
I. Action to Save the Republic

LESSON FROM MACHIAVELLI

The Challenge of Being A Republican Citizen

by Robert Ingraham

May 12—Whether we desire it or not, we live, as the expression warns, in “interesting times.”

The oblivious, the fearful, and the macho might all attempt to ignore the tumultuous events which surround us, but for a reflective, thinking person, prospects for the future are now very uncertain.

The *potential* for a bright future stands right before us. One has only to look at the global development projects of the Belt and Road Initiative, or the recent determination by several nations to accelerate manned space exploration, to perceive what is possible, what *might become* a better, happier, more creative world. Yet, the oppressive hand of empire and oligarchy still weighs us down and threatens to destroy everything. In London the Queen smiles as her minions attempt a *coup d'état* in the United States and seek to provoke global war. In America the people sink under the wounds of drug usage, powerlessness, and a degenerate culture. The outcome of this dynamic is unclear, and apprehension swirls about and bedevils us.

How to act in such an environment? How to win such a fight?

The answer is one that may surprise you, for the key to a better future is to be found in your own heart. There is no short-cut to victory, no gimmick, and no savior who will rescue us. Nor will a populist “mass move-



Heinrich Hoffman, 1886

Christ in the garden of Gethsemane.

ment” succeed. Rather, what is needed are leaders, not media-created “leaders” but real leaders who will step forth from the population—individuals who have made the decision to take upon themselves the responsibility of history. For each of us, this is a personal decision. A solitary decision. A willful determination to act for the future.

Currently, the LaRouche Political Action Committee is engaged in a drive to create membership chapters throughout the United States. The immediate focus of this work is to accomplish the full exoneration of Lyndon LaRouche, and this in such a way that the establishment’s “containment” of LaRouche—the slanders, the lies,

the intimidation—is fully shattered. Success in this effort will create a potential for the full power of LaRouche’s ideas and policies to be brought to bear in this current crisis.

The question for each of us is, do you want to become a leader in this fight? Don’t jump to answer. Consider first the full implications of your decision. Consider what Lyndon LaRouche wrote in 1988:

Up to a critical point in our lives, we plod our craft and pursue our moral commitments honestly to the limit of our knowledge and strength of will to do so. In that respect, we are all ordi-

nary. Then, one day, to some among us ordinary folk, there comes an experience which we must fairly liken to the New Testament's account of Christ in Gethsemane. It is not enough to propose, to foster, to support those causes we know to be good. A silent voice speaks to us: "If there is no one else to lead, you must do so."

Later, in the same piece, LaRouche warns that to accept true leadership, to accept responsibility for acting on behalf of the whole human race, requires overcoming "a special quality of terror," a terror which says we are too weak, too small and too frightened to act. Overcoming those fears is the essence of the quality needed today.

Becoming a leader who speaks and acts for the truth, makes one a "dangerous person." It might attract the attention of unwelcome adversaries. It will certainly put one at odds with many friends and acquaintances who do not wish to have their boat "rocked." It means standing out from the crowd. It means willfully allowing one's actions and priorities to be governed by higher principles. It requires a certain type of moral courage, and an utter rejection of any desire to "go along to get along."

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In this report we shall examine the courage and insights of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), as well as his collaboration with Leonardo da Vinci. We shall look at Machiavelli's concept of "republican citizenry" as the means by which oligarchical power might be defeated. There is much to be learned in this investigation, for it is precisely just such an awakened republican citizenry which today can win the fight for a new Renaissance—a *New Paradigm*. But what exactly is this "citizenry"? It is not a mob. It is not based in "populism" or "protests," or other juvenile macho posturing or waving about of guns. A republican citizenry begins with the individual citizen, with the morality and courage of individual

people to act. It begins with a thinking creative mind. What Machiavelli sought to deploy was a willful *cognitive* power, a power which resides as a slumbering potential within each of us. This is precisely the means by which, today, we may win the battle for a better future.

