The Forgotten Republic
Renaissance Florence Without the Medici, 1494-1512

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Timeline

- April 8, 1492 - Lorenzo de’ Medici (Il Magnifico) dies.

- November 9, 1494 - Florentine Revolution. Piero, Giovanni, and Giuliano de’ Medici are expelled from Florence.

- May 1495 - The Florentine populace, led by Savonarola, successfully achieves the removal of the Twenty from office.

- April 28, 1497 - Piero de’ Medici attempts to return to Florence, but the citizens refuse to rise up against the Signoria and come to his aid.

- August 5, 1497 - The Signoria executes five pro-Medici conspirators.

- May 23, 1498 - Savonarola is burned at the stake as a heretic.

- May 15, 1501 - Florence signs a treaty with Cesare Borgia, agreeing to pay the condottiero 36,000 florins per year for three years.

- September 22, 1502 - Piero Soderini is named Gonfaloniere for life. He enters the Palagio for the first time on November 1, to preside over the Great Council.

- December 28, 1503 - Piero de’ Medici drowns in the Garigliano River.

- 1504 - Michelangelo finishes his work on David.

- 1505 - Machiavelli obtains permission to form the Florentine militia.

- 1509 - Guicciardini stops working on The History of Florence.

- August 29, 1512 - Battle of Prato.

- September 1, 1512 - Giuliano de’ Medici enters Florence, accompanied by troops.


- March 11, 1513 - Giovanni de’ Medici is elected Pope Leo X.

- 1538 - Guicciardini begins writing The History of Italy.
Medici Family Tree (Senior Branch)

Cosimo "Il Vecchio"
de' Medici[1389 - 1464]


Lorenzo "Il Magnifico"
de' Medici[1449 - 1492]  Giuliano de' Medici[1453 - 1478]

Piero"The Unfortunate"

Lorenzo II de' Medici, Duke of Urbino[1492 - 1519]  Ippolito de' Medici (Illegitimate), Cardinal[1511 - 1535]

Caterina de' Medici, Queen of France[1519 - 1589]  Alessandro de' Medici (Illegitimate), Duke of Florence[1510 - 1537]
Introduction

On November 9, 1494, Piero de’ Medici and his two younger brothers, Giovanni and Giuliano, were driven out of the city of Florence, pursued by an angry mob that cried “popolo e libertà!” as the young men fled the city.¹ After they were forced out, the city ushered in eighteen years of republican government, during which enfranchisement, autonomy, and liberty extended further than ever before. While the Florentine Republic reformed its institutions and began to grow in strength, the Medici brothers gradually went their separate ways.² Piero died in 1503, after a number of failed attempts to retake the city. Giovanni traveled to Rome in order to carry out his duties as a cardinal until 1513, when he was elected Pope Leo X. Only Giuliano, the youngest brother, returned to rule Florence when the family was restored to the city in 1512. However, after two decades in exile, the Medici found that the city to which they returned had undergone a paradigm shift in their absence. Florence had enjoyed popular support for the government, an expansion of political autonomy, and the elevation of liberty for the middling and lower classes under the republican regime. The populace was no longer content to accept the family’s traditional manipulation of its republican institutions, so the Medici turned instead to the overt use of force in order to retain control of the city.

The shift in Florentine political culture between the Revolution of 1494 and the Medicean Restoration of 1512 occurred gradually, as the fledgling republic contended with threats of religious extremism, foreign invasion, famine, and internal division. During its first few years of existence, the Florentine Republic was dominated by a self-anointed prophet of God, Fra Girolamo Savonarola, whose puritanic preachings and apocalyptic predictions about the future of...
Italy brought him power and influence in the city before his eventual execution in 1498. In addition to combating religious extremism, the Republic faced invasion threats from the French, from Piero de’ Medici, and from the formidable Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) and one of the many ambitious leaders of the period. It also had to contend with the question of how best to structure its republican institutions, as aristocrats and populists fought for the upper hand within the government. Still, despite all of these difficulties, the Florentine Republic grew into a functioning republic which succeeded in maintaining domestic peace, commissioning major public works, and defending itself against outside invaders until its final defeat by Spanish troops in the 1512 Battle of Prato. It experienced a high degree of popular support during its short lifespan, and the citizens’ collective endorsement of republican values induced the later shift in political culture.

Despite everything that Florence accomplished during the republican era, surprisingly little is written about the republic itself. Modern discourse focuses instead on the way that the Medici were able to dominate the city between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, with a particular emphasis on the pre-ducal Medici, Piero’s ancestors, who instituted despotic rule over the nominally republican government. Most essential works of Renaissance historical scholarship base their analyses on sources like Medici bank records, relevant Florentine artwork from artists like Brunelleschi and Donatello, and contemporary works of history such as Leonardo Bruni’s *Books of Histories of the Florentine People* (1442) and Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Florentine Histories* (1532). Scholars focusing specifically on the life and myth of Lorenzo de’ Medici, *Il Magnifico*, Piero’s legendary father whose death in 1492 facilitated the family’s downfall two years later, also make use of Lorenzo’s surviving correspondence with foreign

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3 Landucci’s diary shows that the author’s religious devotion bred great respect for the Dominican friar, even as the friar’s teachings became increasingly radical in his final months.
princes, powerful clergymen, and key members of the Medici political machine in Florence. Foundational titles like *Florence and the Medici: the Pattern of Control* and *The Government of Florence Under the Medici (1434 to 1494)* provide useful background information on the Medici and their relationship to the city, but do not give any information about the republican period following the Revolution of 1494.⁴

While the study of *Il Magnifico* certainly eclipses modern analysis of the republican period, this does not mean that scholarship neglects to address the time after Lorenzo de’ Medici’s death. A number of studies focus on the post-1512 era of Medici control, in which the family ruled the city via papal domination and noble title, but the years between the two periods of Medici rule attract much less attention. Brief analysis of Florence’s republican period between 1494 and 1512 can be found in a number of works that survey the Florentine Renaissance as a whole, presenting narratives that span the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Some, like Christopher Hibbert’s *The Rise and Fall of the House of Medici*, provide surface-level overviews of the family’s journey through history and its relationship to Florence.⁵ Others, like Herbert Vaughan’s *The Medici Popes (Leo X and Clement VII)* or Raymond de Roover’s *The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank, 1397-1494*, focus on specific aspects of the family’s history, necessarily including useful analyses of the Medicean exile and the Florentine Republic of 1494 to 1512.⁶ One trait that most modern works of historical scholarship share is a tendency to focus more on the Medici than on the city of Florence itself. To speak of one is to speak of the other, but with the exception of John Najemy’s *A History of Florence*, studies of the city as an independent subject are comparatively rare.⁷

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Modern scholarship tends to overlook the Republic’s importance because the foundational sources modern scholars use to study sixteenth-century Italy tend to minimize the importance of the republican period. Hale, Rubenstein, De Roover, Hibbert, and Vaughan all base their analyses on primary sources that include personal correspondence, bank records, government records written for the Signoria, and relevant artwork. Still, some of the most influential sources that they use are early sixteenth-century works like Machiavelli’s The Prince (1513) and Francesco Guicciardini’s The History of Italy (1540). Both works were written as commentaries on the political dynamics at play on the peninsula and the conflicts that took place outside of Florence, and thus do not spend as much time exploring the city’s short republican experiment. This is perhaps unsurprising, as the period between 1490 and 1520 was defined by political upheaval and constant violence in the Italian peninsula. French troops kicked off the Italian Wars with an invasion of the peninsula in 1494, ambitious popes like Alexander VI and Julius II (1503-1513) wrought havoc in their wars of conquest, and powerful Italian princes navigated intrigue and violence in an attempt to secure wealth, power, and prestige.\(^8\) Compared to these unprecedented developments, Machiavelli and Guicciardini viewed Florence’s eighteen years of republican government as a rather inconsequential interruption in what history remembers as three centuries or so of Medici domination.

Felix Gilbert examines the two scholars’ collective legacy in *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence*.\(^9\) In this landmark work, Gilbert argues that the introduction of French troops into Italian politics fundamentally shifted the way that Europeans thought about political power and the use of force. The French army’s

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\(^8\) *The Prince* dedicates extensive analysis to the movements and actions of Cesare Borgia, whose conquest of the Romagna Machiavelli famously admired.

power and ferocity, he says, were such that the 1494 invasion forced Italians to reconsider the political norms that had governed warfare, alliance, and power balancing in the peninsula for the past century. Gilbert argues that the French invasions and political crises of Renaissance Italy gave rise to a new form of political theory based in pragmatism, secular rationality, and the calculated use of force.\textsuperscript{10} Machiavelli and Guicciardini, according to Gilbert, were two of the first authors to make use of this new political theory in their scholarly endeavors. The Prince famously explores the use of cruelty and violence in a political context, while Guicciardini’s History of Italy applies realist principles to his analysis of the French invasion, the Italian wars, and the political upheaval that wrought so much destruction upon the region. Gilbert’s work is particularly useful not only because it studies the Florentine Republic in its exploration of the authors’ political careers, but also because it explores the various shortcomings and biases that affected his subjects’ portrayals of Florentine history and politics.\textsuperscript{11}

It is important to note that modern scholars view Machiavelli and Guicciardini’s “histories” written in the early sixteenth century as intellectual sources, best used in an analysis of the way that political thought and humanist ideology evolved through Renaissance scholarship. These works are not unbiased textbooks; they are accounts that historical figures created in order to tell readers their version of the events in question. Alison Brown’s recent work reminds us to keep in mind that Guicciardini, in particular, writes from an aristocratic perspective when he describes historical events. Brown’s work, Piero di Lorenzo de’ Medici and the Crisis of Renaissance Italy, suggests that modern scholarship places too much trust in sources


\textsuperscript{11} Both Machiavelli and Guicciardini held positions within the Florentine republican government prior to the Medicean Restoration. Machiavelli was subjected to torture as a punishment for his participation in the republic’s efforts to resist the Medici in 1512, while Guicciardini earned himself a position within the Medici papal courts.
like Guicciardini when it comes to topics like the actions and personality of Piero de’ Medici.\footnote{Alison Brown, \textit{Piero Di Lorenzo de’ Medici and the Crisis of Renaissance Italy} (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 2020).} Guicciardini, Machiavelli, and most other authors writing after 1512 cite Piero’s arrogance and incompetence as a political leader as the primary reason that the Medici were kicked out of Florence. As a result, modern historical discourse echoes this sentiment. Brown, however, draws upon sources written before the Medicean exile to show that Piero, while still privileged and certainly less gifted than his father, was not as vicious or stupid as authors like Guicciardini and Machiavelli suggest. She uses memoirs and diaries written by middle-class Florentines to challenge the dominant narrative presented in aristocratic writings like Machiavelli’s \textit{The Discourses} and Guicciardini’s \textit{The History of Florence}.\footnote{The Guicciardini were one of Florence’s elite families, while Machiavelli was born into the lower section of the Florentine upper class, but I posit that their classical educations and political careers qualify both authors’ writings as thoroughly aristocratic.} Brown is by no means the first Renaissance scholar to use diaries and memoirs written by non-aristocrats to supplement her argument, but she is one of the first to treat these sources as more than a collection of helpful quotes and eyewitness accounts. By using sources from authors outside of the Florentine upper class, she gains a better understanding of how the city, not just its leaders, viewed Piero’s actions.

My thesis follows Brown’s approach, but seeks to explore the attitudes that Florentines held toward the republican government and the threat of Medicean restoration between 1494 and 1512. Based on accounts from historical figures like Machiavelli and Guicciardini, it would be easy to conclude that Piero de’ Medici’s ineptitude was the direct cause of his family’s exile, and that the Florentine republican period was an unprosperous time of political instability for the city. This narrative is problematic, however, because it suggests that a Medicean Restoration was more or less inevitable, that a more skilled Medici family head was bound to ultimately retake Florence, and that Florentine citizens never truly embraced the republican government. The truth...
is much more nuanced, and I plan to show this in my research by comparing the narratives presented by aristocratic scholars like Machiavelli and Guicciardini to accounts produced by middle-class Florentine citizens.

In order to gain a clear picture of the sociopolitical dynamics at play during the Florentine republican period, it is necessary to consider the fact that oft-cited aristocratic writers like Guicciardini and Machiavelli produced most of their work after the Medicean Restoration. This means that while these authors did live through the events they describe, their accounts are influenced by the benefit of hindsight and the biases they acquired from their experiences. They could not always pull from their own memories, and thus would have had to rely on primary research, oral tradition, or a series of educated assumptions to fill in the gaps. Therefore, when describing popular perception of the Medici and popular opinion of the republican government, sources like Guicciardini and Machiavelli may be less than trustworthy. Luca Landucci’s *Diario Fiorentino* (*Florentine Diary*) and the *Ricordanze di Bartolomeo Masi* are two valuable resources precisely because the authors recorded their thoughts on various events as they were happening, meaning that the accounts may reveal any oversights in Guicciardini or Machiavelli’s writing. An earlier Guicciardini work, *The History of Florence*, is similarly useful because it was written prior to the Medicean Restoration and therefore shows the republic in a more positive, optimistic light than does his later *History of Italy*.

I will base my analysis on primary sources such as Landucci’s *Diario* and Bartolomeo Masi’s *Ricordanze*, which are more likely to record rumors, whispers, and shifts in popular opinion more accurately than the works of aristocratic scholars. I will add this exploration of Florentine popular sentiment to a comparison between Guicciardini’s two works of history,

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14 Guicciardini’s *The History of Italy*, from which modern scholarship draws much of its information, was written over two decades after the fall of the Florentine republic in 1512.
which can reinforce the idea that our traditional narrative of the Florentine republican years underrepresents the regime’s success and popularity. I will also include a supplementary analysis of Michelangelo’s David, which was commissioned by the Florentine Republic in 1501 and sculpted to represent the city’s strength and vigor in the first decade of the sixteenth century.\(^\text{15}\) There exist a number of contemporary accounts of the David’s installation, which I will use to analyze how Florentines reacted to their city’s achievements and successes during the republican period, reinforcing my argument that Florentine civic pride and faith in the government flourished between 1494 and 1512. Analysis of the David, combined with the exploration of primary sources written during and after the republican era, reveals a more holistic image of Florentine attitudes toward the republican regime.

To understand Florentine attitudes toward the Medici and the new republican government, one must look to the sources produced during the republican period by authors who understood the thoughts and fears of the Florentine citizenry. Close readings of scholarship from Machiavelli and Guicciardini, for example, show how Florentine intellectuals sought to portray the city’s republican period after it ended. Diaries and memoirs written prior to 1512 reveal how Florentines thought about their government and the shadow of Medici power during the republican period, and the artwork produced under the republican regime illustrates how the Republic sought to portray itself. By integrating analyses of all of these sources, and accounting for the various contexts and biases that would have influenced their production, I will construct a more accurate narrative of the Florentine republican era. My thesis shows that the Florentine republican period was a time of vibrant republicanism, defined by optimism and popular support

for the anti-Medicean regime, which fundamentally changed the way that Florentines thought about the Medici, the Republic, and the concept of liberty.
Chapter 1: The Eighteen Years that History Forgot

The turn of the sixteenth century was a tumultuous period in Renaissance Italy. While the fields of art and scholarship experienced unprecedented advancement between 1490 and 1530, Italian politics underwent a fundamental paradigm shift when a French invasion interrupted decades of relative peace on the peninsula. For the city of Florence, this shift brought revolution, followed by two decades of republican populism under an anti-Medicean government. This Florentine Republic only lasted from 1494 to 1512, but during that time it faced existential threats of foreign invasion, religious fanaticism, pro-Medici conspiracy, financial ruin, and internal political division. The city managed to overcome these obstacles and make significant advancements in the fields of art and politics, but despite all of its achievements, modern scholarship tends to minimize the historical importance of the Florentine Republican period. Gilbert summarizes this dilemma in his study of Machiavelli and Guicciardini, which laments that modern writers “are vague and often contradict each other” in their discussions of the Republican period.16 This is due, he explains, to the sixteenth-century authors’ tendency to understate the Republic’s influence on Renaissance politics. As a result, modern discourse views the Florentine republican era as a transition period in which the city lay more or less fallow while it awaited Medicean reconquest.

Histories and political treatises by Machiavelli and Guicciardini include numerous accounts of the military campaigns, strategic alliances, and pitched battles that took place between 1494 and 1512. However, critical analysis of the republican period remains difficult to find, both in contemporary and modern studies. One explanation for this phenomenon is that Machiavelli and Guicciardini may have been dissuaded from intensive exploration of the

16 Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, 305.
Florentine Republic by the fact that they both found themselves living in Medici-dominated Florentine territory when they composed their major works. Another possible reason for their reluctance to explore the topic is that the proto-realist analytical framework through which they studied Renaissance politics would have viewed the short-lived Republican period as largely unimportant. It is also possible that the Republic’s lack of notable military campaigns or “great man” leadership could have inclined Guicciardini and Machiavelli to depict Florence as ultimately doomed to Medicean reconquest. The sixteenth-century authors’ personal biases, the benefit of hindsight, and their conceptions of power in Renaissance Italy led both Machiavelli and Guicciardini to overlook the Republic’s significance.

This chapter examines the sixteenth-century sources that modern historians traditionally use to frame Florence’s republican era under a particularly critical lens in order to expose the biases, inconsistencies, and shortcomings that influenced the authors’ depictions of the Florentine Republic. It primarily analyzes Guicciardini and Machiavelli’s most influential writings by exploring the authors’ motivations, accounting for the historical context in which they wrote, and studying how their depictions of the period evolved over time. The study ultimately finds that the effects of hindsight, personal bias, historical methods, and political presuppositions led both Machiavelli and Guicciardini to minimize the Republic’s role in shaping Renaissance Italy’s social, artistic, and political development.

Before exploring the dangers of overreliance on Machiavelli and Guicciardini’s writings, it is important to explain why these two authors are so central to our modern understanding of Italian history. Guicciardini and Machiavelli were by no means the only authors to record and

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17 Machiavelli presented *The Prince* to Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici in 1513, in an attempt to showcase his political aptitude to the new leader of the Florentine government. He composed the work while in exile, after the Medici government subjected him to torture for his role in the old republican government. Guicciardini originally began work on his *History of Italy* around 1538, while Florence was under the control of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici.
comment on Italian politics at the turn of the sixteenth century, but they are certainly the most widely cited. This is because the two present supremely detailed accounts that provide unmatched insight into the way that sixteenth-century Italians thought about the events unfolding around them. Gilbert selects Machiavelli and Guicciardini as subjects for his book because they were some of the first to pioneer the fields that would become modern historical and political scholarship. Machiavelli is today generally considered the father of political science because *The Prince* provides the basis for the modern realist school of international relations discourse, and because his praise of republican militias predated the establishment of citizen armies within modern nation-states. Guicciardini, for his part, was one of the humanist historians to whom Gilbert refers as “the first in the post-classical world to conceive of historical writing as an important and independent literary genre.” Both authors’ works moved away from the earlier tradition of mixing history with poetry and rhetoric in favor of focusing more heavily on power politics and “great man” narratives that complemented their new “reasoned and intellectual” approach to political analysis.

