Name: Block:

**The Medici Family**

The Medici family were the most powerful citizens of Florence, leaders of the largest bank in Europe, and through strategic marriage alliances, joined many of Europe's royal families.

The founder of the family fortunes was Giovanni di Bicci de Medici (1360-1429). Under his leadership, the family bank blossomed, and he soon became the richest man in Florence. Banking was a relative innovation during the period, and the Medici were its most successful practitioners. Giovanni's son, Cosimo (1389-1464), called Cosimo the Elder, succeeded him as leader of the bank. Though nominally an ordinary Florentine citizen, Cosimo skillfully manipulated Florence's political institutions to his family's benefit, using his wealth and connections to pack the governmental bodies with Medici supporters, until he was all but official ruler of Florence.

His son Piero (1416-1469) briefly succeeded him, but it was Piero's son Lorenzo (1449-1492), called Lorenzo the Magnificent, who presided over the Medici golden age and, by extension, the golden age of Florence. He earned his nickname by spending lavishly on artistic and architectural projects to beautify Florence and on splendid public festivals to entertain its citizens. Like his father and grandfather, he maintained control of Florence by making sure that his supporters were appointed to key positions in the government, so that he remained technically an ordinary citizen while living like a prince. In 1478, he survived an assassination attempt by the Pazzi, a rival banking family supported by his enemy, Pope Sixtus IV. He was attacked as he attended church services at the cathedral of Florence. His brother Giovanni was killed, but Lorenzo suffered only minor wounds. The conspirators were hunted down and vengefully executed; the noted artist Sandro Boticelli commemorated the executions in a series of murals. A war with Sixtus followed, in which Lorenzo turned for help to the French and finally ended the war with a dramatic personal visit to the Pope's chief ally, Ferrante of Naples. Subsequently, Lorenzo's position was completely secure, and he became an important stabilizing influence on the Italian states, maintaining a network of formal alliances and friendly personal relationships which helped to keep the peace on the Italian peninsula. Unfortunately, he also neglected management of the family bank, which suffered huge losses near the end of his lifetime. Lorenzo's lavish spending and competition from younger rival banks sapped the family fortune, but the family's influence and reputation remained.

Lorenzo's son Piero (1472-1503) succeeded him as acknowledged ruler of Florence, but proved as unpopular as his father had been popular. When Charles VIII of France invaded Italy in 1494, Piero initially denied him passage through Florentine territory. But as Charles' army approached the city, Piero panicked. He went to the French camp and surrendered Florence to Charles without a struggle. Already disenchanted with Piero and outraged by his concessions to the French, the Florentines rebelled. A democratic faction led by Friar Girolamo Savonarola drove the Medici out of the city and declared it a republic. The Medici would not return until the fall of the next republic, in which Machiavelli served as secretary, in 1512.

The Medici rose to power through their immense wealth and their skill in arranging alliances rather than through military conquest, making them unique among Italian princes of their time. In particular, they systematically married into almost all the great royal families of Europe. Lorenzo the Magnificent's granddaughter Catherine de Medici (1519-1589) became queen mother of France. The Medici also produced two popes, Leo X and Clement VII, who focused their attention on promoting the family's power and influence.

Organization Chart:

Giovanni di Bicci de Medici (1360-1429)

Summary:

How did he maintain political power?:

Popular?:

Cosimo the Elder (1389-1464)

Summary:

How did he maintain political power?:

Popular?:

Piero (1416-1469)

Summary:

How did he maintain political power?:

Popular?:

Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492)

Summary:

How did he maintain political power?:

Popular?:

Piero (1472-1503)

Summary:

How did he maintain political power?:

Popular?:

**PRIMARY SOURCE: Lorenzo De Medici: Paternal Advice To A Cardinal (C. 1491) [EXCERPT]**

*Lorenzo de Medici (1449-1492) was the unofficial ruler of Florence from 1469 until his death. He was a humanist, arts patron - and a skillful politician. In 1489 he manages to have his son Giovanni made a cardinal, at the age of 14. Giovanni later ruled as Pope Leo X (reigned 1513-1521) and was also a patron of the arts. In the letter here Lorenzo warns his son to avoid vice and luxury.*

The first that I would therefore suggest to you is that you ought to be grateful to God, and continually to recollect that it is not through your merits, your prudence, or your solicitude, that this event has taken place, but through his favor, which you can only repay by a pious, chaste and exemplary life; and that your obligations to the performance of these duties are so much the greater, as in your early years you have given some reasonable expectations that your riper age may produce such fruits. It would indeed be highly disgraceful, and as contrary to your duty as to my hopes, if, at a time when others display a greater share of reason and adopt a better mode of life, you should forget the precepts of your youth, and forsake the path in which you have hitherto trodden. Endeavor, therefore, to alleviate the burden of your early dignity by the regularity of your life and by your perseverance in those studies which are suitable to your profession. It gave me great satisfaction to learn, that, in the course of the past year, you bad frequently, of your own accord, gone to communion and confession; nor do I conceive that there is any better way of obtaining the favor of heaven than by habituating yourself to a performance of these and similar duties. This appears to me to be the most suitable and useful advice which, in the first instance, I can possibly give you.

… I shall, therefore, only recommend, that in your intercourse with the cardinals and other men of rank, your language be unassuming and respectful, guiding yourself, however, by your own reason, and not submitting to be impelled by the passions of others, who, actuated by improper motives, may pervert the use of their reasons. Let it satisfy your conscience that your conversation is without intentional offense; and if, through impetuosity of temper, any one should be offended, as his enmity is without just cause, so it will not be very lasting. On this your first visit to Rome, it will, however, be more advisable for you to listen to others than to speak much yourself.

… You are not only the youngest cardinal in the college, but the youngest person that ever was raised to that rank; and you ought, therefore, to be the most vigilant and unassuming, not giving others occasion to wait for you, either in the chapel, the consistory or upon deputations. You will soon get a sufficient insight into the manners of your brethren. With those of less respectable character converse not with too much intimacy; not merely on account of the circumstance in itself, but for the sake of public opinion. Converse on general topics with all. On public occasions, let your equipage and address be rather below than above mediocrity.

… The station of a cardinal is not less secure than elevated; on which account those who arrive at it too frequently become negligent; conceiving their object is attained and that they can preserve it with little trouble, This idea is often injurious to the life and character of those who entertain it. Be attentive, therefore, to your conduct, and confide in others too little rather than too much. There is one rule which I would recommend to your attention in preference to all others. Rise early in the morning. This will not only contribute to your health, but will enable you to arrange and expedite the business of the day; and as there are various duties incident to your station, such as the performance of divine service, studying, giving audience, and so forth, you will find the observance of this admonition productive of the greatest utility.

What sort of advice does Lorenzo de Medici give his son? What is important to him?

Based on this letter, what type of leader do you think Lorenzo was? Why?

After watching the first 12 minutes of “The Medici: Godfathers of the Renaissance,” explain how the Medici family is portrayed. What does it mean to be a ‘godfather’?