Against Oligarchy

Niccolò Machiavelli despised oligarchy, and he insisted that humanity will never know true freedom, or rise to its full potential, until it rids itself of oligarchical domination. This is the underlying theme in almost all of his works.

In addition to his political, historical, and military writings, Machiavelli also authored plays, short stories, and social commentaries. Taking the advice of Dante Alighieri, he penned all of his "literary" efforts, as well as *The Prince* and most of his political works, in the Italian vernacular to reach the broadest possible audience. Despite his fluency in Latin, Machiavelli was not interested—as many of his contemporaries were—in composing for an aristocratic elite. In fact, it was precisely that elite which was his target.

It is no coincidence that Machiavelli was a life-long student of Dante. He is driven, in his own way, by the same vision of human poten-

tial. Niccolò also wrote poetry, all in the vernacular and most of it in Dante's *terza rima* style. And much like Dante's depiction of oligarchical decadence in the *Inferno*, or the failings of Florentine culture exposed by Giovanni Boccaccio in the *Decameron*, Machiavelli recognizes that mankind's future happiness could only be secured by breaking the chains of oligarchical culture.

Oligarchical corruption is always center stage for Machiavelli. He scorned its power as well as its values. He stated that, in Florence, if one did not have an oligarchical patron, "there isn't even a dog who will bark in your face," and he ridiculed the young Florentine aristocrats who cared for nothing but "to appear splendid in



Niccolò Machiavelli

Santi di Tito

their dress and to be clever and smart in their speech.” He even wrote an essay, *Rules for an Elegant Social Circle*, where he skewers the frivolity and moral emptiness of the upper classes.

Machiavelli wrote three plays. The first, *Le Maschere*,—now lost—lampooned, by name, many of the leading members of the Florentine aristocracy. His two extant plays, *Clizia* and *La Mandragola*, are both hilarious, but beneath the levity is a brutal evisceration of the bestial appetites of the elites. Take *La Mandragola*. There is no one in the play who can legitimately be identified as either a “hero” or “heroine,” unless one stretches a point and awards that status to Lucrezia, simply on the basis of the abuse she endures. All of the characters,—the cuckolded husband Nicia, the Church’s Friar Timoteo, the pimp Ligurio, the fool Siro, Siro’s master Callimaco, and all the rest—are driven by avarice, gluttony, ambition, and lust. As such, Machiavelli’s fictional aristocratic players inhabit the same moral realm as the British East India Company’s Adam Smith, driven by the “pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain.”

Machiavelli knew that rule by oligarchy would lead to destruction. He took a stand. He said no. And he devised a means to combat his enemy.

Niccolò and Leonardo

In Machiavelli’s lifetime, the creative impulse of what is known today as the “Renaissance” was ebbing. Filippo Brunelleschi, the builder of the great Dome of the Santa Maria del Fiori Cathedral in Florence, died in 1446. His associate, the sculptor Donatello, died in 1466, and Nicholas of Cusa, the greatest scientist of the era, died in 1464. In 1453, the Venetian Empire had orchestrated the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks, an event which begat fear and pessimism throughout Italy. By the time that Machiavelli entered government service in 1498, Italy was in the grips of extreme political reaction. Venice was on the ascen-



Dante Alighieri, in fresco by Andrea del Castagno, kept in the Uffizi in Florence.

dant, the papacy, following the death of Pope Pius II in 1464, was in the hands of scoundrels, and the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in 1478 began a process that would lead into the religious wars of the next century.

Machiavelli and Leonardo da Vinci battled against this trajectory. They fought for human advancement. They fought against a culture that defines human beings as animals. They fought, not only to defend the creative dynamic which had flowered in Florence over the previous century, but on behalf of a continuing productive future for the human species.

Of paramount importance, for our purpose here, is the creation in 1504, by Machiavelli,—with the aid of Leonardo—of the Citizen Militia of Florence. Machiavelli insisted that the only way to save the Florentine Republic was through the creation and deployment of a republican citizenry.