Still, despite the significant contributions that the two authors made to the fields of history and political science, it is important to note that their accounts of the Florentine Republican period are not infallible. While scholars from Jacob Burckhardt to Hibbert cite Machiavelli and Guicciardini to illustrate political trends and movements in sixteenth-century Italy, the aims of their research do not force them to question whether these authors’ opinions are completely reliable. The early modern shift to a more pragmatic method of scholarship, evident in Guicciardini’s *History of Italy* and Machiavelli’s *The Art of War* and *The Florentine Histories*, is useful because they provide clear and direct narration of the events that modern researchers

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wish to examine. Both Machiavelli and Guicciardini are useful sources for wide surveys of the Italian political landscape during the Renaissance, but their new method led them to downplay the importance of entities such as the Florentine Republic, which did not boast military strength or anything that the two authors could identify as “great man” leadership. The authors had no real reason to spend time explaining how the Republic expanded political autonomies, successfully resisted multiple attempted invasions, or managed to retain the populace’s support through famine, war, and religious turmoil. Modern historians who are still in the thrall of these first interpreters fall victim to similar fallacies, leading them to depict the Florentine Republic as weak and insignificant.

Primary among the factors that discredit Guicciardini and Machiavelli’s historical analyses is the effect that hindsight had on their views of the Florentine Republic. Gilbert explains that at the time of the Florentine Revolution in 1494, “the inevitable adjustment of traditional ideas about politics and society to the changed—and changing—political and social conditions found its first most trenchant expression in Florence, and the ideas which were advanced there came to form an important and enduring strand in the fabric of modern political thought.” Scholarship today relies heavily on Guicciardini and Machiavelli because the two were able to identify the consequences of these “changing political and social conditions” in their works by recognizing the 1490s as a point of departure from the balance of power that had defined Italy’s late fifteenth century. With the introduction of Charles VIII’s troops into the Italian peninsula, the election of Pope Alexander VI, and the mad dash for power and influence in Italy over the next several decades, the old order was replaced by a significantly more violent

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20 Guicciardini’s History of Florence is discussed in later chapters, as it was written during the Republican period. It is less important to the current discussion because it was published more recently than Guicciardini’s more famous History of Italy, and was therefore less widely accessible prior to the twentieth century.
21 Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, 48.
and unpredictable political reality. Guicciardini and Machiavelli viewed this transition as the end of Italian prosperity in the Renaissance era, and depicted the Florentine Republic as simply another symptom of Italian decline as the fifteenth century drew to a close. While this is a reasonable conclusion to draw based on the political upheaval that Italy experienced in the sixteenth century, it fails to account for the Republic’s numerous achievements in fields like art and political organization. Today, many Renaissance historians follow Machiavelli and Guicciardini in tracing much of Italy’s fall from grace to a single inciting incident: the death of Lorenzo de’ Medici in 1492.

Analysis of Machiavelli and Guicciardini’s depictions of Lorenzo as a historical figure illustrates the way that hindsight influenced their perceptions of the Florentine Republican period. Lorenzo, called Il Magnifico, is a subject of fascination for scholars past and present. His reign as the de-facto leader of Florence is today remembered as a “Golden Age” of Renaissance history because it witnessed a period of artistic advancement and relative political stability on the Italian peninsula. His legendary standing in popular Italian memory only grew during the sixteenth century, as authors began to look back upon his life as an idyllic period that predated the French invasion and the Italian Wars. Over time, the myth of Lorenzo de’ Medici became a foundation for Guicciardini and Machiavelli’s “great man” history.

The role that Machiavelli and Guicciardini played in building the legend of Il Magnifico provides a clear example of how the authors’ nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Florence influenced their analysis of the Republican period that followed. A number of portraits from the early sixteenth century reinforce the idea that Lorenzo’s death had marked a point of departure from the Florentine “Golden Age,” and Machiavelli’s was one of the first. His Florentine Histories analyzes the history of his city from its ancient origins all the way to 1492, and the work’s final
pages include a powerful portrait of the late Lorenzo. In these pages, Machiavelli praises Lorenzo for “staying the arms of Italy” through his “sense and authority,” and writes that both God and Florence agreed “that very great disasters must arise from his death.” While it is true that Lorenzo played a significant role in maintaining peaceful relations between the five major Italian states during his life, this portrait is one of the earliest examples of an author deifying *Il Magnifico*. It is unlikely that Machiavelli, who presented this work in 1525 to Lorenzo’s nephew, Pope Clement VII, would have dared to openly criticize the angelic *Magnifico*, but the author’s choice to show 1492 as the end of Florentine prosperity still serves to reinforce the idea that only disaster could have followed Lorenzo’s death. This point is made especially clear in Machiavelli’s conclusion, which declares that “as soon as Lorenzo was dead, those bad seeds began to grow which, not long after, since the one who knew how to eliminate them was not alive, ruined and are still ruining Italy.”

About two decades later, Guicciardini reinforced the conception of Lorenzo’s death as a point of transition for Renaissance Italy with his own portrait of *Il Magnifico*. Gilbert writes that Guicciardini’s characterization of Lorenzo de’ Medici, “more than all others, has influenced the judgements on Lorenzo in the following centuries.” Born in 1483, Guicciardini spent his early years living within the Florentine nobility during the final decade of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s life. He was nine years old when Lorenzo died, and as young Francesco grew into a respected historian he also participated in the gradual mythification of Lorenzo’s life. In 1538, when he began work on his *History of Italy*, Guicciardini followed Machiavelli’s example by depicting

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Lorenzo as a keystone figure whose death was immediately followed by crisis and disaster.\textsuperscript{26} In Book One of twenty, he describes Lorenzo as a paternal, cosmopolitan, and selfless servant of the common good whose steady hand maintained a peaceful balance of power between Florence, Milan, Naples, Venice, and the Papal States. Such praise is uncommon in Guicciardini’s work, which tends to prop up notable figures as cautionary tales, rather than role models. He notes that Lorenzo understood “how destructive it would prove, both to himself and the Republic of Florence if any of them should increase his dominions at the expense of his neighbors; and was therefore ever watchful to prevent the most minute cause of strife or misunderstanding among them, lest the balance of power, which then subsisted in Italy, should suffer any alteration.”\textsuperscript{27} For writers like Machiavelli and Guicciardini, both of whom found work under the Medici family after losing their positions in the Florentine Republic, the era from 1494 to 1512 could very well have seemed like a time of distress and crisis that ultimately ended in failure.

It is the duty of present-day historians to determine whether this conclusion is valid, or if it might have been tainted by the authors’ personal biases and resentments. For example, there is a multitude of evidence to suggest that Machiavelli was ultimately a republican sympathizer. He worked closely with \textit{Gonfaloniere} Soderini during the republican era, though the failure of the Florentine militia to defend the republic and his subsequent torture and exile at the hands of the post-Restoration Medici regime could certainly have sullied his view of the Florentine Republic.\textsuperscript{28} The fact that he was employed by a Medici pope when he penned the portrait cited above also could have motivated him to show Lorenzo in an overly charitable light. As for Guicciardini, though he did find political success when the Florentine Republic appointed him

\textsuperscript{26} Gilbert, \textit{Machiavelli and Guicciardini}, 121.

\textsuperscript{27} Francesco Guicciardini, \textit{The History of the Wars in Italy: Book I}, trans. Austin Parke Goddard Esq, 3rd ed. (London: Printed for Z. Stuart, 1763), 5. Modern translations generally shorten the title to \textit{The History of Italy}, which is the name I use to refer to the work throughout the entirety of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{28} The word \textit{Gonfaloniere} refers to a “standard-bearer,” which was a traditional Florentine title for local or district leaders. In 1502, Piero Soderini became Florence’s first-ever Gonfaloniere for life.
Ambassador to the King of Aragon in 1511, his 1509 *History of Florence* reveals the level of derision that he felt toward what he believed was an insufficiently oligarchic Republic. It is obvious that Guicciardini felt entitled to this appointment by virtue of his aristocratic upbringing and his classical education; a rather pompous passage from his later *History of Italy* reads: “they sent Ambassador to the King of Aragon Francesco Guicciardini, the Writer of this History, and Doctor of Laws, at this time so young that he was by the Laws of his Country incapable of exercising any public Employment on Account of his Age.”29 His inflated self-image, combined with his frustration at the Republic’s more populist tendencies could certainly have darkened his memories of the Republican period.

It is also notable that Guicciardini, this “Writer of History and Doctor of Laws,” gave a very different, and probably more honest description of Lorenzo de’ Medici when he wrote his *History of Florence* in 1509. Translator Mario Domandi explains in his introduction to this work that the young aristocrat sought, in writing the *History*, to find “the reasons for the city’s weakness and lethargy in his time, and he believes he has discovered them by tracing historically how one-man rule, beneficial though it was in the hands of Lorenzo, led to the inheritance of power by succession, putting the state into the hands of a madman like Piero [de’ Medici].”30 Guicciardini’s predisposition to blame the republic’s troubles on the Florentine middle class’s growing political power is as prominent here as it is thirty years later in *The History of Italy*, but his thoughts on Lorenzo are notably different. In *The History of Florence* Guicciardini maintains, as he does in his later work, that Lorenzo was a capable politician of fiercely sharp intellect. However, unlike in his later *History of Italy*, the Guicciardini of 1509 did not refrain from leveling criticisms against the former tyrant. “Lorenzo was by nature very haughty,” reads *The

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History of Florence, “not only did he not want anyone to contradict him, he wanted people to understand him almost intuitively, so that in important matters his words would be few and vague.” Guicciardini also alleges here that Lorenzo was “very libidinous, completely carnal, and persistent in his love affairs, which lasted many years.” He even notes Lorenzo’s growing postmortem legend, and suggests that the crises of the subsequent years may have contributed to the idea that Lorenzo’s death spelt disaster for Italy. “The city,” he says, “fell after [Lorenzo’s] death into so many calamities and misfortunes that the sense of his loss increased manifold, as did his reputation.” Lorenzo’s death certainly sent shockwaves through Florence, and indeed all of Italy, but passages like these suggest that mainstream Renaissance discourse errs when it includes the Florentine republican period in the list of calamities that struck Italy at the turn of the century. Both Machiavelli and Guicciardini overemphasize the causal link between Lorenzo’s demise and the subsequent crises that developed, leaving their accounts of the republican period vulnerable to bias and inconsistency.

Another factor that detracts significantly from Machiavelli and Guicciardini’s credibility is the authors’ tendency to frame the Florentine Republic according to how they viewed the city’s notable leaders during the republican era. The case of Savonarola provides a perfect example of how the authors’ biases skewed their depiction of the Republic as a whole. An object of intense curiosity among scholars modern and contemporary, Savonarola actually came to Florence at Lorenzo’s invitation several years before his death, and he began to draw something of a cult following in Florence as his sermons became increasingly radical. He was especially popular amongst the lower classes, and he helped to deliver the mandate of the masses to the republican government in 1494 after the Medici were expelled from the city.

31 Guicciardini, The History of Florence, 74.
33 Guicciardini, The History of Florence, 78.
Savonarola was probably the closest thing to a “great man” that Machiavelli and Guicciardini would have deemed worthy of analysis, and his actions between the Florentine Revolution and his inglorious downfall in 1498 contributed to the two authors’ narratives of Florentine irrelevance in the republican era. Savonarola’s preaching conveyed a sense of impending doom for Italy which, taken in concert with Machiavelli and Guicciardini’s later assessments, likely perpetuated the exaggerated narrative of Lorenzo’s death as the inciting incident that brought war and destruction to Italy at the turn of the sixteenth century. Guicciardini reports in his History of Florence that after Lorenzo’s death, Savonarola became bolder in his preaching, predicting “the renewal of the Church, and an imminent scourge of Italy, during which barbarian nations would come and take fortresses effortlessly, sweeping everything before them.” It is important to note that, like Guicciardini’s 1509 portrait of Lorenzo de’ Medici, this passage describing Savonarola’s message shows Lorenzo’s death as coinciding with, rather than causing, crises like the French invasion and the subsequent Italian Wars. The subtle distinction virtually disappears in the works composed during the 1520s and ‘30s, but it is important because it suggests that the difficulties faced in the first decades of the sixteenth century fundamentally altered the way that Renaissance scholars remembered the fall of the Medici and the rise of the Florentine Republic.

Of course, the religious fanaticism and popular upheaval that Savonarola brought to the city in the years following the Florentine Revolution of 1494 would also have influenced contemporary historians’ analyses. Guicciardini’s prejudice against the lower classes is notable in both of his major historical works, so it is unsurprising that he had mixed feelings about the man who wielded such influence over the Florentine populace. In 1509 he wrote of Savonarola that “although his detractors searched industriously during the investigation, they could not find

34 Guicciardini, History of Florence, 103
even the slightest moral defect in him.” Still, Guicciardini hesitated to make a final judgement on the friar’s impact on the city, concluding his discussion by saying that “I shall reserve my judgement for a future time, if I live that long; for time clears up everything. But I do believe this: if he was good, we have seen a great prophet in our time; if he was bad, we have seen a great man.” By the time he wrote his *History of Italy* in the late 1530s, Guicciardini’s admiration for Savonarola’s moral fiber had diminished. In fairness, this could be because *The History of Italy* adheres much more closely to the Machiavellian style of rational analysis and realist discussion of power politics than the earlier *History of Florence*. Thus, *The History of Italy* paints Savonarola as simply an ambitious fanatic whose status as a religious leader ultimately proved unable to save him from the Florentine mob. Guicciardini’s 1538 account explains that the preacher’s downfall began when Savonarola proved unwilling to verify his connection with the Almighty via a trial by fire against a religious rival. Guicciardini writes that “Savonarola’s Credit suffered greatly on this Occasion; so much, that the next Day, on a casual Tumult, the People took up Arms” in order to seize Savonarola. The friar was sent to trial and sentenced to burn for his religious crimes. Forty years after his death, and almost three decades after the reconquest of the republic that the friar helped to build, Savonarola cast a much smaller shadow in Guicciardini’s mind than he did in 1509.

Machiavelli gives a very similar, though much shorter, assessment of Girolamo Savonarola in Chapter Six of *The Prince*. In his discussion of “New Kingdoms Acquired with

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37 According to Chapter Sixteen of Guicciardini’s *History of Florence*, a certain Brother Domenico, a Franciscan, challenged Savonarola to a contest in 1498, in which each friar would walk into a fire in order to determine which one held God’s favor. Savonarola reproached Domenico for asking God to perform miracles on demand, but nevertheless accepted the challenge. When the day came for the contest to commence, Savonarola insisted that he be allowed to hold the Host in his hands while he walked through the fire. Not wanting to damage the Host, Brother Domenico refused to concede this point, and the contest was ultimately canceled when the two sides proved unable to reach an agreement.
One’s Own Armies and One’s Own Skill,” Machiavelli advocates for rulers who have recently acquired kingdoms for themselves through charisma to use force as a means of solidifying their newly established authority.\(^{39}\) He cites Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus as examples of rulers who successfully accomplished this task, and uses Savonarola as an example of the dangers that arise when charismatic rulers fail to cement their own authority. “This is what happened,” Machiavelli asserts, “to Friar Girolamo Savonarola. He and his new constitution were destroyed as soon as the multitude began to stop believing in him. He had no way of stiffening the resolution of those who had been believers or of forcing disbelievers to obey.”\(^{40}\) By studying Savonarola in a purely political context rather than a religious one, Machiavelli holds true to his depiction of religion as a tool to be used for personal gain while simultaneously diminishing the role that the friar played in the development of the Florentine Republic. He implies that the republican period actually consisted of two phases, the first dominated by Savonarola, and a second ruled by a faltering republican government. While Savonarola was ultimately unsuccessful in his quest to make a theocratic “New Jerusalem” of the city, the friar was still a key figure in the early days of the Florentine Republic. His example works well for Machiavelli’s purposes, especially considering that Lorenzo II de’ Medici, grandson of \textit{Il Magnifico} to whom \textit{The Prince} is dedicated, would likely have appreciated any criticism of the friar who had played such an important role in the Florentine Revolution of 1494.

Comparison to other Florentine voices provides additional insight into the biases and shortcomings that weaken Machiavelli and Guicciardini’s credibility. Neither one of the authors was overly religious, nor were they members of the Florentine lower or middle classes from which Savonarola drew much of his support. The perspective of a religious middle-class


Florentine on Savonarola’s teachings can thus show us quite a different image of the friar. Luca Landucci’s *Diario Fiorentino* provides this much-needed counterweight to the aristocratic scholars. Landucci was a pharmacist who sporadically recorded his thoughts in a diary throughout the “Golden Age” of Florence, the Revolution of 1494, the republican period, the Medicean Restoration, and the early ducal years. He was a devout Catholic and a supporter of Savonarola, and his account provides key insight into the extent to which the people believed in the friar’s religious and moral teachings. The pharmacist first mentions *Fra* Girolamo in an entry dated November 5, 1494, describing him as “a preacher of the Order of San Domenico, dwelling at San Marco, a native of Ferrara, whom we believe to be a prophet, and he does not deny it in his sermons, but always says *da parte del Signore* (I have it from the Lord…), and he preaches on important subjects.”41 This assessment implies that unlike Guicciardini and Machiavelli, Landucci believed Savonarola to be a man of religious, rather than political ambition. It does not mean that the friar’s aims remained true over the next several years, nor that Landucci had the right measure of him at all. It does, however, mean that the conventional view of Savonarola as an existential threat that weakened the Florentine Republic is worth critical re-examination.42 If Savonarola really was a man of purely religious aims, then his eventual execution does not confirm the existence of the internal power struggle which Machiavelli seems to imply.

In addition to the shortage of “great man” figures on par with Lorenzo de’ Medici, other factors also led Machiavelli and Guicciardini to minimize the importance of the Republican period. Without traditional leaders through which to analyze the Florentine Republic’s success, the two early realists had to base their judgments of the state on its relevance as a political and military force in Italian politics. Naturally, this did not benefit their assessments of the republican

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41 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 60.
42 For a thorough re-examination of Savonarola’s role in the Florentine Republic, see Chapter 3.
era. The Florentine Republic survived for just eighteen years, during which its only major accomplishments were the long effort to retake control of the city of Pisa and the successful defense of the city against a vengeful Piero de’ Medici. Thus, Machiavelli and Guicciardini’s analyses rather unfairly depict the Republic as an unstable, irrelevant state plagued by the constant threat of foreign conquest. This assessment is problematic because it fails to account for the extraordinarily difficult situation into which the Republic was born, it neglects the Republic’s achievements outside of the military arena, and it disregards the significance of Machiavelli’s own re-establishment of the Florentine militia in 1505.

The turn of the sixteenth century was one of the most chaotic periods in Italian history to date, and the Florentine Republic was by no means unique in its failure to thrive as a military force. The French invasion of the peninsula in 1494 fundamentally altered not only the balance of power in Italy, but also the way in which wars were fought in general. During the preceding “Quattrocento,” Renaissance Italian warfare was conducted primarily by condottieri, mercenary commanders who Machiavelli writes “are always a liability.”\(^\text{43}\) Their warfare often consisted of more pomp and ceremony than actual combat; Machiavelli laments in *The Prince* that this conduct was permitted so that condottieri “could avoid all effort and risk: so much so that they have reduced Italy to terrible slavery.”\(^\text{44}\) The “slavery” of which Machiavelli speaks refers to the fact that many states in sixteenth-century Italy had been at one time or another forced to pay humiliating ransoms to foreign armies, as Florence did to the French in 1494. Twentieth-century historian Christopher Hibbert echoes Machiavelli’s sentiment in his 1974 book, writing that the condottieri “looked more like strolling players than men of war,” and noting that, “in sharp contrast, the soldiers of Charles VIII’s army were experienced, professional, and trained to


\(^{44}\) Machiavelli, *The Prince*, in *Selected Political Writings*, 42.
kill."[45] Italian troops were largely unable to cope with the ferocity of the French forces, and the early years of the sixteenth century saw a necessary evolution of Italian warfare from pompous shows of condottieri force into savage military conflicts between Italian, French, Spanish, and even Swiss troops.

