profound crisis on all fronts, and we can't escape the fact that our people and our institutions have become corrupt. But this is by no means an insurmountable problem. As Machiavelli says in Book III of the *Discourses*, it is natural, over time, for states to become corrupt; but such states, particularly Commonwealths, are able to renew themselves because of the virtues of

their heritage and their constitutional institutions.

Machiavelli also says that, were such a renewal to occur, it is then impossible for the oligarchy to work great mischief.

Today, in the global mass-strike, we see a potential for just such a renewal. If we learn the lessons of where we came from, and the principles upon which our republic was founded, we will have every expectation of success.

The Republic is the most powerful force in human history. That is our basis for victory over the British Empire today.

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by Robert Ingraham
March 29, 2011¹⁴

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14. This current article is dedicated to Charles B. Allen, Jr. and James Legare, republican patriots from an earlier generation.

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