This initiative was not simply a “military” tactic. What Machiavelli sought to unleash was the moral and creative power which exists within every “ordinary person” as a force—the only force—capable of defeating the power of oligarchy. This was Machiavelli’s brilliant historical flanking maneuver.

Leonardo da Vinci was seventeen years older than Machiavelli and already a great artist when Machiavelli was still a child. It is possible that Leonardo might have known the youthful Niccolò through their mutual connections to the Vespucci family. What is known is that one of Machiavelli’s first acts as Second Chancellor of the Florentine Republic in 1502 was to arrange for Leonardo to be appointed as chief military engineer to Cesare Borgia.

At the end of 1502, Machiavelli joined Leonardo at Borgia’s camp and remained there for four months. Based on subsequent events, it is clear that a deep political bond developed between the two. For the next ten years they would work as allies. Together, they undertook numerous projects. The best known of these is Machiavelli’s championing of da Vinci’s plan to divert



Leonardo da Vinci, said to be a self-portrait.



Pixabay/David Mark

Santa Maria del Fiore Cathedral in Florence, featuring Filippo Brunelleschi's great Dome, completed in 1436.

the Arno River, but Machiavelli also deployed Leonardo as a military engineer and a diplomat, and he secured painting commissions for him. They also collaborated closely on the creation of the Florentine militia.

The Decisive Intervention

In the summer of 1503 Venice invaded the Romagna region, east of Florence, and began gobbling up many cities that had been previously controlled by Cesare Borgia, including those bordering Florentine territory. On August 20, Machiavelli wrote a circular, calling for the immediate re-institution of Borgia to the command of the Romagna army to stop the Venetian advance. Machiavelli's pleas were ignored, and in October a faction of Florence's aristocracy succeeded in having Machiavelli dismissed from all of his government posts.

On November 1, the Venetian Ambassador Sebastian Giustinian engineered the election of Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere as Pope Julius II. Machiavelli had spent the month of October in Rome, not as a government envoy but in a private capacity, organizing against Giustinian and attempting to prevent the selection of della Rovere. Later in November,

Machiavelli wrote 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."

It was at this juncture, in early 1504, that Niccolò made his decisive intervention. He authored a long poem, titled *Decennale Primo (The First Decade)*. It is in this poem that he first proposes the creation of a Citizen Army to defend Florence.

Although the historic importance of Machiavelli's proposal may be unclear to the modern reader, what he



Leonardo da Vinci

Leonardo's "Study of a Tuscan Landscape," a sketch of the Arno River Valley, in 1473.

put forward was revolutionary. At that time, all of the Italian city states, as well as almost all of the monarchies and principalities throughout Europe, relied on mercenary armies. In many instances entire private “free armies,” each under the command of a *condottiere*—a mercenary commander—were simply hired when needed. In effect, the numerous “wars” of that era were actually bloody conflicts initiated by different oligarchs, and the mercenary “hired guns,” like those who employed them, were in it for the money and the loot, with no moral commitment to anything.

Machiavelli starts from the standpoint that the Republic is based on *principle*, not hereditary wealth, and that the citizenry, whose posterity depends on the productive development of the Republic, can be uplifted and recruited to fight for a shared human future. Think of the citizen troops standing in front of George Washington on Cambridge Commons in 1775, and think of what motivated them. This is the potential which Machiavelli foresaw.

War

In April 1505, a combined Papal-Venetian-Spanish military force invades Florentine territory. As the crisis deepens, Machiavelli is recalled to the government and restored to all of his previous posts.

In early August, a Florentine mercenary army at Pisa is defeated, and later that month, a second Venetian-Papal invasion force is stopped only sixty miles from the city. With the very survival of the Republic threatened, Machiavelli officially proposes the creation of a civilian militia, a Citizen Army. The Florentine government, out of military necessity, accepts Machiavelli’s proposal.