The 1494 invasion of French King Charles VIII played a particularly important role in facilitating Florence’s Revolution, its loss of influence over its vassal cities like Pisa, and the general Calamità d’Italia which, Nicholas Bos writes, “overturned the old order in which the various Italian states had competed over power.”[46] From the ashes of this “old order” rose an Italian political landscape defined by brutal violence, foreign intrigue, and the proto-Realpolitik analysis for which Machiavelli and Guicciardini are famous. It is this shift in Italian political norms that Gilbert studies in his work, and it was recognition of the new reality that led sixteenth-century Florentines to innovate in the fields of historical and political scholarship. Bos writes that Machiavelli and Guicciardini’s assessments of the world in which they found themselves arose on their view of the Italian past as “essentially tragic.” He goes on to note that both authors “have a strong sense that the old Italian order is irretrievably lost after the succession of crises that started in 1494.”[47] It should be noted that Bos’ allusion to 1494 refers to the French invasion, and not to the Florentine Revolution that occurred in the same year as a reaction to the looming threat of foreign conquest. However, this view of Italy’s “tragic past” would certainly have influenced sixteenth-century authors’ portrayals of the Florentine Revolution, as well as the subsequent Republican period.

The Renaissance authors’ recognition of the changes that took place in the early sixteenth century is evident in their work. Guicciardini’s History of Italy differs considerably from the

45 Hibbert, The Rise and Fall of the House of Medici, 195.
46 Bos, “Framing a New Model,” 355.
47 Bos, “Framing a New Model,” 357.
History of Florence that he wrote three decades prior, not only in their depictions of figures like Savonarola and Lorenzo de’ Medici but also in the scope of their subjects. His History of Florence focuses more on the inner conflicts and operations of the city than on the trends and events that defined the wider Italy during the time period in question, while The History of Italy pushes Florence to the periphery of his analysis of the years between 1492 and 1532. Figures to take center stage in The History of Italy include King Charles VIII, Pope Alexander VI, Ferdinand of Aragon, and Ludovico Sforza while the likes of Piero Soderini and other prominent Florentines appear only occasionally. This does not mean that Guicciardini neglected the development and fall of the Florentine Republic; just that he viewed the republican experiment as marginal to Italian history as a whole. This approach largely conforms to the “billiard ball” facet of the classical realist school of international relations scholarship, which takes states as uniform actors who behave according to how they interact with each other, regardless of their internal makeup. For Guicciardini’s purposes, Florence’s republican government is only relevant when its constitution weakens or strengthens the city’s ability to attack or defend itself. His power politics and “Great Man” approaches to history lead him to place heavy emphasis on figures like Piero de’ Medici or Girolamo Savonarola because these were men whose actions affected Florence’s behavior as a whole.

Machiavelli, on the other hand, thoroughly explored the merits of republicanism and tyranny through most of his political works. Debate continues to this day over whether or not his advocacy for tyrannical cruelty in The Prince was sincere, but his other works absolutely brim with support for republicanism and implicit anti-Medicean sentiment. As mentioned previously, however, it would have been unwise for Machiavelli to betray any overt republican leanings.

48 The republican nature of Machiavelli’s discussion of militia in The Prince and The Discourses on Livy shall be explored in depth in Chapter 2, as will republican themes present in his The Art of War.
while under the watchful eye of various Medici patrons. Thus, while he may have left hints of his personal views in his work, he usually kept his writing foggy enough to retain plausible deniability. One explicit theme that spans all of his work from *The Prince* to *The Art of War* is the idea that the use of force is the foundation of political interaction. *The Prince* argues that the Florentine people overcame Savonarola because he had neglected to fortify his rule with force, and this same cold, rational calculation governs his interpretation of all sixteenth-century Italian political interactions. Thus, like Guicciardini’s *History of Italy*, Machiavelli’s political treatises focus very little on the Florentine Republic of 1494 to 1512. The most famous contemporary model that Machiavelli uses to illustrate his point is Cesare Borgia, otherwise known as Duke Valentino. Borgia, whom Machiavelli describes as “pugnacious and strong,” was the son of Spanish Pope Alexander VI and a fearsome *condottiere* whose exploits earned him the title “Duke of the Romagna.” No comparable figure existed within the Florentine Republic, so it makes sense that Machiavelli would have spent less time discussing the topic.

Machiavelli’s thoughts on the state of Italy in 1513 are made abundantly clear in the title of his final chapter in *The Prince*, the “Exhortation to Seize Italy and Free Her from the Barbarians.” This chapter is, for the sake of the treatise, the reason that Machiavelli dedicated *The Prince* to Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici. The “Exhortation” calls for the Medici ruler of Florence to take advantage of his family’s position of influence, as well as his connection to his uncle Pope Leo X (1513-1521) in order to unite the Italian peninsula and force out foreign troops. This does not imply approval of the Medici family’s conquest of the Florentine Republic in 1512, nor does it mean that Machiavelli thought the Republic irrelevant. It simply shows

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50 The timing of the book’s presentation to Lorenzo II suggests that Machiavelli probably initially intended to present *The Prince* to Giuliano de’ Medici, with whom he had a better relationship and who was brother, instead of nephew, to Pope Leo X. However, Leo replaced Giuliano with Lorenzo II as Florence’s resident despot in 1513, so Machiavelli was forced to present the work to a much younger - and much less interested - Medici. There is no indication that Lorenzo II ever actually read it.
Machiavelli’s understanding that, in this time of chaos governed by power politics, the Medici were likely to cement their hold over the city. It also reinforces the idea that Italy had existed in a state of catastrophe since the introduction of foreign troops in the 1490s. He paints the picture of an “enslaved,” “defenseless,” and “oppressed” Italy in need of a savior.\(^{51}\) When he writes that “everyone is sick of being pushed around by the barbarians,” he explicitly calls for the removal of Swiss, Spanish, and French forces from the peninsula. He is correct in his assessment of Italy as a whole, but his rhetoric again permits modern historians to discount the Florentine Republic that existed between 1494 and \textit{The Prince’s} dedication. The Republic was not relevant to Machiavelli’s work in \textit{The Prince} because it was dead by the time he started writing the book. This does not mean that he saw the Republic as valueless, nor does it mean that it should be dismissed by modern scholarship as a bungled attempt at expanding democracy.

It should also be noted that despite their reluctance to explore the topic in their later works, both Machiavelli and Guicciardini rose to the first prominent political posts of their respective careers within the Florentine republican government. Despite Guicciardini’s complaints about Piero Soderini and the populist nature of the Republic, he still agreed to carry out the duties of Ambassador to Aragon on behalf of the government. Even the fact that he undertook to write a \textit{History of Florence} shows that he had some faith that this was a relevant historical development. Domandi’s introduction to the work notes that “the \textit{History of Florence} as well of most of his other writings lay mute in the Guicciardini archive for over three hundred years,” which means that Francesco Guicciardini thought the city’s history was important enough to record for his own personal use.\(^{52}\) Machiavelli, for his part, became a pillar of the Florentine Republic during his time working as one of Gonfaloniere Soderini’s most trusted allies. He was

\(^{51}\) Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, in \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 77.
\(^{52}\) Domandi, introduction to Guicciardini, \textit{The History of Florence}, xiii.
given charge of the Florentine military, which allowed him to pass an ordinance in 1505 that authorized the creation of a militia force to defend the city.\textsuperscript{53} While this militia was ultimately defeated by Spanish and Medici forces in the brutal Battle of Prato in 1512, Machiavelli’s brainchild acquitted itself well in the effort to retake Pisa in 1509. Machiavelli was subjected to torture by the \textit{strappato} when the Medici retook the city, but all of his subsequent writings still celebrate the value of using a militia to defend one’s territory. His efforts to defend his city, like Guicciardini’s willingness to leave his native country in order to work in Aragon on behalf of the Republic, make it difficult to believe that these innovative scholars did not, at least before the Medicean Restoration, believe in the strength and value of the Florentine Republic.

One final factor that discredits Machiavelli and Guicciardini’s historical analyses is their tendency to show the Medicean Restoration in 1512 as more or less inevitable. Recall that the Medici ruled the city of Florence as de-facto tyrants from the 1430s up to the revolution of 1494, and that their return in 1512 was followed very quickly by the election of Giovanni de’ Medici to the papacy and the subsequent marriage of several Medici men into noble houses. The post-1512 Medici regime made much less of an effort to uphold the appearance of a functional republic than had that of \textit{Il Magnifico} and his forefathers, and following one more brief exile from 1527-1530 the Medici established themselves as Dukes of Florence and, later, of Tuscany.\textsuperscript{54} This, in addition to the overwhelming victory by Spanish and Medici troops over the Florentine Republican forces in the 1512 Battle of Prato, led Renaissance authors to frame the Republican period as a brief interruption in an essentially continuous era of Medici rule in Florence. In some ways this is a reasonable conclusion, as the Medici family continued to reign as Grand-Dukes of


\textsuperscript{54} The Florentine Republic of 1527-1530 is generally depicted as having been even weaker than the Republic of 1494-1512, though perhaps it is simply a victim of the same oversights discussed here. This topic may be worth further examination in future research.
Tuscany until well into the eighteenth century, rendering an eighteen-year stint in exile relatively insignificant. On the other hand, such an assessment denies the fundamental changes that the republican era forced the Medici to make in the way in which they asserted their dominance over the city of Florence. Furthermore, it diminishes both the importance of the Republic’s achievements during that eighteen-year period, as well as the pro-republican sentiment that much of the city felt during the Medicean exile.

Until very recently, the depiction of the Florentine Republic as a struggling regime doomed to suffer an eventual Medicean Restoration was heavily supported by the near-universal condemnation of Piero de’ Medici’s character. Piero was the privileged son of Lorenzo II Magnifico de’ Medici, whom most contemporary accounts harshly condemn for failing to inherit his father’s intelligence and skill. In his History of Italy Guicciardini describes Piero as “trusting more to himself and the counsels of rash and arrogant ministers, bold in times of peace, but dejected and useless in times of danger, than to those of trusty and experienced citizens.”

Giorgio Vasari, the author of The Lives of the Artists who is today remembered as the world’s first art historian, intimates a similar sentiment in his biography of Michelangelo: “It happened that the Medici were driven out of Florence, and that, a few weeks before, Michelangelo had already left for Bologna and then for Venice, because, having seen the insolent actions and bad government of Piero de’ Medici, he feared some sinister accident might befall him as a friend of the family.” For centuries historians had no reason to doubt the veracity of these assessments, given Piero’s failure to retain control of the city for more than two years, and his lack of ability to maintain the Italian peace for which his father was so beloved. This condemnation allowed historians to view the Medicean exile more as a personal failure by Piero de’ Medici than as a

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result of the Florentines’ desire to reinstate a republican government. Thus, Piero could be depicted as a “bad apple” whose inadequacy led to a brief lapse in Medici control before Giovanni made up for his brother’s mistakes in 1512.

Modern scholarship also cites the existence of a pro-Medici faction within the Florentine Republic as an indication of the republic’s lack of support within the city. Herbert Vaughan’s early and influential work, The Medici Popes, makes note of Gonfaloniere Soderini’s need, in 1512 with Medici forces drawing close to the city, to “boldly thrust into prison some twenty-five prominent supporters of the Medicean faction, who were already agitating noisily for the return of their patrons.”57 By emphasizing Soderini’s need to lock up Medici supporters, Vaughan implies that the Republic lacked strong support from its citizens and suggests that the shadow of Medici power never truly faded from the city. Guicciardini provided ample testimony to support this claim in his History of Italy, which says of the Republic in 1511 that “besides that some desired the Return of the Family of the Medici, Discords and Divisions, the ancient Bane of Florence, prevailed among some of the most considerable Citizens.”58 Both of his histories also describe in great detail the trial of a handful of pro-Medici conspirators in 1497, after Piero’s aborted attempt to retake the city earlier that year. Of course, from Guicciardini’s vantage point in 1538, by which time the Medici had officially become Dukes of the city, the pro-Medici faction would have looked much more potent than it may have done during the Republican period. While there is no denying the presence—and on certain occasions the significant strength—of pro-Medici factions within the city, here is another instance in which Guicciardini’s work downplays the significance of the republican spirit that existed within the Florentine Republic prior to the Medicean Restoration.

57 Vaughan, The Medici Popes 84.
Alison Brown’s 2020 *Piero di Lorenzo de’ Medici and the Crisis of Renaissance Italy* challenges not only the modern depiction of Piero de’ Medici, but also the wisdom of trusting writers like Guicciardini and Machiavelli to accurately portray the characters and conditions of the republican era in Florence. In her work, Brown makes skillful use of sources written during Piero’s life to assess various authors’ thoughts on his character. She uses these sources, many of which are relatively unpolluted by hindsight and prejudice, to challenge the conventional view of Piero as a vain but inept figure. In her assessment of Piero’s performance at the head of the family after Lorenzo’s death, Brown notes that Guicciardini’s particularly uncharitable description of the young man’s character is the primary basis for modern scholarship’s perception of his actions. She suggests, however, that other contemporary accounts of Piero’s leadership provide perhaps a more accurate view of the situation in which Lorenzo left his son.

Relying on a memoir written around the turn of the sixteenth century, Brown explains that between the decline of the family bank, the recent decrease of Medici popularity within Florentine politics, and the loss of his father’s unmatched political genius, Piero’s odds of success were perhaps not as favorable as Guicciardini would have his readers believe. In the final section of her book, Brown concludes that “the character traits revealed by the life we have been following show that Piero was very different from the savage and bestial tyrant portrayed in Guicciardini’s *Florentine Histories*.” It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the Florentine Revolution was due in significant part to the anti-Medicean republicanism that existed within the city, as opposed to simple ineptitude or cruelty on Piero’s part.

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59 Brown, *Piero Di Lorenzo de’ Medici and the Crisis of Renaissance Italy*, 152.
60 Brown, *Piero Di Lorenzo de’ Medici and the Crisis of Renaissance Italy*, 302. Brown translates directly from Guicciardini’s *Storie Fiorentine*, which is why the title differs from Domandi’s translation of *The History of Florence*. 
The republican era from 1494 to 1512 was a short-lived period in Florentine history, during which the city was plagued by internal division, religious fanaticism, financial woes, and the threat of foreign invasion. Still, in spite of all these challenges, it is not a period that should be overlooked in modern surveys of the High Renaissance era. Not only did the Florentine Republic establish one of the most democratic systems to exist in early modern Europe, but it also succeeded in retaking the city of Pisa, establishing a militia that predated the citizen-armies that came to define nineteenth-century nation-state warfare, and commissioning the creation of Michelangelo’s 1504 masterpiece, the famous David. In addition to these achievements, it forced a fundamental change in the way that the Medici family sought to control the city going forward. The period of Medici domination between 1512 and 1527 marks a dissolution of the Florentine Republic’s institutions within which the Medici had ruled prior to 1494. After the Republican period, the populace had to be subjected more directly than it had previously, possibly because it had experienced such uncommon liberty in the preceding decades. Unfortunately, modern historical scholarship largely overlooks these accomplishments because of the way that Guicciardini’s histories and Machiavelli’s political treatises portray the Florentine Republic. While these texts are vital to our understanding of the era, they also include inconsistencies and biases that lead to inaccuracy in their accounts of the republican period.

Machiavelli and Guicciardini were not the only Renaissance scholars to analyze this period, but their recognition of the shifting political norms within Italy makes their works by far the most influential. Unfortunately, their shift to historical analysis based on reason, rather than rhetoric, did not eliminate the personal biases or the prejudices of hindsight with which these authors wrote. There exist a number of factors that explain the sixteenth-century scholars’ assessments of the Florentine Republic, including an unwillingness to speak out against the
Medici, a focus on “great man” history and power politics, and the use of hindsight in historical analyses. As a result, they saw the Florentine Republic as a faulty regime which, once the Medici were gone and Savonarola had died, experienced mediocre leadership and never gathered enough military strength to become a relevant player in the conflicts and movements that defined Italy’s early sixteenth century. Furthermore, historical discourse which relies too heavily on major works of history and politics written years and decades after the Medicean Restoration does not adequately assess the importance of the Florentine Republic.
Chapter 2: *Popolo, Libertà, and David*

History is indeed written by the victors, but it is the historian’s duty to look beyond the victors’ hyperbole and bias in order to reconstruct a more accurate narrative. The previous chapter aimed to begin this process by dismantling the conventional perception of the Florentine Republic as an insignificant state led by an inconsequential government which had no real impact in sixteenth-century Italian politics. It did so by identifying the shortcomings and inconsistencies present in the source material upon which most modern Renaissance scholars, from Burkhardt to Rubinstein, base their historical analysis. These shortcomings do not render Guicciardini and Machiavelli’s writings useless, nor do they imply that traditionally foundational source material can be left out of consideration in a study of the Florentine Republic. It does, however, mean that a more holistic exploration of the regime requires a survey of alternative sources which are less likely to be tainted by the influence of hindsight and personal bias. When these alternative sources are used in tandem with traditional narratives like Guicciardini’s *History of Italy*, they suggest that, while the Florentine Republic was indeed financially unsound and often vulnerable to foreign threats, it was also defined by certain strengths which historians continue to underestimate.

The notion that the Florentine Republic was stronger and more unified than sixteenth-century scholarship suggests is based upon a close examination of primary sources written during the republican era which are often overlooked in wide-brush histories like Najemy’s *A History of Florence* or Vaughan’s *The Medici Popes*. Two such primary sources, which I introduced in the previous chapter, are Luca Landucci’s *Diario Fiorentino* and the *Ricordanze* of a Florentine metalworker named Bartolomeo Masi. Both were written by middle-class Florentines over several decades, and both provide invaluable insight into the
average citizen’s thoughts and feelings during the republican period. Landucci’s account offers considerably more information than Masi’s, but both provide useful first-hand descriptions of the most influential episodes that occurred between 1494 and 1512, and the way that ordinary citizens reacted to them. The accounts are particularly valuable because, while both authors were literate and relatively well-educated by sixteenth-century standards, neither belonged to Guicciardini’s aristocratic peer group or Machiavelli’s politically active circle. Thus, neither author had the same stake in the success or failure of the Florentine Republic as the two scholars discussed above. Landucci recorded about five decades’ worth of events, including the rise and death of Lorenzo de’ Medici, the Florentine Revolution of 1494, the Medicean Restoration of 1512, and the Restoration’s aftermath. The fact that he and Masi often recorded their thoughts only hours or days after the events took place means that their accounts are not marred by the hindsight biases present in those written in the years and decades following the Medicean Restoration.

In addition to the lack of hindsight bias at play in their accounts, the diary sources are valuable because they were not written with a specific audience in mind. Thus, unlike Machiavelli and Guicciardini, Landucci and Masi did not have to censor or spin their descriptions of the historical events in order to appease a patron or recipient of their work. This is not to say that personal perceptions and biases did not play a role in shaping the diarists’ accounts, but it does mean that these diarists’ assessments may reflect Florentine popular sentiment more accurately than those written three decades later, by aristocrats living under Medici rule.

