

VITAL REMNANTS

A GUIDE TO MACHIAVELLI'S THE PRINCE



McCONNELL CENTER
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LOUISVILLE



Recommended Text

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2nd Ed., Translated and with an intro. by Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)



Accompanying Podcast

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INTRODUCTION

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Some call Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) “the great teacher of evil” and his most famous book, *The Prince*, has been called a “handbook for dictators.” Machiavellianism has become a term often used to describe ruthless and cunning politicians, and few of us would want to be known publicly as one of his followers.

His negative reputation might be true enough, but in this study of *The Prince* we will focus on finding lessons that can be applied to leadership challenges found in our everyday lives. We won’t aim to create or empower any Machiavellian politicians, but we will seek to learn from the Florentine’s cold realism and see what we can gather to help us be better leaders—or at least understand other people, friends, and enemies—better.



In the following pages you will find a reading guide to *The Prince* accompanied by core insights to consider as you make your way through one of history’s most popular treatises on political leadership.

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OVERVIEW OF READINGS



SESSION I

Read: Dedicatory Letter, Appendix “Niccolò Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori, Florence, Dec. 10, 1513” pp. 3-4, 107-111

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Episode 1

SESSION II

Read: Chapters 1-5, pp. 5-21

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Episode 2

SESSION III

Read: Chapters 6-8, pp. 21-38

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Episode 3

SESSION IV

Read: Chapters 9-10, pp. 38-44

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Episode 4

SESSION V

Read: Chapters 11-15, pp. 45-62

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Episode 5

SESSION VI

Read: Chapters 16-18, pp. 62-71

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Episode 6

SESSION VII

Read: Chapters 19-20, pp. 71-87

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Episode 7

SESSION VIII

Read: Chapters 21-23, pp. 87-95

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Episode 8

SESSION IX

Read: Chapters 24-26, pp. 96-105

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Episode 9



“I have found nothing in my belongings that I care so much for and esteem so greatly as the knowledge of the actions of great men, learned by me from long experience with modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones.”

—Niccolò Machiavelli

VITAL REMNANTS | THE PRINCE

SESSION I

Read: Dedicatory Letter, Appendix
“Niccolò Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori,
Florence, Dec. 10, 1513” pp. 3-4, 107-111

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Ep. 1

KEY LESSONS

1. Learn from contemporaries and the ancients.
2. Perspective is important when viewing politics.

SESSION II

Read: Chapters 1-5, pp. 5-21

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Ep. 2

KEY LESSONS

3. High expectations come with new leaders and cannot be met.
4. You must always offend those over whom you have become the new leader.
5. Learn before you lose—most of us only learn after having been beaten or overthrown.
6. “...men should either be caressed or eliminated.”
7. Be prudent and care for the long-term consequences.
8. Don’t delay a war.
9. Don’t bite off more than you can chew.
10. “Whoever is the cause of someone’s becoming powerful is ruined.”

SESSION III

Read: Chapters 6-8, pp. 21-38

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Ep. 3

KEY LESSONS

11. Follow great men.
12. The great rely on fortune only for the opportunity—then it is skill that counts.
13. There is great peril in founding new orders.
14. One can convince people easily – but don’t expect them to stay with you.
15. What comes to be quickly has no roots and dies at the first good challenge.
16. Use cruelty correctly: focused and then ended
 - Spread benefits out over time.
17. One must get the people’s support.

SESSION IV

Read: Chapters 9-10, pp. 38-44

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Ep. 4

KEY LESSONS

18. There is great benefit in doing good when people expect evil.
19. Make yourself indispensable.
20. Peace through strength.
21. People’s loyalty comes as much by what they give as what is given them.



VITAL REMNANTS | THE PRINCE

SESSION V

Read: Chapters 11-15, pp. 45-62

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Ep. 6

KEY LESSONS

22. Men will not make great sacrifices for money only (mercenaries).
23. Care only for war.
 - Prepare during good times (peace) so you are always ready for troubles ahead (war).
24. Learn how not to be good.
25. It is impossible to get a completely good reputation—avoid the dangerous epitaphs.
26. Liberality plus leadership.

SESSION VI

Read: Chapters 16-18, pp. 62-71

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Ep. 6

KEY LESSONS

27. A cruel prince is more merciful than chaos.
28. Better to be feared than loved.
29. Property is vitally important to people.
30. Be a fox and a lion.
31. Be flexible/adaptable.
32. Appearances are everything
 - Five key qualities to appear to possess: mercy, faith, honesty, humanity, religion

SESSION VII

Read: Chapters 19-20, pp. 71-87

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Ep. 7

KEY LESSONS

33. Avoid hatred and contempt.
34. Keep the people content.
35. Use surrogates properly.
36. To be great, you must overcome great difficulties.

SESSION VIII

Read: Chapters 21-23, pp. 87-95

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Ep. 8

KEY LESSONS

37. Keep people preoccupied (see #34).
38. Take sides.
39. Beware of overconfidence.
40. Properly hiring and managing assistants.
41. Getting the proper advice.

SESSION IX

Read: Chapters 24-26, pp. 96-105

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 2, Ep. 9

KEY LESSON

42. Better to be impetuous/aggressive than cautious.