Machiavelli takes personal charge of organizing the militia. His goal, never fully realized, is to create a force of 10,000 men. These are Florentine citizens recruited from within both the city of Florence and many surrounding communities. The new soldiers include merchants, farmers, smiths, laborers, and craftsmen of many varieties. Leonardo da Vinci aids in the recruitment and also designs all of the uniforms for the new militia.

Machiavelli spends more than a year personally overseeing the recruiting and training of the troops. As the



Francesco Granacci

French troops under Charles VIII entering Florence in 1494.

new army comes into being, it is attacked by many Florentine aristocrats, who denounce the “democratizing” effect it is having on Florentine society. Official attempts are made to stop Machiavelli, but none succeed.

In December 1507, Machiavelli is sent to the Court of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I to negotiate an alliance against Venice. This is the beginning of what later became the anti-Venetian League of Cambrai, and it initiates Machiavelli’s plan to destroy the Venetian-Papal grip over northern and central Italy. In February 1508, Emperor Maximilian’s army attacks Venice. Florence finances the war with cash payments to both Louis XII of France and Maximilian. In February 1509, Machiavelli personally leads the Florentine Militia to begin a siege of Venice’s ally Pisa. On April 15, the army of French King Louis XII invades Venetian territory.

On June 4, 1509 the Florentine Militia captures Pisa, a feat which Florence’s mercenary armies had repeatedly failed to do over the previous twenty 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.

Between 1509 and 1512 Machiavelli’s Citizen Army successfully defends the Florentine Republic, and this during a period of incessant warfare throughout northern Italy. However, by 1512 the League of Cambrai had disintegrated, and a new formation—the Holy League—is founded, including Pope Julius II, Venice, King Ferdinand of Spain and Naples, the German Emperor Maximilian, Henry VIII of England, and Swiss mercenaries—all arrayed against France and

Florence. After the Battle of Ravenna in April, the French Army retreats from Italy to France, and Florence is left alone to defend against the overwhelming combined forces of the Holy League.

Realizing that the military situation is hopeless, Machiavelli urges the Florentine government to negotiate. Instead, it foolishly decides to make a military stand against a vastly superior Spanish army at the city of Prato. The Florentine army is almost wiped out. Days later Spanish

troops enter Florence. Five thousand Florentines are slaughtered, the Republic is abolished, and the Militia disbanded. Leonardo flees Florence, eventually suffering the equivalent of “house arrest” in Rome. On September 3, the new Florentine government, under Giuliano de’ Medici, officially joins the Holy League and allies with Venice against France. On November 7, Machiavelli is fired from all government posts. On February 12, 1513, he is arrested, imprisoned, and tortured for three weeks, after which he is banished from the city.

Cincinnatus

Machiavelli’s efforts on behalf of Florence were defeated. But later, in exile, he would author his greatest work, the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*. It is here that he not only returns to the issue of a Citizen Army, but he explores, in depth, the question of how to create, govern and sustain a Republic. At the center of this discussion is the concept of the power of the *Republican Citizen*.

In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli uses the Roman historian Livy’s work as a jumping-off point for an extended discussion of Republic versus Empire, a theme he develops in ways that go far beyond Livy. The central figure of the *Discourses* is Cincinnatus (519-430 BC), the citizen-general from the very early Roman Republic.

Machiavelli posits that one of the leading causes for the destruction of the Roman Republic was the gradual replacement of citizen-soldiers with hired mercenaries. He is explicit that this led to a growth of oligarchical



Giorgio Vasari

Florentine soldiers defeat the Pisan army at Tower San Vincenzo in 1505.

power, and the debasement of the citizenry into servile subjects. From there he develops his primary argument. Going beyond merely military matters, he states that the creation and development of a *republican citizenry* is the only method whereby oligarchical power might be defeated. And this is the only way to develop a society in which the creative potentials within the people might be brought forth.

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.” What Machiavelli is actually describing is a new type of *universal power*, a power which does not, and can not, exist in an oligarchical state, no matter its wealth or money. It is the power—the flanking power—of creative citizens.