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Interestingly, both Machiavelli and Guicciardini’s own works also provide valuable evidence to support the claim that Renaissance scholarship which draws too heavily on primary sources written after 1512 portrays the Florentine Republic in an overly negative light. While Guicciardini’s twenty-book *History of Italy* is widely regarded as his most consequential work because of its influence upon modern Renaissance literature, his 1509 *History of Florence* can be used to challenge some of its successor’s claims because it was written during the Republican years and was not commissioned by political patrons.\(^6^2\) Machiavelli’s case is somewhat complicated by the fact that his most influential writing occurred after 1512, but his works include a plethora of evidence to suggest that Machiavelli retained much of his republican sentiment even after the republican government fell. Indeed, Guicciardini’s pre-Restoration writings and Machiavelli’s subtle jabs at Medici tyranny reveal that civic pride and popular support for the Republic were likely much more prevalent in turn-of-the-century Florence than was previously believed.

Exploration of firsthand accounts and pre-Restoration writings is incredibly useful, but it is not the only window into the past that sixteenth-century Florentines left behind. Additional insight into the strength, optimism, and confidence present in the Florentine Republic can be found in careful analysis of Michelangelo’s famous *David* sculpture, erected in 1504. The masterpiece, which Vasari refers to as “the Giant” in his *Lives of the Artists*, is useful in this respect because it both followed and departed from established Florentine artistic traditions.\(^6^3\) By calling upon well-known symbolic links between Florence and the biblical king, Michelangelo created both an embodiment of the city’s historic struggle against tyranny and a symbol of Florence’s rejection of Medici influence over the city. Michelangelo’s departure from the

\(^6^2\) Domandi, introduction to Guicciardini, *The History of Florence*, xiii.

traditional depiction of David, coupled with the ways in which the government eventually chose to display the work, reveal the Republic’s desire to project confidence and strength in the face of tyranny, both foreign and historic.

Careful examination of first-person narratives, lesser-known passages from Machiavelli and Guicciardini, and artwork produced during the republican era suggests that the traditional perception of the Florentine Republic requires revision. Republican Florence never regained the strength or cohesion that it had had during the golden age of Medici power, but it certainly was not as weak or divided as accounts written after the Medicean Restoration imply. The resurgence of republican sentiment following the Revolution of 1494, the prevalence of anti-Medicean sentiment within the populace, and the city’s steady growth in military strength all indicate that Florence was not as insignificant or helpless as sources written decades later tend to imply. In fact, holistic analysis of the period suggests that the republican era was a time of optimism, confidence, and pride within the city.

The prevalence of republican sentiment within Florence immediately following the 1494 revolution is one of the most important indicators of the city’s capacity for strength and unity during the republican years. After the Medici were expelled from the city, it would have been easy for Florence to fall into chaos as different groups vied for control in the resulting power vacuum. Machiavelli explains this point in his *Discourses on Livy*, in which he argues that the city’s republican heritage allowed the citizens to rely on traditional norms to keep relative peace in late 1494. Comparing Florence to ancient Rome, he explains that a city’s republican roots often outlast its institutions and continue to affect city politics even as tyrants take over. He describes both cities as having been “established by the common agreement of the community, working together to make it powerful.”  

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64 Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, in *Selected Political Writings*, 194.
were threatened, the populations drew upon their history of collective action to incite uprisings against tyranny. “This was the case,” writes Machiavelli, “with the government of Rome and the expulsion of the Tarquins, just as it was the case with the government of the Medici in Florence. When they were driven out of power in 1494, they were the only ones who were attacked.” By citing Florence’s republican heritage as the reason why the city was able to transition relatively smoothly out of Medici rule, Machiavelli clearly implies that republican values were still a driving force in Florentine politics during the 1494 revolution.

This strength of republican traditions is also evident in sources written prior to the Medicean Restoration of 1512, when the Republic was still alive. Both Guicciardini’s *History of Florence* and Landucci’s *Diario* speak favorably about the creation of Florence’s republican government, which suggests that the city’s collective republican heritage was indeed an important force that allowed it to survive its post-revolutionary struggles. Landucci frames the Republic’s rise as the city’s fulfillment of God’s will, which was relayed to the citizens through the then-popular Girolamo Savonarola. In December 1494, about a month after the Florentine Revolution, Landucci wrote that “Fra Girolamo did his utmost in the pulpit to persuade Florence to adopt a good form of government.” This “good form of government” may have included more populist characteristics than the classical republics that Machiavelli adored, but it is clear that Landucci viewed this as a return to Florence’s rightful state. On January 1st of the following year, the pharmacist wrote that “the new Signoria entered into office, and it was a great joy to see the whole Piazza filled with citizens, quite different from other times, as a new thing, thanking God who had given this impartial government to Florence, and delivered us from subjection.”

Landucci’s delight at having left behind the “other times” can hardly be mistaken. If his diary

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65 Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, in *Selected Political Writings*, 194.
66 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 76.
67 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 78.
gives any indication at all of Florentine public opinion immediately following the revolution, then it is obvious that civic pride and popular support for the Republic were on the rise in early 1495.

Guicciardini’s *History of Florence* provides additional insight into the rise of popular republicanism within Florence in early 1495. Guicciardini, who was about twelve years old when the Republic was born, provides a historically minded account of the proceedings in his 1509 narrative. Interestingly, his story actually pairs quite well with the one recounted in Landucci’s diary. Like the pharmacist, Guicciardini writes that after Piero fled, “[Savonarola] began to preach his message from God, which was that God, not men, had freed the city from tyranny.” Unlike Landucci, Guicciardini also notes that anti-Medicean sentiment played a key role in the establishment of political norms and expectations within the Republican system. “At home,” he writes, “a very powerful house had been expelled after having ruled for sixty years, and all its enemies had been brought back. This revolution brought with it a complete change in the methods of government.” This “change in…government” represented a shift away from Medici domination into a more popular-minded Florentine Republic, toward which Guicciardini is much more charitable in his *History of Florence* than he is in *The History of Italy*. The variation is most likely due to the fact that in 1509, Guicciardini was more heavily influenced by the popular Florentine perception of the Medici as enemies of liberty.

There is no denying that the Florentine Revolution spawned an immediate increase in support for the republican government that rose to replace the Medici system, and pre-Restoration sources suggest that the enthusiasm persisted for the majority of the republican era. It is true that the years between 1494 and 1512 were marred by religious extremism,

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economic woes, and internal division, but the Republic managed to achieve modest prosperity in spite of all these difficulties. Even Guicciardini, an eternal critic of the government’s populist leanings, begrudgingly admits in his *History of Florence* that by 1502 “the Signoria had settled the troubles in our dominions and the threats to peace in a most praiseworthy and felicitous fashion.” He immediately follows this comment by lamenting the woeful state of the Florentine economy, but this serves mostly to validate his complaint that the elite class were not given the power they were due under the republican government. His indictment of the Florentine state of affairs loses much of its credibility when he writes that “the city is sure to suffer when men of quality do not have, I will not say tyrannical power, but at least the rank they justly deserve.” While this passage does suggest that the city’s elite may have resented the loss of power that they experienced during the Republican years, it also clearly illustrates that the Florentine middle class gained an unprecedented amount of political influence in the absence of Medici tyranny.

The expansion of middle-class power may explain how the republican government retained popular support despite enduring significant economic hardship between 1494 and 1512. The Florentine Republic’s inability to achieve economic success is commonly cited as evidence that the city floundered in the Medici family’s absence, but financial hardship may not have dealt as devastating a blow to republican morale as is sometimes assumed. The city’s financial difficulty is chronicled both in reports from aristocrats like Guicciardini, and in accounts from members of the middle classes. In a 1505 entry from his *Ricordanze*, Bartolomeo Masi reports that “this truly was a very tough year, and everything to eat was as expensive as can be remembered in our city of Florence,” but this may not have translated into popular resentment of the republican government. Guicciardini goes to great lengths to blame Florence’s troubles on

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the overly populist government, but Masi’s account is much less critical of the Republic itself. His entry explains that the hardships were caused by a disappointing harvest throughout all of Italy in the preceding year, and he adds that the hardship was “worse (valse piú) in the places outside of Florentine territory than in those belonging to Florence.” Landucci’s diary conveys a similar sentiment in an entry which recounts Piero Soderini’s 1502 entry into the Palazzo della Signoria as the Republic’s first ever Gonfaloniere for life. The passage reports that everyone who went to witness this event “seemed to have hopes of living in comfort,” implying that the common people did not feel the sense of economic dread that plagued Florence’s upper class. This does not negate Guicciardini’s reports of hunger and hardship, but it does suggest that the city’s economic difficulties need not have significantly reduced the people’s pride and support for the Republic.

In addition to showing faith in the Florentine government during times of economic hardship, Florentines expressed their support for the republican regime by linking it to the concept of liberty. In the summer of 1495, when King Charles was still considering invading Florence, Landucci writes that the city’s gonfaloni sent a message to the king, asking him “first, to leave us our liberty, secondly to understand that we did not choose to have Piero de’ Medici return, as had already been said.” The “liberty” that Landucci mentions in the first request is understood to have been won mere months earlier when Piero was expelled, but its position as the first request that the Florentines made to King Charles shows how valuable it was to them. When the Republic eventually did fall to the Medici in 1512, Landucci’s despair was evident in his writing. Upon witnessing Giuliano de’ Medici’s entrance into the Palazzo della Signoria accompanied by a squad of armed guards, the pharmacist returned to the Savonarolan idea that

74 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 201.
75 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 87.
Florence’s misfortune must signal God’s displeasure. His diary asserts that “all states and jurisdictions are of the Lord, and if in these changes of government the people suffer some hardship, loss, costs, or discomfort, we must consider that it is on account of our sins and with the object of some greater good.” We can assume that Landucci was not the only Florentine to wonder which of their sins had led God to bring this unhappiness upon them.

Over a decade after Landucci lamented the return of the Medici, Machiavelli recalled in his *Discourses* how fiercely the Florentines had coveted their freedom during the republican era. Exiled from Florence in 1513 for the role he played in the republican government, Machiavelli uses a section in his later political work to identify Piero Soderini, the Republic’s main leader, as one of the few modern Italian politicians worthy of praise. Soderini, often a lightning rod for criticisms of the Florentine Republic in Guicciardini’s *History of Italy*, offers an interesting case because he refrained from seizing despotic control of the Florentine government despite meeting heavy political opposition from Florentine aristocrats during his tenure. Machiavelli alleges that it was not, as Guicciardini suggests, a lack of ambition which led Soderini to refrain from seizing total control of the state. Instead, according to the *Discourses*, Soderini was motivated by a strong aversion to any violation of the Florentines’ hard-earned political liberties. “If he set out to attack his opponents boldly and to destroy his adversaries,” Machiavelli says of Soderini, “he would have to claim extraordinary powers and set aside not only the laws but the principle of political equality.” The equality of which Machiavelli speaks is intimately tied to the republican liberty that he champions throughout his *Discourses*, and his assessment of Soderini’s character shows that, even after the Medicean Restoration, Florentines cherished the memory of the liberty afforded them under the republican government.

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76 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 261.
77 Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, in *Selected Political Writings*, 194.
It is likely that the relationship Landucci and Machiavelli perceived between liberty and the Republic arose in part from the teachings of Girolamo Savonarola, whose thoughts on liberty and tyranny shaped Florentine views of both the Republic and the old Medici regime. Savonarola, whose career in Florentine politics is discussed more fully in the following chapter, is pertinent to the current discussion of public opinion during the 1490s because his preaching heavily influenced how commoners like Landucci thought about the new regime. Savonarola’s 1498 “Treatise on the Constitution and Government of Florence” provides a record of his political teachings and draws clear connections between the city’s God-given liberty and the “civil government” under which he wrote. Like Machiavelli, he appeals to Florence’s republican roots, writing that “the Florentine people, having established a civil form of government long ago, have made such a habit of this form that...it has become habitual and fixed in their minds.”

By establishing republicanism as Florence’s natural state, the friar also pointed to “tyranny” as a form of government with which the city was completely incompatible. This, in turn, allowed him to depict the Medici as enemies of the Republic. Readers had no trouble identifying the “citizen” who, according to Savonarola, “usurped the liberty and common good of the people.”

Machiavelli certainly seems to echo this accusation in his *Discourses*, which compare the Medici to classical tyrants on a number of occasions. Like Savonarola, he takes care in his works to avoid explicitly accusing the family of being tyrants, but his thoughts are made clear when he draws the aforementioned parallel between the Medici and the Tarquins, whose removal from ancient Rome allowed a republican regime to grow and thrive in their place.

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80 Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, in *Selected Political Writings*, 194.
Lorenzo and his younger brother, Giuliano, to “Diocles and Hippias, tyrants of Athens,” and “Clearchus and Satirus, who were tyrants.” Machiavelli notes that both pairs of classical tyrants were targets of botched assassination plots, which only succeeded in killing one tyrant each. He then compares these plots to the 1478 anti-Medicean conspiracy, in which “the Pazzi, whom we have cited many times, only succeeded in killing Giuliano.” The result, he says, is that “the survivors who remain become more insufferable and harsher, as is well known to Florence.”

Though Machiavelli does not explicitly name Lorenzo in this passage, while naming both “tyrants” when referring to the two ancient pairs, no reader could fail to understand who the “insufferable and harsher” survivor was in the case of the Pazzi conspiracy. Machiavelli’s mention of Florence serves both to confirm his aim to critique the Medici, and to underscore the dichotomy between Medici control and republican liberty in Florence. Anti-Mediceanism was not a new phenomenon in Florence during the republican years, but the connection that Savonarola and Machiavelli draw between the Medici and the loss of liberty reveals that hatred of the old tyrants became synonymous with support for the republican regime after the Revolution of 1494.

The link between anti-Mediceanism and support for the Republic is relevant because it provides further insight into Florentine citizens’ views of the new government during the republican era. Declarations in support of _popolo e libertà_ do not often appear in the diaries after the Florentine Revolution, and as previously noted, sixteenth-century histories pay little attention to the city’s republican years. For this reason, it is often necessary to study instances in which Florentines were actively hostile toward the Republic’s enemies in order to measure the strength of their support for the new government. By expressing fear or disapproval of the Medici, who

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remained among the city’s most existential threats during the republican era, Florentines showed a preference for the status quo under the republican government. Anti-Mediceanism could be motivated by a number of factors; Guicciardini may have wished that his aristocratic family had held the same elite status as the Medici, while Landucci’s fellow commoners might have resented the family’s arrogance or burdensome tax policy. Whatever the individual reason, the result was the same: hatred of the Medici and, by extension, some level of support for the Republic. It follows, then, that an exploration of Florentine anti-Medicean sentiment between 1494 and 1512 should reveal how many citizens thought about the shadow of Medici power during the republican era.

After the Medici were expelled from the city, Landucci took note of a concerted effort made by the Florentine government to cut its remaining ties to the family. This was done, both by prohibiting commerce with the Medici, and by “having the balls which were the arms of the Medici destroyed and chiselled away on the palace of the Medici, in Sa’ Lorenzo, and elsewhere.”

This symbolic removal of Medici influence from the city further reinforced the idea that the family had no place in the new Republic of Florence. The erasure perpetuated the thoughts expressed in Savonarola’s treatise and laid the foundations for Machiavelli who, decades later in his *Discourses*, asserted that “a populace in power, if it is well ordered, will be as reliable, prudent, and loyal as an individual, or rather it will be even better than an individual who is thought wise.”

Even Guicciardini was concerned in 1509 about the preservation of Florentine freedom, despite his distaste for the Republic’s populist tendencies. In a *History of Florence* passage that mainly functions to criticize Piero Soderini, Guicciardini worries that the Gonfaloniere may not...
be equipped with the tools to arrange the city “in the sort of order that is required if a republic is to stay free and avoid the extremes of tyranny and license.”

In fact, this sentiment reappears in his *History of Italy*, which includes a speech attributed to Piero Soderini. It invokes the memory of Lorenzo de’ Medici “under whom tho’ Circumstances were hard, and there was really a Tyranny, but milder than many others, yet the Days of his Government, in comparison of what we may expect from the Return of his Family, may be called a Golden Age.” This speech follows a long-standing tradition of historians inventing speeches for the historical figures in their narratives in order to illustrate the figures’ motivations and considerations, but there is little evidence to suggest that these are not Guicciardini’s words in Soderini’s mouth. Thus, the passage can be read both as a subtle jab at the Medici who ruled during the late 1530s, as well as a recognition of the liberty that Florence enjoyed between 1494 and 1512. While Guicciardini is certainly less idealistic in his writing than Machiavelli, he still conveys the same message as the one found in Machiavelli’s *Discourses*: that a republican system ought to remain free of tyrannical influence.

Anti-Mediceanism also had functions outside of the symbolic and ideological realms. Pre-Restoration primary sources show that in the months and years immediately following the 1494 revolution, it was also a source of social and political capital for Florentine republicans. Guicciardini writes in his *History of Florence* that Bardo Corsi, the first Gonfaloniere to take office after the revolution, was elected to the post “because he was old, and because he had been oppressed and admonished by the Medici.”

As soon as Piero and his brothers were chased out of the city, any Florentine’s history of enmity toward the Medici family was admired in the new republican climate. Conversely, “anyone who had wielded any authority in the time of Lorenzo

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or Piero, anyone who had offended - or whose ancestors had offended - the exiles or their ancestors...was now thoroughly alarmed." Landucci reports that in 1495 the Republic placed a bounty of four thousand ducats upon Piero’s head, and that a price on his brother Giuliano quickly followed. Guicciardini writes that “many enemies of the old regime were thirsting for revenge, and so was the public, which delights in all kinds of novelty and turmoil.” This is one of the earliest examples of Guicciardini’s disapproval of populism in the Republic, though in this case it does not lead him to present an uncharitable picture of the new government. While he does not look favorably upon those Florentines who clamored for harsh anti-Medicean policy, Guicciardini also refrains from depicting the exiled Medici in a positive light. Various pro-Medici factions did arise throughout the eighteen-year Republican period, but anti-Medicean sentiment remained a dominant force in Florentine politics until the Republic’s brutal defeat in the Battle of Prato shattered the people’s will to resist the Medici.

Of course, anti-Mediceanism did not consist only of overt references to the Medici as enemies of Florentine liberty. More direct evidence of anti-Mediceanism is found in the republican literature produced by Florentine intellectuals during and after the Republican period. In perhaps his most scathing indictment of the Medici family, Guicciardini concludes his discussion of the 1494 Revolution by saying that “all the good that house had done for our city was cancelled by the events of one day—in fact...those events far outweighed and surpassed the good.” Machiavelli makes a similar claim about the harm that the Medici did to the city when, in his Discourses, he asserts that the Medici were only able to control Florence prior to the revolution by making constant use of violence and fear. He writes that “those who were in charge

88 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 95.
89 Guicciardini, The History of Florence, 103.
90 Guicciardini, The History of Florence, 95.
of the Florentine state from 1434 to 1494 used to say, when discussing the subject, that it was necessary to retake power every five years, otherwise power would slip away from them. What they meant by ‘retaking power’ was inspiring the same fear and terror in their subjects they had inspired when they first came to power…”

This passage implies not only that the Medici had no legitimate right to rule Florence, but also that the family only retained its power by constantly perpetrating violence against its fellow citizens. The Medici did not overtly use force to control the city until 1512, but general recognition of their capacity for violence certainly protected their status as de facto rulers prior to 1494. Modern historians like Paul Strathern and Lauro Martines cite the Medici family’s capacity for violence and terror as a foundation of its power within Florence, but it is important to note that the family’s actions also fostered considerable hatred within the citizenry.

Sources like Machiavelli’s Discourses and Guicciardini’s History of Italy are useful because they explain the reasoning behind anti-Medicean sentiment during the Republican years, and entries from Landucci and Masi are useful because they reinforce the idea that the people felt no loyalty to the former tyrants. Still, it is difficult to conclude that the city was completely hostile to the Medici simply based on the limited textual sources available. Luckily, the historical record also includes a few instances in which the city, as a whole, demonstrated its preference for life under the Republican government.

The best example of this phenomenon occurred in late April of 1497, about two and a half years after Piero’s expulsion. Guicciardini reports that “while Bernardo del Nero was still gonfalonier, Piero de’ Medici... arrived in Siena with many soldiers. This was the work of the

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91 Machiavelli, The Discourses, in Selected Political Writings, 192.
Venetians, who were helping Piero to overthrow our government so that they could keep a firm hold on Pisa.” Landucci, who had already been tracking Piero’s movements for several days and recording them in his diary, writes on April 28th that “We heard that [Piero] was at Castellina; and then again that he was at Certosa. In fact, before 24 hours had passed he was at Fonte di San Gaggio, with 2000 men on foot and horseback.” Piero’s intention was to incite an insurrection within the city, rally people to his cause, and retake control of Florence in a manner similar to how he had been thrown out in 1494. Guicciardini writes that “Piero thought it would be easy, for he had heard that the great scarcity of food had caused deep discontent among many of the important citizens and among many of his friends,” but Piero had miscalculated how unwilling the Florentine populace would be to join him. Masi’s entry in his Ricordanze reports that “on the 23rd many of our citizens and a good part of the people of Florence armed themselves against the aforementioned Piero,” but that when Piero tried to raise them in arms for his cause, “not a single person raised themselves.” Despite the intelligence related to Piero through the “friends” of which Guicciardini speaks, the city ultimately proved unwilling to pursue a Medicean Restoration, even at a time of economic hardship and food scarcity under the republican government.

While the city was unable to make any attempt at capturing Piero and his forces after the episode in 1497, its successful resistance of Medicean reconquest is still a notable achievement. The Florentine Republic could never be considered a particularly powerful force in sixteenth-century Italian politics, but that does not mean that it was as weak or insignificant as Guicciardini’s History of Italy suggests. The support that the people showed, both for the

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93 Guicciardini, The History of Florence, 124.
94 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 118.
95 Guicciardini, The History of Florence, 124.
96 Masi, Ricordanze, 34.
Republic and for Florence itself, allowed the city to slowly recover from the ruinous state in which it was left at the end of 1494. In 1495, Florence, still reeling from a brief French occupation following the expulsion of the Medici, lost control of Pisa when the vassal city rebelled against Florentine rule. As a result, the newly formed Republic was left with very little money, reduced means of trade with other towns, less access to the sea, a lack of means to acquire military force, and a fledgling government which was still under Savonarola’s radical influence. Given these extremely humble beginnings, it is quite impressive that the Republic was able to strengthen itself, defend against threats internal and external, emerge from the shadow of French power, and even create a considerable militia force.

Florence’s steady growth in strength and confidence is evident in the way that its citizens thought about the Medici threat during the eighteen years of republican government. One of the most obvious threats to the city’s survival was, as established above, the idea that the Medici may one day come back and regain control of the city. Histories written after 1512 portray the Restoration as having been more or less inevitable, but accounts written during the republican era tell a different story. While Guicciardini’s History of Italy takes care to note every instance in which Piero, Giovanni, or Giuliano de’ Medici marched with an army or visited a noble court while in exile, Landucci’s diary entries suggest that the average Florentine gradually lost interest in the brothers’ movements during the republican era. On a number of occasions directly following the revolution, the pharmacist’s account includes passages saying that, “we heard that Giuliano de’ Medici was mustering men in the neighborhood of Bruscoli,” or that “we heard from Rome that the Duke of Milan was setting up Piero de’ Medici again, and giving him 10 thousand florins, so that he might oppose us and hinder us from having Pisa.” These entries,

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98 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 118 and 159.
recorded in 1497 and 1499 respectively, show that the shadow of Medici power still lay heavily over the city prior to the turn of the century. Guicciardini says about as much in his *History of Florence*, which asserts that “not only did [Piero’s] Florentine enemies keep a close watch on his movements and remain implacable toward him, but the majority of people in the city came to hate him thoroughly.”

As outlined above, this hatred of the Medici burned hot in Florentine hearts for most of the republican era. However, Landucci’s diary shows that Florentine fear of Piero’s return began to subside around the year 1500. After that point, the pharmacist seems to have taken less of an interest in Piero’s movements, suggesting that citizens no longer viewed him as an imminent threat to the city. Apart from one instance in 1502, in which Landucci reports that the city called men-at-arms to stand guard after hearing that Piero was rallying support in Arezzo, the Medici largely disappear from his narrative until Piero’s untimely death on December 28, 1503. When the news reached Florence on January 5 of the following year, Landucci recorded that “we heard that the French had been defeated, with great numbers slain, and had lost Gaeta, which they had taken by storm. The same day, Piero de’ Medici was drowned, together with many French barons, in fleeing from Gaeta, where he had been; and all the French fared ill.” The fact that Piero’s death is not the first or last event that Landucci reports in this entry means that Florentines may not have considered it to be the momentous occasion that later reports describe.

Guicciardini’s 1509 account of the incident tells a similar story, dealing first with the French defeat and then adding, as a side note, that “Piero de’ Medici, who was with them, drowned in the Garigliano.” This description of his death is markedly different from the one included in Guicciardini’s *History of Italy*, which reads:

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100 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 211.
A greater Misfortune befell Piero de’ Medici, who had followed the French Camp, and some other Noblemen. For at the Decampment of the Army from the Garigliano, these unfortunate People entered on board a Bark, which was laden with Four Pieces of Artillery, to be transported to Gaeta, which being over burlenet, and the Winds contrary, sunk at the Mouth of the River, and all were drowned.\textsuperscript{102}

The latter history’s detailed account obviously lends more significance to Piero’s death than the earlier edition does, despite being written about three decades later. Perhaps Guicciardini simply wished to write more magnificently in his History of Italy because it was being produced for public consumption, but the fact that his History of Florence includes similarly detailed passages elsewhere in his narrative suggests that, when he wrote the earlier work, the author simply did not view Piero’s death as important enough to warrant a long explanation.

Although the threat of Medicean Restoration was certainly the most common cause of Florentine discomfort during the republican era, its confrontations with Piero (and, in 1512, its eventual surrender to forces led by Giovanni de’ Medici) were not the only battles that the city fought during its eighteen years of republican government. Florence was occupied by French forces immediately following the 1494 revolution, and in the following two decades it worked hard to avoid conquest by Cesare Borgia, repel attacks from the Milanese, and regain control of Pisa. Each of these conflicts gives a glimpse into the relative strength of the Republican government as it gradually rebuilt its reputation in Italian politics.

The French occupation was perhaps the lowest point for the Florentine Republic. King Charles VIII took up residence in Florentine territory in the weeks following Piero’s expulsion, and the citizens understood that his presence in their territory represented an existential threat to their liberty. Guicciardini’s History of Italy describes the enmity between Florence and the king, saying “he was full of greed and cruelty; he threatened not only to lay waste to our land and to cause our remaining subjects to rebel, but even to sack the city, to restore Piero de’ Medici, and

\textsuperscript{102} Guicciardini, The History of the Wars in Italy: Book VI, 291.
perhaps even to become master of Florence himself.” Guicciardini goes on to explain that the only reason the king refrained from bending the city to his will was that “when he remembered that Florence had a large population, he began to doubt his ability to force and sack the city. He began to fear that if he even entered Florence, the armed population might assault him.” This passage is important because it implies that even in the darkest days of the Republican period, Florence still had the potential to inflict serious damages upon one of the best armies in Europe. Charles did briefly send troops into the city after Piero’s expulsion, where they attracted fierce resentment from the Florentine populace. Masi viciously insults the king in his Ricordanze, saying that Charles was “small in person, with an ugly face, big shoulders, aquiline nose, his feet like a goose, [with] his toes set together.” The Florentines’ obvious displeasure with the occupation, coupled with their latent capacity for resistance, appears to have dissuaded the king from taking full custody of the city. When the Florentines eventually paid Charles to cease his occupation, Florence was on the road to becoming an ally, rather than a servant, of the French king.

The next time that a major foreign power threatened Florence, the city avoided conquest and occupation, but the result cannot really be considered a victory for the Republic. The History of Italy reports that in 1501 known Medici associate Cesare Borgia (often referred to as “Duke Valentino” in sixteenth-century accounts) marched toward Florence “on a Presumption that the Florentines were but in a poor Condition, that they had but few Men at Arms, and no Infantry but Peasants, who did Duty every Day; and that nothing but Fear, Distrust, and Division reigned in Florence.” At the news of Borgia’s approach, Landucci writes that the Signoria issued a
command that any capable Florentines should arm themselves to fight the Duke, while inside the city “everyone closed their shops and cleared out the goods, taking them to their houses, being convinced that there was great peril.” Borgia could plausibly have defeated Florence and taken control of the city, but his fear of French retribution led him ultimately to reach an agreement with the city. Borgia agreed to leave Florence in peace, in exchange for over one hundred thousand florins paid over three years, the honor of being named Capitano of the city, and forgiveness of any past misdeeds he had committed against Florence. The Republic certainly did not come off the better in this exchange, though its willingness to raise a defensive force and the Duke’s ultimate decision not to attack the city do show that Florence had grown slightly in strength and confidence since 1494.

After this near-miss with disaster, the Republic appears to have regained some of its strength, which led to modest success in foreign affairs. The city defended itself much more effectively in 1505, when a Milanese army sought to attack the city and reinstall a more amicable Medicean government. To defend against this attack, the Florentines called upon their French allies to provide troops to supplement their own. France obliged, and the result was that the Florentine forces under Ercole Bentivoglio were able to defeat the Milanese in a rather anticlimactic skirmish. Four years later, Florence achieved its longtime goal of regaining control of Pisa. The loss of this subject city in 1494 had been a serious blow to Florence, both economically and in terms of pride and morale. Since that time, the Republic had made a more or less continuous effort to retake the city. This effort had led the Florentines to carry out a number of campaigns over the years. For a brief time in 1505, the city even attempted to carry out

107 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 179.
108 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 180.
Machiavelli’s vision of cutting off Pisa’s water supply by physically altering the course of the River Arno away from the city.\footnote{Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 216.} Eventually, Pisa was retaken with the aid of the French, to whom the Republic once again had to pay a large sum in exchange for the withdrawal of troops. Masi and Landucci have less to say about these affairs than they do about domestic matters, perhaps because these victories did not take place within the city. Still, the fact that Florence was able to carry out moderately successful military operations, albeit with the help of powerful allies, shows that the Republic may have deserved more consideration than Guicciardini was prepared to afford it when he wrote his \textit{History of Italy}.

Perhaps the best example of the growing strength and confidence within the Republic is the fact that in 1505, Florence authorized Niccoló Machiavelli to organize a militia for the defense of the city.\footnote{Gilbert, “Machiavelli and the Renaissance of the Art of War,” in \textit{Makers of Modern Strategy}, 18.} This is especially significant because Machiavelli believed that at its core, a good republic had to depend on a militia for security and stability. Felix Gilbert explains that “Machiavelli became a political thinker because he was a military thinker. His view of the military problems of his time patterned his entire political outlook.”\footnote{Gilbert, “Machiavelli and the Renaissance of the Art of War,” 11.} It follows, then, that a republican thinker like Machiavelli would express disgust with foreign, mercenary, and auxiliary troops in every single one of his political treatises. He explains his reasoning in his 1521 work, \textit{The Art of War}, when he writes that “the arms of foreigners more readily do harm to the public good than their own; for they are easier to corrupt.”\footnote{Niccoló Machiavelli, \textit{The Art of War}, trans. Henry Neville (Indianapolis: The Online Library of Liberty, 2011), 20.} He expresses similar thoughts in \textit{The Prince}, which states that “a wise ruler will always avoid using mercenary and auxiliary troops, and will rely on his own forces. He would rather lose with his own troops than win with someone else’s, for he will not regard it a true victory if it is won with troops that do not belong to him.”\footnote{Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince} in \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 43.}
For Machiavelli, citizen militias provided the ultimate defense for a republic because a citizen army is capable of defending its city without posing any threat to its security. Creation of the militia certainly seems to have impressed Landucci, whose diary includes a lengthy explanation of the Florentine soldiers’ armor and organization, before concluding that “this was thought the finest thing that had ever been arranged for Florence.” While the militia ultimately proved unable to protect the Republic and prevent the Medicean Restoration, its organization and reception reflects a high level of confidence and support for the Republican government prior to 1512.

As demonstrated above, it is clearly possible to explore what Florentines thought of their republican government simply by studying the thoughts and actions that they chose to record. It is also important, however, to ask how the Republic strove to portray itself prior to 1512. Luckily, Michelangelo’s famous marble David, completed in 1504, provides an answer to this query. Historical analysis of Michelangelo’s David reveals that in the early sixteenth century, the Florentine Republic sought to call upon the city’s special connection to the biblical figure in order to project strength and defiance in the face of tyranny.

Michelangelo’s David was by no means the first David statue to be produced in Renaissance Florence. In fact, as early as 1408, Florentine master Donatello was commissioned to produce the first of his beautiful Davids, this one in marble, earning the admiration of the entire city. Donatello carved one of the earliest Renaissance Davids in a rather traditional fashion, with the figure standing in a slight contrapposto, over the head of the Goliath, to show that he has just completed the Biblical feat of slaying the Philistine giant. This David was

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116 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 218.
117 Michelangelo, David, 1504, marble, 13’ 6 1/2 in (4.1m), Accademia di Belle Arti, Florence, Italy.
119 Donatello, David, 1409, marble, 6’3 in. (1.91m), Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Italy.
given to the government in 1416, and its pedestal reads, “to the fatherland, still struggling mightily against terrible enemies.” The mention of “terrible enemies” likely alludes to rival Italian states, such as Milan, which did not operate under republican governments.

Over the course of the fifteenth century, the city of Florence adopted David as a symbol of the republic in order to reinforce the idea that Florence, like David, was fighting to carry out God’s will on Earth. Early-Renaissance Florentines viewed their government as an underdog, like the boy who would become King of Israel, but took comfort in the fact that God favored their city because it was built upon the principles of liberty and equality.

Donatello’s bronze David, cast around the year 1440, builds upon this idea but adds a specifically humanist tone to the classical theme. The bronze David still stands triumphant over Goliath, but his demeanor has changed rather dramatically. The figure, described by Stephen J. Campbell and Michael Wayne Cole as “androgynous and childlike,” strikes a curved, relaxed pose as he stands nude over Goliath’s head. This David, carved three decades after its marble counterpart, reinforces this idea that Florence’s republican heritage has earned it the same divine favor that was given to the biblical David. Its epigram reads, “the victor is whoever

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120 Campbell and Cole, Italian Renaissance Art, 79.
121 Donatello, David, 1440 - 1443. Bronze, 5’2” in. (1.58m), Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Italy.
defends the fatherland. God crushes the wrath of an enormous foe. Behold! A boy overcame a great tyrant. Conquer, O citizens!"\textsuperscript{123} Ironically, this symbol of Florentine triumph over tyranny was commissioned by Cosimo de Medici, grandfather of Lorenzo \textit{Il Magnifico}, and subsequently placed in the courtyard of the Palazzo Medici, where passersby on the street could still view it when the portal was open. Art historian Sarah Blake McHam writes that “the decision to situate an emblem of Florentine republican government in their palace could be understood as a sign that the Medici were closely connected to that regime and continued its ideals,” but that it also signalled “an unprecedented appropriation by a single family of a corporate symbol of the state and informed the cognoscenti that true power resided several hundred meters north of the Palazzo della Signoria.”\textsuperscript{124} So striking was this assertion of dominance that the city made a point of transporting the statue out to the Piazza della Signoria in 1494, in order to signify the transfer of power away from the Medici and back to the city itself.

By the time that Lorenzo de’ Medici took up the mantle of leadership in Florence, citizens were well aware that one family now held sway over the republican government. Still, this did not deter Lorenzo from commissioning a third \textit{David}, this one cast in the 1470s by Andrea Verrocchio, likely “as a follow-up to the bronze statue on the same theme that Donatello

\textsuperscript{123} Campbell and Cole, \textit{Italian Renaissance Art}, 163.
had made for Lorenzo’s grandfather.”

Like Donatello’s bronze David, Verrocchio’s cast conveys an air of easygoing confidence. In discussing the figure, Stephen Campbell and Michael Cole note that “Verrocchio’s David, with his slim physique, his stylish contemporary haircut, and his swagger, looks more like a boy from the city than an evocation of an authoritative sculptural tradition.”

The creation of such a figure served to further emphasize David as an emblem of the city, and the “swagger” with which he is portrayed reflects everything that the Laurentian “Golden Age” came to embody: confidence, benevolence, and, with Goliath’s head once again sitting at David’s feet, triumph. The Verrocchio David, like those before, loosely implies a victory over tyranny, but his posture and demeanor suggest that the danger has long since passed.

Michelangelo’s was the next notable David to be created in Florence, and it bore several differences from those created by Donatello and Verrocchio which drastically altered its message. The first major difference was that Michelangelo, who returned to Florence in 1501 after carving his masterful Pietà in Rome, was commissioned by the Republic, rather than by the Medici. Michelangelo’s David was also different from its predecessors in its approach to its subject. While there is documented evidence that Michelangelo had studied Donatello’s bronze

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125 Campbell and Cole, Italian Renaissance Art, 261.
126 Andrea Verrocchio, David, 1473-1476, bronze, 49.25 in. (125 cm), Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Italy.
127 Campbell and Cole, Italian Renaissance Art, 261.
David in detail, he made no attempt to adhere to the older style. “There is nothing retrospective or backward-looking about the figure itself,” write Campbell and Cole, “except for in Michelangelo’s self-conscious bid to outdo his Florentine predecessors.”128 The 1504 David instead attempted to return to the figure’s original symbolic purpose: to represent Florence’s holy battle against tyranny. Vasari emphasizes this point when he writes that, prior to carving the figure, “Michelangelo did a wax model depicting a young David with a sling in hand, as the symbol of the palace, for just as David had defended his people and governed them with justice, so, too, those who governed this city should courageously defend it and govern it with justice.”129 This David leaves behind the childlike swagger observed in its predecessors, and instead conveys a sense of strength and determination with its imposing build and serious, thoughtful expression.