The two 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. Machiavelli states that a republic is governed easily if the people are not corrupted, but a republic is impossible in a state which tolerates influence by an avaricious aristocracy.

The three books of the *Discourses* contain much brilliant advice on how to conduct successful war, e.g., Machiavelli’s advice against both limited war and long wars, his discussion of flanking attacks and the foolishness of attempting to hold indefensible positions, his instructions on the use of artillery in battle, and much, much more. Yet, he returns again and again to the subject of Cincin-

natus and the concept of the “citizen soldier.” He insists that a republic which is developing the potentials of its people possesses a power which no oligarchy can defeat.

What is implicit in all of this is a concept of the creative power of the human identity—an idea completely at odds with oligarchical culture. Think of Machiavelli’s collaboration with Leonardo; or for that matter consider the life-long devotion of Leonardo to investigate the frontiers of science, music and art, often under very difficult circumstances. What we are discussing is the potential power of each individual citizen, each human being, to act to change the future.

Cincinnatus Today

In *The Prince* Machiavelli holds *Courage* to be the highest human quality. Some might argue with that view, but in examining the life of Lyndon LaRouche do we not witness a life governed by extraordinary moral courage? For fifty years LaRouche fought to awaken in the hearts and minds of our fellow beings—and in ourselves—an awareness of our actual creative potential; to spur us to come to grips with what it truly means to be human, and to bring out in each of us a desire to act upon the future. All of this he did at great cost to himself and against great opposition.

In his autobiographical writings, LaRouche gives many examples of painful decisions he was forced to make throughout his life. He speaks of his rejection of Euclidean geometry at a young age, which resulted in public ridicule by his mathematics teacher; he speaks of his military enlistment during World War II, in opposition to the Quaker beliefs of his family; he tells of his estrangement from many friends and acquaintances after the war, as they succumbed to the cultural pressures of the Truman era.

And then, later, there were the fights with scientific collaborators who resisted his emphasis on the importance of Johannes Kepler. There are many other examples which could be given. All of this led up to 1986-1989, when under massive government persecution,

LaRouche refused to abandon his principles to avoid a prison sentence. He drank from the cup of *Gethsemane*, and demonstrated to each of us the mission we need to cultivate within ourselves.

LaRouche went even further,—as Machiavelli did in his own long banishment—and while imprisoned authored some of his most profound scientific work. At each singular juncture throughout his life, LaRouche had a choice. He had to make a decision. That’s what it comes down to for each of us: to decide to act, even if it is unpleasant, unpopular, or dangerous, on behalf of demonstrable truth and what is right.

This question of moral courage is the subject of *The Prince*. It is also the subject of Christopher Marlowe’s very Machiavellian play, *Tamburlaine the Great*. Some people shrink from the ruthlessness of *The Prince* or *Tamburlaine*—but they miss the point. For Machiavelli—as for LaRouche—one must be willing to risk all in defense of the sacred principle embedded in humanity’s cause. This is precisely the meaning of Machiavelli’s concept of *Virtù*.

It is for this reason that it is insufficient, in our present circumstances, to propose that we need a “movement” of citizens—at least not in the way that this is generally understood. A “mass movement” composed of *followers* will not work. Deeper reflection is required.

Political actions driven by anger, rage or victimization can never succeed. What is needed today is an awakening in the minds of more and more among us of a willingness to open one’s heart to a guiding spirit of *agapē*—of love for the future of mankind. Within each of us we have great dormant powers—the power of discovery, the power to do things we have never done before. This is what we see in Lyndon LaRouche. LaRouche demonstrated that a single individual possesses the power to change history. Let his life be our guide. As Machiavelli asserted, oligarchical culture is powerless against such an unleashing of the human spirit. In this, he and Leonardo are in agreement.



Rick Dikeman

Statue of the Roman farmer-statesman Cincinnatus in Cincinnati, Ohio.