Michelangelo’s figure is more muscular and mature than the earlier bronze Davids because, unlike the figures cast for the Medici, the “Giant of Florence” recognizes that his battle is not yet won. The figure is carved to represent the Florentine Republic, which in the early sixteenth century hoped to send a message of strength and courage in the face of tyranny. The conspicuous absence of Goliath’s head at the figure’s feet implies that Michelangelo’s David is

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128 Campbell and Cole, Italian Renaissance Art, 344.
preparing to strike at his enemies in order to defend his people, and the city went to great lengths to ensure that this message was clearly understood. The statue had originally been commissioned to stand high above the street, adorning one of the buttresses of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. After lengthy consideration, however, the city instead decided to place it at ground level, in a prominent spot outside the government building, overlooking the Piazza della Signoria. Art historian Judith Testa explains that even the direction of David’s gaze was derived from the political message that it tried to convey. She writes that “David stares off to the south, away from the heavily used piazza and toward Rome, where enemies of the Florentine republic, in particular the exiled Medici, continued to hatch their plots.” By commissioning Michelangelo to carve a giant figure which conveyed strength and determination in the face of tyranny, and then placing it in front of the main government building and facing the figure toward Rome, where Cardinal Giovanni de’ Medici resided as head of the Medici family, the Republic made sure that David’s message could not be misinterpreted. The Florentine Republic was no longer a carefree child lounging in the shadow of Medici power. It was now a fully grown protector of liberty, and it was more than willing to defend itself against powerful enemies.

History is written by its victors, but the story of the Florentine Republic needs to be revisited. Though it is commonly portrayed as weak and insignificant in most historical narratives, evidence from the artwork, memoirs, and analyses produced between 1494 and 1512 suggests that the Florentine Republic was stronger and more unified than how it was presented in sources written after its demise. From Landucci’s hopeful approval of Soderini’s election to Machiavelli’s indictment of Medici tyranny, sources show that Florentines were generally far

more supportive of the city’s republican government than readers of Guicciardini’s *History of Italy* would believe. While this support ultimately did not solve the city’s financial or military issues, it did turn the city into a fountain of republican spirit which spurred the creation of some of the world’s most influential political philosophy and artwork. The spirit of republicanism shines through the Republican-era sources in the form of intense civic pride, the elevation of liberty, and a strong rejection of Medici power. While the Republic ultimately did not prove as strong or durable as Michelangelo’s *David*, it was certainly more united, determined, and cohesive than its conquerors would have us believe.
Chapter 3: Legacy of the Failed Republic

Given that the Florentine Republic only survived for about eighteen years, it is reasonable to question why it merits such intensive historical exploration. After all, Venice and Genoa were also ruled by oligarchic republics during the early sixteenth century, and they managed to survive for centuries. Additionally, after the Medici returned to the city in 1512, they made themselves dukes of all Tuscany within a few decades and ruled the region as princes for the next two hundred years. Why is it important to study the strength, support, and political culture present in a regime that failed to last two decades?

This question traditionally has two answers. Perhaps the best-known reason to study the Florentine Republic is that it employed Niccolò Machiavelli, whose experience within the government was instrumental in his development as a political philosopher. A second reason is that even though Florence’s republican era was brief, the years between 1494 and 1512 mark a cutoff point in Medici family history. The period prior to 1494 was the age of the bank, of Donatello, and of Il Magnifico. After 1512, the age of the Medici Popes and the Tuscan Dukes ensued. This thesis proposes a third reason to study the Florentine Republic: because in the eighteen years separating the Florentine Revolution and the Medicean Restoration, the city experienced a paradigm shift in its political culture which changed Florentines’ views of popular government and, consequently, forced the Medici to adopt new methods of ruling the city after 1512.

The previous two chapters argue that the Republic was significantly stronger, and enjoyed much greater support, than sixteenth-century Italian historians have led most modern scholars to believe. This chapter seeks to illustrate how instrumental the Republic’s strength and popular support were in changing the nature of Florentine government over the next two
centuries. Resentment of the Medici had always existed in Florence, but in the years leading up to 1494, the family steadily lost its hold over the city’s republican infrastructure. The Medici power base eroded as the family bank dried up, and during their exile, there occurred such an expansion of participation, enfranchisement, and political autonomy within the Florentine Republic that the Medici had to fundamentally alter the way in which they controlled the city after the Restoration of 1512. Discontent had grown before 1494, but the people had begrudgingly accepted Medici rule behind the facade of republican government. When the family returned after eighteen years of actual republicanism, this was no longer the case. Friar Girolamo Savonarola’s radical preaching during the republican era had empowered middle-class Florentines, who began to view their government in a different light. The Medici who returned to the city after the Restoration found that they could no longer control it by manipulating its republican institutions, as Lorenzo the Magnificent had done. After the republican era, Florence would only bow to force and noble title.

In order to adequately examine the consequences of the Florentine Republican era, it is important to establish that the city’s return to a more genuine republican system in the absence of Medici tyranny was neither sudden, nor surprising. In fact, it was the result of a decades-long decline in Medici power, wealth, and popularity within Florence. The conditions for a major shift in Florentine political thought had been improving for some time, and the city reached its boiling point in 1494. Resentment of the Medici had always existed within Florence, as evidenced by Cosimo Il Vecchio de’ Medici’s exile in the 1430s, the conspiracy against Piero “The Gouty” in 1466, and the Pazzi Conspiracy of 1478, the latter of which resulted in the gruesome murder of Lorenzo the Magnificent’s younger brother. Still, prior to 1494, the family had usually been able to rely on the charisma of its gifted patriarchs, in addition to the influence guaranteed by the
family bank, to retain control of the city. By the 1490s, however, the Medici bank was drowning and the family was led by a young Piero de’ Medici, who had inherited little of his father’s tact or political savvy. At the same time, Friar Savonarola’s preaching was already turning the masses against the Medici. As a result, the people’s desire to protect the Medici against conspirators and revolutionaries, as they had in the past, was severely diminished as the rising tide of republicanism chipped away at traditional Medici rule. The family’s power in Florence broke in 1494 and, until the very end of the republican era, the probability of a Medicean restoration seemed low. When the Medici finally did return, they had to alter the way they governed the city because of how drastically Florentine conceptions and experiences of government had changed.

Two related but contrasting entries in Landucci’s diary provide the best evidence of the Florentine populace’s diminished support for Medici rule in the late fifteenth century. The first entry was written in April of 1478, just after the Pazzi conspiracy to kill Lorenzo de’ Medici and his brother, Giuliano. Landucci reports Giuliano de’ Medici’s murder during Easter mass at Santa Maria del Fiore, and writes that one conspirator, Jacopo Salviati, “rushed on horseback to the Piazza dei Signori, crying ‘Popolo e libertà!’”132 Just as it would in 1494, this appeal to “the people and liberty” invoked the city’s republican heritage in an attempt to turn the people against the tyrannical Medici. Unfortunately for Salviati, the city was not yet ready to rally behind an anti-Medicean cause. Landucci describes the gruesome results of Salviati’s efforts:

All the city was up in arms, in the Piazza and at Lorenzo de’ Medici’s house. And numbers of men on the side of the conspirators were killed in the Piazza; amongst others a priest of the bishop’s was killed there, his body being quartered and the head cut off, and then the head was stuck on the top of a lance, and carried about Florence the whole day, and one quarter of his body was carried on a spit all through the city, with the cry of: ‘Death to the traitors!’133

132 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 16.
133 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 16.
Much of the mob’s fury can be attributed to the fact that the conspirators had ill-advisedly attempted to assassinate the Medici brothers inside a cathedral during Easter mass, but the fact that the populace went to Lorenzo’s house in addition to the Piazza shows a genuine desire to protect the de facto head of state. In fact, while Lorenzo was by all accounts devastated by his brother’s death, the popularity that he gained after the Pazzi conspiracy was instrumental in elevating him to the legendary, almost holy stature which Guicciardini ascribes to him in The History of Italy.

Landucci’s account of the 1494 revolution bears striking similarities to the story he told in 1478, but it has a very different conclusion. During the Florentine Revolution of 1494, he wrote of “Francesco Valori and other citizens on horseback, all crying ‘Popolo e Libertà!’”\footnote{Landucci, Florentine Diary, 60.} Once again, here was a Medici rival attempting to stir up anti-Medicean sentiment by appealing to Florence’s republican past. The difference is that Valori succeeded. Landucci writes that “although the people did not very well understand what all this tumult was about, nevertheless not many citizens went to Piero de’ Medici’s house.”\footnote{Landucci, Florentine Diary, 60.} The mention of the Palazzo Medici implies that Landucci and his fellow Florentines certainly recognized the cry for “the people and liberty” as a call to cast off the Medici yoke, but refused to defend Piero the way that they had defended his father. In 1494, Florence was fed up with Medici domination. Guicciardini’s “Golden Age” of magnificence and civic humanism ended as the Republican era dawned. After 1494, the Medici would only be able to control the city by monopolizing the use of force within its walls.

One factor that facilitated the erosion of Medici power prior to the Revolution was the steady decline of the Medici family bank in the late fifteenth century. Guicciardini’s History of
Italy describes Lorenzo as “wonderfully flourished in riches, and in all those blessings and ornaments in which human affairs are usual attendants of a long and secure peace,” and this reputation for magnificence was essential to late-century Medici rule.\textsuperscript{136} In reality, however, the Medici bank was in a tailspin throughout much of Lorenzo’s life. In his landmark work, The Rise and Fall of the Medici Bank, economic historian Raymond de Roover paints a much more accurate picture of the bank’s affairs during the “Golden Age.” He notes that by 1494 most of the bank’s branches had closed, “and those still in existence were gasping for breath.”\textsuperscript{137} Among the major reasons for the bank’s decline were the diminishing wool trade with England, mismanagement of bank branches, and the fact that the Medici patriarchs succeeding Cosimo il Vecchio all received humanist educations instead of being trained in “the practice of the countinghouse.”\textsuperscript{138} Landucci’s diary still describes Lorenzo as “the richest, the most stately, and the most renowned among men” upon Il Magnifico’s death in 1492, but de Roover’s work clearly shows that Medici power was already declining at this time. When the bank effectively died in 1494, so too did the Medici family’s ability to control the city as private citizens.

The birth of the Florentine Republic meant not only that the Medici could no longer rule in the style of Cosimo and Lorenzo, but also that the family was without a home or a source of income. That they managed to return as conquerors in 1512, and eventually to rule as dukes, is due to two specific factors: ties to the Roman nobility, and the fact that Lorenzo had the foresight to have his son made into a cardinal at a young age. The former was accomplished when both Lorenzo de’ Medici and his son Piero married into the noble Orsini family, which battled the Colonna family for control of the Roman aristocracy (and at times, the papacy) throughout the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Guicciardini, The History of the Wars in Italy: Book I, 11.}
\footnote{De Roover, The Rise and Fall of the Medici Bank, 370.}
\footnote{De Roover, The Rise and Fall of the Medici Bank, 365.}
\end{footnotes}
Late Medieval and Renaissance periods. These marriages proved advantageous for Lorenzo’s children during the exile years, because they meant that the brothers had support from their mother’s family. The relationship between the Medici and the Orsini added noble blood to a Medici line which had heretofore lacked an official connection to the upper echelons of Italian society. In doing so, it laid the groundwork for the family’s eventual transition into the ruling European elite. It was one of the reasons why, even after the Republican period empowered the Florentine populace to advocate for its political autonomy, the Medici still managed to take control of the city by force.

Giovanni’s placement within the Church served a similar purpose. Lorenzo’s second son was only sixteen years old when he received his scarlet hat from Pope Innocent VIII in 1491, at which point Landucci says that “the Signoria presented him with thirty loads of gifts,” which were estimated at more than 20,000 florins, although that seems impossible to me; but it was a public report.” Giovanni departed for Rome shortly after the ceremony, and in the following year he received a letter from his father which hints at the true reason for his appointment. In the letter, Lorenzo expresses his desire that Giovanni “should be the link to bind this city of Florence closer to the Church, and our family with the city, and although it may be impossible to foresee what accidents may happen, I doubt not but this may be done with equal advantage to all.”

While this letter does not suggest that Lorenzo had any premonition of the revolution that would send his children into exile two years later, it does imply that Il Magnifico’s motivations for making Giovanni a cardinal were more political than pious. In his work, The Medici Popes,

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139 Strathern, The Medici, 152.
140 Landucci’s diary (p. 62) indicates that Pagolo Orsini was present to protect Piero and his brothers during the 1494 Florentine Revolution and Masi’s Ricordanze (p. 100) takes note of Franciotto Orsini’s presence at the head of Giovanni de’ Medici’s guard upon his return to Florence in 1512.
141 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 52.
Vaughan makes use of the traditional descriptor for cardinals by referring to Giovanni as a “prince of the Church,” noting that the boy’s place within the Church hierarchy meant that the Medici now had a foothold in the highest rung of Italian society. By placing his son on a track to eventually become pope, Lorenzo provided his children with a means of retaining power even after the bank inevitably failed. When the Medici were exiled from Florence, Giovanni’s position became the new base of Medici power in Italy. It allowed him to revive the Medici reputation after Piero’s death, marry his relatives to Italian and European nobles, and most importantly, use papal troops to reconquer Florence in 1512.

The Medici were fortunate that their connections to the nobility and the papacy allowed them to eventually retake control of Florence, because it is doubtful that they could have rejoined the city’s aristocracy without the use of force. This is because the Republican era brought about an expansion of popular government within Florence, which made it much harder for wealthy oligarchs to control the Signoria. Savonarola exercised extraordinary influence over governmental proceedings in the early days of the Republic, and his radical preaching empowered the Florentine populace to force an expansion of political autonomy for middle-class citizens. The city’s republican systems had traditionally been rather oligarchic in nature, but after about sixty years of Medici tyranny, it is likely that the Florentine third estate had more leverage than usual to advocate for a place in the legislative process. The result was one of the most democratic systems in early modern Italy, with a rapidly evolving set of political norms to match it. Anti-Medicean rhetoric sprang up throughout the city as the populace became attached to the concept of republican liberty, which I discussed at length in the previous chapter. These shifting norms were essential, not only because they allowed the Florentine Republic to maintain popular support through difficult times, but also because they ensured that future tyrants would have to

143 Vaughan, *The Medici Popes*, 42.
contend with the city’s new political ideals. The Medici certainly did not have the capacity to contend with these new political norms as *de facto* rulers, so they circumvented them completely by instituting a new regime backed by a formal title to rule and the threat of force.

The expansion of democratic politics within Florence was one of the driving forces behind the city’s changing political landscape, and it would not have been possible without Savonarola, whom historian Donald Weinstein credits for “turning the Florentine oligarchic coup into a popular revolution.”¹⁴⁴ Savonarola is first described in Landucci’s diary as “our famous preacher” when the *frate* attempted to convince King Charles VIII to leave Florence after the Florentine Revolution, but its entries reflect the friar’s message that the French invasion was God’s way of punishing Florentine sins even before the Medici were thrown out.¹⁴⁵ Landucci’s respect for Savonarola is evident when he describes the friar’s final confrontation with the king, in which the friar “declared again that [the king] was not following God’s will, and that whatever evil should befall others would return on his head. It was thought that this was the cause of his leaving more speedily, because at that time they said Fra Girolamo was held to be a prophet and a man of holy life, both in Florence and throughout Italy.”¹⁴⁶ Savonarola’s reputation as a prophet only increased his following within the city, winning him both popular support and religious devotion from the Florentine citizenry. In his *History of Florence*, Francesco Guicciardini notes that, when the city’s leaders were deciding how to structure the newly liberated republic, Savonarola exercised a great deal of influence. “It seemed,” writes Guicciardini, “that everything Brother Girolamo proposed had more than human force.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 72.
¹⁴⁶ Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 72. Interestingly enough, the prophecy that whatever evil the king should sow would “return on his head” came true in 1498, when King Charles VIII struck his head on a doorframe in his Château Royal d’Amboise and died.
Savonarola’s saintly stature only increased his appeal among the Florentine populace, allowing him to influence the government reforms by directing the collective action of the people. Guicciardini writes that the friar’s sermons “drew large and devoted audiences,” and Landucci asserts that he “always encouraged this community of feeling amongst the people.”

When Piero de’ Medici was exiled from the city, Savonarola’s popular support allowed him to partially fill the resulting political power vacuum. He quickly became a figurehead for the people, which allowed him to direct certain aspects of the governing process before the new republican government solidified within the city. One of the first political acts that Guicciardini attributes to Savonarola occurred just after the Florentine Revolution, when the friar “turned his efforts toward saving some citizens and recommending mercy, and he obtained a reprieve for his friend ser Giovanni.” Over the next several months, the friar made a number of “recommendations” relating to the city’s leadership, elections, and overall legislative structure.

Savonarola continued to preach while city leaders debated how best to structure the new regime, and his popularity enabled him to influence the deliberations from the pulpit. Weinstein writes that the friar’s words gained strength from an alliance with opportunistic anti-Medicean aristocrats, which in turn amplified his message that “the failure of the Florentines to perfect their new constitution with the reforms ordained by God violated the divine honor and would rekindle His wrath.” Guicciardini writes that when Florence’s governing bodies drew up a plan for the new popular government, they “sent for Brother Girolamo and had the proposal read to him in the presence of the Signoria. Savonarola approved it with wise words, saying that for the time being it was enough to fix on a plan that was good in general.”

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151 Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 133.
eventually fall from grace in 1498, but the power he wielded in the early republican days allowed him to shape the system that endured until the end of the republican era.

Savonarola used this influence to empower the Florentine middle class that supported him by advocating for the expansion of access to government offices, forcing unsympathetic government officials to resign their posts, and checking the power of the Signoria. One example of this use of power occurred in 1495, when the Twenty, a body of Florentine oligarchs traditionally charged with appointing both the members of the Signoria and the Gonfaloniere of Justice, appointed an unpopular aristocrat named Tanai de’ Nerli to the city’s highest office.\footnote{Guicciardini, \textit{The History of Florence}, 109.} This aroused the populace’s fear that Nerli might use his station to abolish the newly established Great Council, which consisted of every male citizen over twenty-nine years old who paid taxes and had an ancestor who had served in the Florentine magistracies.\footnote{Guicciardini, \textit{The History of Florence}, 109. These requirements still essentially excluded the lower class in Florence, but they drastically increased the access that middle and upper-middle class Florentines had to the city government.} The people’s concerns were not entirely unwarranted; Nicholas Scott Baker notes in \textit{The Fruit of Liberty} that “of the twenty men appointed as accoppiatori on 2 December 1494 to control the election of the Signoria for the next twelve months, only one had not personally sat, or had a father who sat, on one of the Medicean balìe of the previous sixty years.”\footnote{Guicciardini, \textit{The History of Florence}, 105. These requirements still essentially excluded the lower class in Florence, but they drastically increased the access that middle and upper-middle class Florentines had to the city government.} Baker uses this fact to bolster his claim that the Florentine Revolution “constituted a realignment within the office-holding class rather than a social or ideological revolution,” arguing that the election of the Twenty indicates a continuation of oligarchic dominance within the new regime.

Baker’s claim is weakened, however, by its failure to account for Savonarola’s intervention, which resulted in the removal of the Twenty from office. In early 1495, Savonarola had an encounter with the Virgin Mary which, according to Weinstein, “gave him renewed

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ammunition for the pulpit wars.” Guicciardini does not mention the friar’s conveniently timed revelation, but he does note that Savonarola’s ever-growing popularity made him a powerful force in Florentine politics. In his History of Florence, Guicciardini writes that following Nerli’s appointment, and “backed by the authority and the reputation of Brother Girolamo, the people began to threaten and insult the Twenty, who now found themselves in great trouble.” As Savonarola’s supporters increased their pressure, the Twenty “put a proposal to the Council asking that they all be relieved of their office. It won overwhelming approval, and in May, 1495, they all left office. The authority to elect the Signoria was transferred to the people.” In other words, Savonarola led the people to overturn the election that Baker uses as evidence to support the claim that the Florentine aristocracy continued to dominate the populace after 1494. The ability to choose their leaders directly was a power that the Florentine people had never known under the Medici, and it was a major foundation of the republican liberty that the people so cherished.

Savonarola’s empowerment of the Florentine people enabled them to institute unprecedented democratic reforms that expanded political autonomy to the city’s middle class. The system was still restrictive by today’s democratic standards, but it was revolutionary for sixteenth-century Italy. In his 2016 history of the Medici, Paul Strathern even suggests that the Florentine Republican system “was unique in Italy at the time.” This was essentially due to the aforementioned expansion of the Great Council’s authority. Prior to the reforms instituted in 1502 the Great Council, which “had no authority without a quorum of one thousand men,” needed to give “final approval” for all city legislation. Such was the extent of the expansion of

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156 Weinstein, Savonarola, 153.


159 Strathern, The Medici, 220.
political representation within Florence that the city had to commission the construction of a new
great hall in order to accommodate such a large body of councilors.\textsuperscript{160} Steps were also taken to
reduce corruption within the city government; Landucci notes that in February 1495, “the Signori burst all the tickets of the ballot-bags, because they said that the names had been chosen according to the wishes of a few powerful citizens.”\textsuperscript{161} His allusion to “a few powerful citizens” is a clear reference to the Medici, for whom ballot manipulation had been a cornerstone of family power. The Great Council even went as far as to institute justice reforms within the city, passing a motion in March 1495 which declared “that the Signoria should not be able to imprison without the consent of the great council.”\textsuperscript{162} This, as much as any other measure that the Council passed, signalled that change had come to Florence in the form of expanded political participation by the city’s middle class.

Of course, these structural changes do not by themselves prove that Florentine political norms were evolving away from those that had prevailed in Medicean Florence. A clearer signal that the city was actively working to leave behind the days of Medici corruption is the way in which the Republic reacted to a conspiracy by the small pro-Medici faction that remained in the city after the Revolution. In 1497 five Florentine nobles, Bernardo del Nero, Niccolò Ridolfi, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, Giannozzo Pucci, and Giovanni Cambi, attempted to “hold negotiations” with Piero de’ Medici when they observed discontent brewing within the city.\textsuperscript{163} Their aim was to bring about a Medicean restoration, but they were instead arrested, tortured, and forced to admit that Tornabuoni and Pucci had corresponded with Piero in order to suggest ways for him to return to the city.\textsuperscript{164} These revelations created a dilemma for the young republican government,

\textsuperscript{160} Guicciardini, \textit{The History of Florence}, 105.
\textsuperscript{161} Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 83.
\textsuperscript{162} Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 85.
\textsuperscript{163} Guicciardini, \textit{The History of Florence}, 129.
\textsuperscript{164} Guicciardini, \textit{The History of Florence} 131.
which now had to contend not only with the existence of a pro-Medici party, but also with the
question of how to punish the traitors. Guicciardini reports that a committee was assigned to the
task, in which the prevailing opinion was “that these conspiracies against the liberty of the city
were of such a nature that according to the law not only those involved in them must lose their
lives, but even those who knew of them and kept silent.” 165

Landucci notes that the committee, made up of 180 men, spent a full day “from morning
until midnight” to arrive at this decision. When they did, however, “Everyone marvelled that
such a thing could be done; it was difficult to realize it.” 166 He also records his own reaction to
the decision, saying, “they were put to death the same night, and I could not refrain from
weeping when I saw that young Lorenzo carried past the Canto de’ Tornaquinci on a bier, shortly
before dawn.” 167 He also notes that the men were denied an appeal, “which seemed too cruel to
such men as they were. However, everything happens in accordance with God’s will. May all be
to His glory!” 168 Landucci’s reaction to the executions is telling because it suggests that the
executions may have been harsher than the average Florentine expected. His mention of God’s
will could be read as an admission that the executions may have been necessary to please God,
but it is more likely a signal of the helplessness that he felt on behalf of Lorenzo Tornabuoni. 169

Masi’s Ricordanze gives a much less emotive account of the executions, but based on his writing
this may only be because he does not seem to have witnessed them first-hand, like Landucci.

“They say,” writes Masi, “that these were killed for having worked against the state of

166 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 125.
167 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 126.
168 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 126.
169 Other instances that prompted Landucci to invoke God’s will, either for explanation or comfort, include Lorenzo
de’ Medici’s death, the announcement that papal troops were headed toward Florence in 1512, the departure of Piero
Soderini in the same year, and the official entrance of Giuliano de’ Medici into the city during the Restoration.
Florence.” His entry is short, but the fact that it is only one of five entries from 1497 suggests that the executions were still shocking enough to become city-wide news.

While the unexpected violence that the Republic perpetrated seems to have shocked some Florentines, it did not dampen the people’s support for the regime. In fact, a passage from Guicciardini’s *History of Florence* implies that it actually solidified Florentines’ belief in the political equality that defined the regime. He writes that “all citizens should learn a lesson from the death of men such as these, who enjoyed wealth, power, authority, family connections, and universal popularity: if a man is well off and has a reasonable share of things, he should be satisfied and not try to get more, for most of the time the attempt fails.” Such praise of the newly established equality between aristocracy and populace does not quite fit with the rest of Guicciardini’s classist rhetoric, but the fact that his father, Piero Guicciardini, was a part of the committee that voted in favor of the executions may have biased his assessments. Whatever the case, the message of the executions was clear: remnants of the old regime, especially those related to the Medici family, would not be tolerated in Republican Florence.

In 1502, the city’s government reformed and Piero Soderini was elected *Gonfaloniere* for life. According to Guicciardini, this occurred because “the wise citizens, who were accustomed to having authority, were so displeased by this state of affairs that they were nearly disgusted by this form of government,” which they believed was ruining the city. Landucci’s assessment of the decision to reform the government is less dramatic; he simply writes that “a vote was passed in the Great Council that a *Doge* should be elected in the Venetian manner.” In truth, the changes that the city made moved it to a more centralized form of government than it had taken

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174 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 199.
during the early Republican era. This was accomplished by Soderini’s lifetime appointment to Florence’s highest government office. According to Guicciardini, the function of the Gonfaloniere for life was to “see to it that important matters were governed by the leading citizens of the city and that the men of standing had the leading positions and the authority they deserved.” One of the reasons that Guicciardini’s account is so critical of Soderini is that the Gonfaloniere did not use his power to accomplish these goals. *The History of Florence* decries Soderini’s refusal to appoint “men of reputation” to Florence’s leading positions, but, as discussed in the previous chapter, many Florentines saw this as a merit rather than a weakness. Among the officers whom Soderini did lift up was Niccolò Machiavelli, whose *Discourses on Livy* depict the Gonfaloniere in a very charitable manner. For his part, Landucci greeted Soderini’s appointment with enthusiastic approval, writing, “in the final drawing Piero Soderini was the successful one, thank God; and they immediately sent for him from Arezzo, where he had been all through the war...How well he discharged this dignity, and how well he presided over the Great Council! Truly it was a work of God.” The most likely reason that Guicciardini’s assessment of Soderini differs from those of Machiavelli and Landucci is that the former had hoped that the Gonfaloniere would bring in a new age of oligarchic republicanism in Florence, while the latter two favored the city’s more inclusive model.

The expansion of political autonomy within Florentine society during the republican era was the reason why the republican government enjoyed broad support from the populace, and it led the city to largely abandon the political norms that had governed it prior to 1494. Savonarola empowered the populace and directed its use of collective action to move the city away from oligarchic republicanism and into something much more inclusive. As the regime solidified over

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176 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 200.
the next several years, it succeeded in retaining its relatively inclusive nature even in the face of pro-Medicean conspiracy and institutional reform. The city experienced difficulties, particularly in economic affairs, but as discussed in the previous chapter, it succeeded in retaining popular support and increasing its military strength. All of this is significant because it meant that when the Medici returned to Florence in 1512, the city’s political culture was remarkably different from the one into which they had been bred. The returning Medici understood, even before they arrived in Florence, that they would not be able to control the government the way that their forefathers had done. The middle class was empowered, oligarchic influence was more limited than it had ever been, and the government was actively suppressing any attempt to return to the days of Medici tyranny. The city had evolved, and the strategy of manipulation and magnificence was no longer an option.

Interestingly, the Medici family also evolved quite a bit during its exile from the city. Piero spent the years following the Florentine Revolution travelling up and down the Italian peninsula, associating with princes and condottieri, attempting on more than one occasion to organize a Medicean restoration before his untimely death in 1503. Once that happened, Giovanni de’ Medici became the head of the family. The cardinal appears to have taken his father’s advice to heart following the Revolution, and Guicciardini asserts that Giovanni had actually maintained friendly relations with Florentine elites who travelled to Rome by “pretending that he never designed to intermeddle in the Affairs of Florence, nor aspire to the ancient Greatness of his Family, [and] he always received with the highest Caresses all the Florentines that came to Rome, and readily fatigued himself in serving them in their Business.”177 It is important to note that these passages were written after the author witnessed the Medicean Restoration and later received patronage from Pope Clement VII (Giulio de’

Medici, cousin of Giovanni and Piero), but there is evidence that Guicciardini held these thoughts even prior to the Republic’s downfall. In 1509 he wrote that the Medici in Rome “never overlooked an opportunity to do a favor to any Florentine citizen, whether he lived in Rome or was just passing through.”

This did not generate enough goodwill to sway much public support away from the Republican government, but the fact that writings from Machiavelli and Guicciardini refrain from criticizing Giovanni as they do Piero suggests that Florentines at least did not hate the cardinal as much as they did his older brother.

Giovanni’s talent for pleasing Florentines who traveled to Rome indicates that he, unlike his older brother, seems to have inherited their father’s political charisma. This was useful not only because it allowed Giovanni to keep tabs on the city from Rome, but also because it afforded him connections to valuable allies. Guicciardini later wrote of Giovanni that by the 1510s “he had rendered himself acceptable to many in Florence, and therefore [Pope] Julius, who was desirous of changing that Government.”

By attaching himself closely to the erratic pope, Giovanni de’ Medici succeeded in steadily climbing the hierarchical ladder in Roman society. As he did so, he was able to set up a network of connections that allowed him to win favor with Florentine elites who were less than satisfied with the city’s more populist tendencies. Guicciardini’s History of Florence suggests that “before long, nearly all Florentines—even some who had been his enemies—would get in touch either personally or by letter with the Cardinal de’ Medici whenever they needed to make use of the Roman court for the expediting of some benefice or in fact for any reason at all...Before long the name of that house, so hateful while Piero was alive, seemed to enjoy favor and compassion now that he was dead.”

Giovanni was gathering favor and influence in Rome, making him an ever-growing concern for the Florentine

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Republic. This is why Michelangelo’s *David* faced Rome when it was erected in 1504, and it is also why the cardinal was able to direct papal troops to march on Florence in 1512.

In addition to currying favor with well-to-do Florentines who visited Rome, Cardinal de’ Medici also facilitated his rise to power by impressing Pope Julius II during the military campaigns of the early 1500s. Strathern asserts that he did so by acquitting himself well in the “Warrior Pope’s” campaign to drive Venetian troops out of the Papal States, which won the cardinal a place in Julius’ subsequent effort to drive the French out of the peninsula.181 Part of the Pope’s strategy in this campaign was to assemble a Holy League, which brought together troops from the Papal States, Naples, the Holy Roman Empire, and the recently subdued Venice. Florence, however, declined to participate in the war, citing its alliance with France and its own fragile military strength as reasons to remain neutral.182 Unfortunately for the republican government, this decision alienated the city from the rest of the peninsula. Thus, following a historic battle near Ravenna in April 1512, during which Giovanni was actually captured by the withdrawing French army and forced to make a daring escape, Julius turned his attention to Florence. He called a conference of the Holy League in Mantua, at which “it was resolved that the Spanish Army, attended by the Cardinal and Giuliano de’ Medici, should turn their March towards Florence, and that the Cardinal, whom the Pope in his Expedition had declared Legate of Tuscany, should call to his Assistance the Soldiers of the Church, and those of the neighbouring Towns whom he thought fit for his Purpose.”183 After eighteen years in exile, the Medici were preparing to return to Florence.

The Republic itself was predictably troubled by this development. The eighteen years since the Florentine Revolution had not always been easy, but they had created what Baker

classifies as one of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities,” with a distinctive political culture to which most of the city belonged.\textsuperscript{184} The new political culture, built on the principles of liberty, expanded political autonomy, and the importance of the state, was not compatible with the prospect of a Medicean restoration. Thus, when the Pope commanded Florence to remove Piero Soderini from his post as Gonfaloniere and reinstate the Medici, the city was greatly disturbed.

Three days after the Signoria received Julius’ command, Landucci lamented that “these princes and lords, instead of reconciling the Church of Christ and amplifying it, ruin it by their ambitions...at present they only think of shedding the blood of Christ, showing no pity for the poor, afflicted and lacerated people of unhappy Italy.”\textsuperscript{185} Even Guicciardini, in his \textit{History of Italy}, which usually cites Florence’s political division as a major factor contributing to the state’s overall weakness, remarks upon the city’s universal desire to maintain the Republican government:

None doubted what would be the Resolution of the Council, from the Inclination of almost all the People to maintain the popular Government. It was therefore with wonderful Unanimity resolved to consent to the Return of the Medici as private Citizens, but to refuse the Removal of the Gonfaloniere from the Magistracy, and that if the Enemy should obstinately persist in demanding the last, they would freely expose their Lives and Fortunes in the Defense of their common Liberty and Country.\textsuperscript{186}

Landucci even posits that God may have disapproved of the Medicean Restoration, recording reports of chaos within the Spanish camp and writing that “it seemed as if the Lord were aiding Florence, for all those who had it in their minds to do us harm were deprived of their strength; as has been seen several times.”\textsuperscript{187} Unfortunately for Landucci and his countrymen, neither the

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\textsuperscript{184} Baker, \textit{The Fruit of Liberty}, 64.
\textsuperscript{185} Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 254.
\textsuperscript{186} Guicciardini, \textit{The History of the Wars in Italy: Book XI}, 43. The city’s decision to accept the Medici as private citizens is somewhat disputed, as most modern historians agree that Florence saw any return of the Medici as a threat to the Republic.
\textsuperscript{187} Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 254.
\end{flushright}
city’s united resolve nor the Lord’s favor were enough to prevent the Medici from taking the city by force later that year.

A month after the Pope’s original call for surrender arrived in the city, the Spanish sent ambassadors into the city to demand that Florence enter into the Holy League, admit the Medici into the city, and depose Gonfaloniere Soderini. When these requests were also denied, the Medici abandoned diplomacy and turned to brutality as a means of gaining entry into the city. The combined papal and Spanish troops pitched a fierce battle against the Florentine militia outside the city of Prato, less than twenty miles from Florence. The Spanish troops decimated the Florentines, and proceeded to commit vicious atrocities within Prato itself. Landucci reports that “these cruel miscreants and infidels entered the place and slew everyone whom they encountered; not content with having such a large booty, they spared hardly anyone’s life...they sacked the monasteries, and they slaughtered women and children with every sort of cruelty and infamy.” The ferocity with which the Spanish troops sacked Prato prompted Florence to quickly surrender. Soderini was obliged to flee Florence the following night, on 30 August. Two days later, on the first day of September 1512, Giuliano de’ Medici, Piero and Cardinal Giovanni’s younger brother, entered Florence after eighteen years in exile.

The Florentine Republican era was effectively over as soon as Giuliano rode into the city, but the political norms that it ingrained within the citizens continued to play a significant role in the city’s government. The Florentines were no longer content to live under a corrupted Republic as they had prior to 1494, and the Medici adjusted their ruling style accordingly. As soon as the family was restored to Florence, they sprang into action by establishing a rule of force within the city. Masi writes in his *Ricordanze* that when Giuliano entered the city, he did so “with six men

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188 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 257.
on horseback, and no more: and the people did not rejoice at his return.”

Days later, when Giovanni de’ Medici made his return to the city, he entered “with around three hundred Spaniards on horseback with Signore Franciotto Orsini, and which were all for his guard...they came to be more than five hundred knights between the soldiers and citizens who were to meet him.” Clearly, the presence of so many soldiers accompanying the Medici brothers upon their return showed that they did not intend to let the people force them out again. The Medici family’s reaction to the republican sentiment that existed in Florence prior to the Restoration would shape how the family controlled the city, and eventually all of Tuscany, for the next two centuries.

The Medici reconquered Florence in 1512, but the Restoration did not represent a victory over the city’s new political norms. Baker’s The Fruit of Liberty deals primarily with Florence’s office-holding class, rather than with the city as a whole, but in this case his point is valid: “behind and through this imagined community, which constituted the city in the minds of the men who spoke in the pratiche, Florence’s liberty remained a uniting and coherent ideal.” His inclusion of the traditional oligarchs in this imagined community is appropriate because, as he explains, the elite class made a significant effort to exclude Giuliano and Lorenzo II, son of Piero de’ Medici, from Florence’s remaining republican institutions after the 1512 restoration. Baker notes that Florentines in office resisted Medici rule by citing tax debts to disqualify the Medici men from holding public office. Efforts like these did not stop the family from exercising power over the city, but the attempt to render them ineligible for public office “represents a significant change in the political culture of the Medicean republic,” for it is certain that Il Magnifico would

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189 Masi, Ricordanze, 99.
190 Masi, Ricordanze, 100.
191 Baker, The Fruit of Liberty, 64. The pratiche were advisory councils, made up of leading citizens, which the Signoria occasionally convened in order to discuss important matters relating to the city.
never have run into this issue.\textsuperscript{192} In the twenty years following Lorenzo’s death, the city had shifted from submission to defiance in the face of Medici tyranny.

In order to seize and retain control within Florence following the 1512 Restoration, the Medici had to fundamentally change their power structure within the city. Guicciardini explains why this transformation was necessary in his \textit{History of Italy}, by including a speech that Piero Soderini supposedly gave to his fellow citizens prior to the Battle of Prato, as they considered whether to accept the Medici back into Florence as private citizens. It is important to note that Guicciardini did not witness this speech, as he was in Spain acting as the Republic’s ambassador to the King of Aragon, and in fact probably invented it, but the sentiment that he conveys in his writing is still useful because it shows how the Medicean Restoration ultimately played out.

Through Soderini’s mouth, Guicciardini writes that

\begin{quote}
If the Medici had an Inclination to live in this City as private Citizens...their Restoration would be a laudable Action, since it would be the thing uniting the Members of one common Country into one common Body. But if they harbour other Designs, look well to yourselves, and beware of the Danger, and think it not too much to sustain any Costs or Difficulties to preserve your Liberty, the inestimable Value of which you will know better, but to no Purpose, when, I speak it with Horror! You shall be deprived of it.\textsuperscript{193}
\end{quote}

The fact that Guicciardini included this passage in his \textit{History} indicates his belief that the Medici intended to dismantle the Florentine Republic upon re-entry, and his statement that the family “resumed their former Grandeur,” after the Restoration, “but governed more imperiously, and with a more absolute Authority than their Father had done” certainly supports this claim.\textsuperscript{194} The return of the Medici meant the end of the Republic, and the family took steps to ensure that its

\textsuperscript{192} Baker, \textit{The Fruit of Liberty}, 71.
\textsuperscript{193} Guicciardini, \textit{The History of the Wars in Italy: Book XI}, 41.
\textsuperscript{194} Guicciardini, \textit{The History of the Wars in Italy: Book XI}, 60.
legacy would not haunt them in the future. To ensure this, they took action to ensure that their rule looked more like that of a prince than that of a doge.

Stringent measures came almost immediately upon the family’s return. Between the 6th and 8th of September, the Signoria passed laws to limit the Great Council and instate Giovan Battista Ridolfi as the new Gonfaloniere, though only for fourteen months instead of for life. A week later, Landucci reports that “Giuliano de’ Medici and all his men went into the Palagio [of government] fully armed, and took possession of it, since there was no resistance.” He recounts the reading of new articles of government for Florence, which elected a new parliament to rule the city for a year. To enforce this measure, the Medici put on an impressive show of force which was likely designed to deter any attempt at resistance. Landucci writes that “all the streets and outlets from [the Piazza] were barred with men-at-arms, crying perpetually, palle...” Masi’s account largely conforms to that of Landuicci’s; the metalworker writes that when the Medici entered the city in early September, they conducted “three or four hundred men-of-arms...and in this fashion created the aforementioned parliament, shouting… ‘palle palle.’” Many citizens may not have been enthusiastic about living under Medici tyranny after experiencing nearly two decades of unprecedented freedom, but it was clear that they would not have a say in the matter. Except for one more interruption between 1527 and 1530, the Medici ruled like princes in Florence until well into the eighteenth century.

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195 Despite their efforts, the city did rise up one more time, and it succeeded in forcing the Medici out of the city once again in 1527, after the sack of Rome temporarily deprived the family of their power base. The resulting second Republic of Florence was short-lived, however, and when the Medici returned once again in 1530, Pope Clement VII (born Giulio de’ Medici, Lorenzo’s nephew) officially installed the Medici as Dukes of the Florentine Republic.

196 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 261.
197 Landucci, Florentine Diary, 261. Palle, meaning “balls,” refers to the six spheres on the Medici family crest. The crest was an easily identifiable symbol of Medici power in Florence, and “palle” was often used as a short chant in order to rally support for the Medici in times of upheaval. Landucci reports hearing the call ring through the city’s streets after the 1478 Pazzi conspiracy, during Piero’s feeble attempt to rally support in 1494, and then again in 1513 when Giovanni was elected Pope.
198 Masi, Ricordanze, 107.
As they established themselves within the city, the Medici also cemented their place within Florence by commandeering the republican institutions in a much more direct, blunt, and aggressive way than their forefathers had prior to the Revolution. Guicciardini explains that “the Medici troops forced the city to accept a council of fifty citizens [nominated by Giovanni] who could make up a new kind of Balia,” effectively ending the time of political autonomy for Florence’s middle class.\textsuperscript{199} Within a month, the new government began removing republican iconography from around the city. Landucci reports that “the Medici had their coats of arms re-painted on their palace, at the Nunziata, and in many places; and they caused the image of the Gonfaloniere to be removed from the Nunziata de’ Servi.”\textsuperscript{200} These symbolic actions served to suppress Florentine republicanism by removing physical reminders of the city’s democratic past.

One of the most obvious signals that the Medici feared a resurgence of republican sentiment is the fact that they immediately sought to disarm the people of Florence. Giovanni and Giuliano had witnessed first-hand the danger that the populace could pose when aroused to defend its liberty against the Medici, and their actions show that they were determined to avoid a second revolution. Landucci remarks in early 1513 that “the ‘Eight’ made a proclamation that everyone should declare the arms he had, before the evening of the 20th instant, under pain of a fine of 100 florins; and the declarations were made on the 20th,” before adding that “on this latter day it was said that the Pope was dead.”\textsuperscript{201} That the news of Pope Julius’ death is only mentioned after the order that Florentines must declare their arms is a testament to the importance of this proclamation. Machiavelli certainly makes clear his disapproval of this measure in \textit{The Prince}, which was originally intended to be presented to Giuliano de’ Medici. He does not specifically mention the Medici regime’s disarmament measures, but he does write that...

\textsuperscript{199} Guicciardini, \textit{The History of the Wars in Italy: Book XI}, 60.
\textsuperscript{200} Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 263.
\textsuperscript{201} Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 266.
“if you take their arms away from those who have been armed, you begin to alienate them. You make it clear you do not trust them, either because you think they are poor soldiers or disloyal. Whichever view they attribute to you, they will begin to hate you.”\textsuperscript{202}While Machiavelli’s true motivation for writing \textit{The Prince} remains a topic of hot debate in scholarly circles, his allusion to Medici activity in this instance can hardly be mistaken, given the timing of his writing.\textsuperscript{203}

Apart from military conquest and intimidation by force, the Medici also succeeded in repressing the remnants of Republican Florence by tying the city’s leadership more directly to the Church. In achieving this, they enjoyed the great fortune that Pope Julius II died in 1513, and Giovanni was elected to replace him as Pope Leo X. Landucci describes the firing of cannons, the lighting of bonfires, and the outbreak of shouts of \textit{palle!} when the news arrived, saying that “it seemed as if the city were upside-down.”\textsuperscript{204} The city rejoiced at the news of the first-ever Florentine pope, and Giovanni capitalized on the goodwill by appointing his cousin, Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici, as Archbishop of Florence about a month after his own election. This was again met with rejoicing, despite the fact that it signified an extension of Medici control over Florence into the realm of the ecclesiastical.\textsuperscript{205} Masi certainly seems pleased with the news of Giovanni’s election, describing the new Pope’s relatives as “Magnificent Giuliano and Messer Giulio, brothers of the Pope.”\textsuperscript{206} Giovanni’s ascension to the papal throne represented a culmination of the historic rivalry between Rome and Florence, but it also meant that the Medici now had the entire power of the papacy at their disposal. Over the next several years, Leo used his papal authority to secure ducal titles for his brother Giuliano and his nephew Lorenzo II,

\textsuperscript{202} Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince} in \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 64.
\textsuperscript{203} Machiavelli wrote \textit{The Prince} in 1513, as evidenced by a letter that he wrote to a friend asking for notes on it. He was living outside of Florence, in exile by this time, but he would have been well aware of what the Medici were doing inside the city.
\textsuperscript{204} Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 267.
\textsuperscript{205} Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 269.
\textsuperscript{206} Masi, \textit{Ricordanze}, 121.
arrange marriages between the Medici and powerful European families, and solidify Medici military domination of the city.

Landucci was less pleased with Leo’s election than his fellow citizens. Perhaps he reflected upon how vulnerable Florence had been to religious manipulation during the Savonarola years, or maybe he simply resented the grandeur with which the Medici celebrated Leo’s election. Whatever the case, his trepidation about the papal election is obvious in his description of Leo’s triumphal entry into Florence in 1515. One of the first observations he records in his diary is that Leo arrived with a large train of soldiers; “with the Pope came numerous infantry, and amongst them the papal guard, consisting of many German soldiers, in a French fashion.” The troops no doubt added to the overall magnificence of the event, but the presence of foreign troops also served to remind the Florentines of just how powerful their overlords had become. Landucci’s diary also includes a long entry describing the various “sights” that accompanied Leo’s triumphal procession through the city. He notes both the magnificence, and the “incalculable costs,” of the sights, and by the end of the entry he sounds more bitter than impressed. Of the fourteenth sight, a large painted wooden column that was erected in the middle of the Mercato Nuovo, the pharmacist writes that “this did not seem suitable, but on the contrary tasteless.” Of the fifteenth, a bronze “giant” erected under the first arch to the Palagio, he writes that “this was not much appreciated.” He also complains that the sights’ attendants “threw down the gates and walls of the court [at the church of Santa Maria Novella], displeasing many people,” and “spoilt the steps of the Badia.”

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207 Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 279.
208 These “sights” included temporary triumphal arches, statues, obelisks, and columns, which recalled the triumphal processions that accompanied ancient Roman generals when they returned from various conquests.
Landucci was around eighty years old when he wrote this entry, so it makes sense that he would have resented such drastic change coming to the city in which he had lived his entire life. He died a year later, and his last few entries relate to the increases in “corn” prices brought on by the papal court’s visit to Florence. He writes that “everyone was amazed to see the quantity of food consumed by the strangers in the following of the papal court,” after expressing his hope that the pope would bring food to help alleviate the problems caused by the high prices.\textsuperscript{210} His distaste for the Medici is clear in these passages, and it is notable that his complaints about food prices do not have counterparts from the Republican years. If this diary is any indication of general Florentine public opinion in the 1510s, then it is likely that a great deal of anti-Medicean sentiment lingered well after the Republic’s defeat. This is why the Medici had to rule largely by force: after experiencing the autonomy and liberty that the Florentine Republic had offered, many citizens would no longer willingly accept the rule of one powerful family.

Over the next several years, the Medici continued to solidify their monopoly of the use of force within Florence by officially taking control of the city’s military. This occurred when Lorenzo II obtained permission in Rome to become the Captain General of the Florentine Republic. Christopher Hibbert aptly describes the Signoria’s appointment of Lorenzo II to the post as “obedient,” noting that the twenty-three-year-old Capitano became “increasingly authoritarian” after adopting the title.\textsuperscript{211} The militia had been an important symbol of strength for the Florentine Republic because it symbolized the citizens’ collective commitment to protecting the state, and once Lorenzo II was named to the post he wasted no time demonstrating his new power over the city. Landucci notes in May 1515 that Lorenzo II’s appointment gave him the power to appoint and dismiss Florentine officials beneath his office, and writes three months

\textsuperscript{210} Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 287.
\textsuperscript{211} Hibbert, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the House of Medici}, 220.
later that “the Signoria gave the (commander’s) baton to the said Lorenzo II, and there was a muster of many men-at-arms and of our peasants’ battalions (militia).”\textsuperscript{212} By appointing themselves to roles of increasing authority and commandeering control of the city’s militia, the Medici became Florentine princes in all but name within two years of their Restoration.

In 1516, Pope Leo X named his nephew Lorenzo II de’ Medici the new Duke of Urbino, following a papal war against that small state. Lorenzo II was the first Medici to hold a formal title to rule, and his appointment only served to emphasize the departure from Florence’s republican traditions. In the same year, Ludovico Alamanni, brother-in-law to Francesco Guicciardini, summarized this shift in a letter to Lorenzo II. The letter advises the young prince that, while his grandfather the older Lorenzo, \textit{Il Magnifico}, succeeded in Florence because “he adopted civilian dress and familiar manners, conducted affairs of state in his home, came to the city square every day to listen to anyone who wished to speak to him, was informal with the citizens, and behaved with them as though he were their brother rather than their superior,” the new Medici should not attempt to replicate his approach. Reminding the young Lorenzo II of his new station, Alamanni writes that “it is no longer possible for His Excellency the Duke to do any of these things, because in such a grand position, it would be improper for him to act like a private citizen.”\textsuperscript{213} After the Republican era, Florentine citizenship was associated with civic pride and the love of liberty to which the Duke’s regime was principally opposed. Instead, Alamanni advised Lorenzo II to rule as a prince would, despite the fact that the “grand” way of doing things “is completely unfamiliar to Florentines, and the citizens would never become accustomed to this willingly”\textsuperscript{214} His use of the word “willingly” suggests that Florence might

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\item[\textsuperscript{212}] Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 278.
\item[\textsuperscript{214}] Alamanni, “Ludovico Alamanni on Establishing Princely Control in Florence, 1516,” 443.
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never fully accept Medici tyranny and implies that the family may have to force their rule upon the city.

The eighteen-year period between the Florentine Revolution and the Medicean Restoration was one of dramatic change within the city. After years of declining Medici power, the tyrants were thrown out and Florence was finally free. Led by the controversial Friar Girolamo Savonarola, the city’s middle class took advantage of the regime change to gain unprecedented levels of political autonomy and representation within the city. The resulting Republic was more democratic and less oligarchic than any other Italian city-state at the time, and the “liberty” that grew out of this system changed the way that political philosophers and pharmacists alike thought about government. Machiavelli went on to revolutionize the field of political science, while Landucci, used in this paper as a representative of the Florentine populace, became resentful and disapproving of any regime that would not preserve the city’s republican liberty. Florence as a whole was no longer content to live under a corrupt government, which meant that the Medici, when they returned to power, had to turn to intimidation, force, and religious authority in order to control the city.

Although Lorenzo the Magnificent’s branch of the Medici family died out in the mid-sixteenth century, a junior branch of Medici descendants continued to dominate the city as Dukes of Florence, and then as Grand-Dukes of Tuscany, for another two hundred years. From a purely pragmatic perspective, this suggests that the Florentine Republic of 1494 to 1512 served no historical purpose except to hold the city at the turn of the century until the Medici returned to rule it. Most modern histories of Renaissance Italy, and even of Renaissance Florence, treat the Republic as such. But in fact the eighteen years of expanded popular government forced the exiled Medici to completely restructure their power base, accepting that the “golden age” of
Lorenzo de’ Medici had passed. The Medici had to rule by force, and the switch to official hereditary rule in the 1530s is a testament to the massive effort that it took for them to regain complete control. The city was conquered by papal authority and ruled by dukes and princes for the next two centuries, but remnants of the Florentine Republic continue to affect us in the twenty-first century, whether that is through Machiavelli’s musings on historical republics and citizen militias, or through Michelangelo’s *David*, which continues to this day to stand defiantly, poised to do battle against the forces of tyranny.
Conclusion

In 1497, three years after the revolution that expelled the three Medici brothers from Florence, Landucci recorded the Republic’s effort to erase the Medici legacy from the city by removing the Medicean coat of arms from public displays. In 1512, he wrote that the Medici balls were being put back in place by the post-Restoration regime. To a consequentialist, the reinstallation of the *palle* indicates that Medicean tyranny ultimately won out in the battle against Florentine republicanism, rendering the republican era more or less irrelevant. Guicciardini certainly thought this way, at least after 1512, and much of Machiavelli’s writing suggests that he concurred. Both authors’ works depict the Florentine Republic as weak, unremarkable, and unimportant to the wider narrative of Renaissance Italy. My thesis seeks to challenge these notions. Using personal narratives, works of art, and historical treatises produced during the republican era, I argue that Machiavelli and Guicciardini erred in their assessments of the Florentine Republic. I offer evidence that the Republic of Florence enjoyed high levels of popular support, expanded political liberties, warded off significant foreign threats, and commissioned one of the world’s most famous works of art. Finally, I suggest that the period between 1494 and 1512 represented a monumental paradigm shift in Florentine political culture, which led the populace to become more protective of its republican liberty and forced the Medici to dramatically alter the way in which they sought to rule the city.

Despite the increasingly absolutist nature of Medici rule during the 1510s and 1520s, Florentine republicanism persisted in the decades following the Medicean Restoration. Fifteen years after Giuliano’s return to Florence, the city once again rebelled against Medici rule. At the time, the family was headed by Pope Clement VII (1523-34), cousin of Leo X, while Alessandro and Ippolito de’ Medici, bastard sons of Lorenzo II and Giuliano de’ Medici, respectively, lived
in Florence under the guidance of Clement’s representative, Cardinal Passerini.\textsuperscript{215} When the Holy Roman Empire’s army sacked Rome in 1527, republicans in Florence took advantage of Pope Clement’s weakened position and took to the streets in anti-Medicean demonstrations. The cardinal and his young charges were expelled from the city, and Florence once again declared itself a republic. Strathern notes that the city once again removed the Medici \textit{palle} from the city’s buildings, persecuted the family’s allies, and appealed to the Savonarolan idea that Florence should become a “City of God.”\textsuperscript{216} These reforms did not last, however, as the Republic was thoroughly dismantled in 1530, when Clement VII enlisted the help of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and the Prince of Orange, with whom he had reconciled after they had sacked Rome only three years earlier. Alessandro de’ Medici returned to the city to be named \textit{Capo} of the city, and nine months later, his uncle Clement VII named him Duke of the Florentine Republic.\textsuperscript{217} The creation of a hereditary title signaled the official beginning of the ducal period of Medici rule, which lasted until 1737.

Although the results of the 1527 revolt were not positive for Florentine republicans, the city’s repeated attempts to throw off the yoke of Medici domination indicates a continuation of the citizens’ desire for liberty. The three years of resistance validate Machiavelli’s claim that despite its long history of Medici tyranny, Florence’s political culture was still grounded in its republican roots. They also prove that the republican era of 1494 to 1512 continued to affect Florentine politics long after the Medicean Restoration. The Florentine Republic was not an inconsequential interruption of Medici rule; it represents a major turning point in the history of Florentine government. Prior to the republican era, Florence was content to live under a corrupt

\textsuperscript{215} Strathern, \textit{The Medici}, 308. Strathern notes that though Ippolito was nominally the offspring of Giuliano de’ Medici, son of \textit{Il Magnifico}, it is likely that he was actually the son of Clement VII and an enslaved Moorish woman who lived in Florence.

\textsuperscript{216} Strathern, \textit{The Medici}, 309.

\textsuperscript{217} Hibbert, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the House of Medici}, 253.
regime while the Medici controlled the city as *de facto* rulers. This changed with the expansion of political autonomy and the embrace of civic liberty under the republican regime. When the Medici returned in 1512, they encountered continuous resistance from the populace, which forced the family to move closer and closer to declaring absolute hereditary rule of the city.

There is still a great deal that historians can learn about the Florentine republican era by studying diaries, memoirs, treatises, and works of art produced prior to the Medicean Restoration. In order to gain further insight into the thoughts and attitudes of the Florentine middle class, it will be necessary to consider a wider range of personal narratives from republicans, Savonarolans, aristocrats, and Medici partisans. It would also be useful to make use of bank records, personal correspondences, and trading agreements in order to study how changes in Florence’s political culture affected the citizens who did not record their thoughts in diaries and works of scholarship. Historical analysis for this thesis was conducted using limited resources, on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is still a great deal of source material to be explored in an effort to reshape the narrative of the Florentine Republic.

The Florentine Republic of 1527 to 1530 presents a similar opportunity for scholars to expand our understanding of sixteenth-century Florentine political culture. Given the similarities that the 1527 Republic bore to its predecessor, it is likely that in-depth examination of sources produced after the sack of Rome but prior to the final Medicean Restoration would be fruitful. The 1527 revolt certainly suggests a continuation of the push for expanded political liberty within Florence, but further exploration is required to show how Florentine attitudes toward popular government and tyrannical rule evolved under the final republic. Strathern indicates that Florence only surrendered to the Prince of Orange after ten months under siege, so it would be
interesting to learn what allowed the city to hold out for so long, and what finally caused the city’s resolve to crumble after such staunch resistance.\textsuperscript{218}

In order to deepen our understanding of history, it is necessary to continuously challenge conventional narratives of the events, movements, and trends that shaped the development of the modern world. Our current understanding of the Florentine Republic requires significant revision if we are to fully comprehend how it influenced the development of democratic republicanism, citizen armies, and political liberty in early modern Europe. The Florentine Republic itself was built upon the challenge of conventional wisdom, and the willingness to rewrite traditional narratives is one of the reasons that the city achieved so much between 1494 and 1512. The city gained its independence by rising up after six decades of Medici rule, and it produced a revision of the status quo. Under Savonarola’s leadership, the populace challenged traditional oligarchic control of the city’s republican government and achieved a complete shift in Florentine political culture. Michelangelo challenged the traditional Florentine depiction of David, and in doing so he produced an entirely new symbol to represent the strong, bold, and defiant city in which he lived. Hopefully, my challenge of the Florentine Republic’s traditional narrative demonstrates that in the study of history, the thoughts of a humble pharmacist are just as significant as those recorded by the world’s most influential philosophers.

\textsuperscript{218} Strathern, \textit{The Medici}, 314.
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