

What kind of ruler was Oliver Cromwell?

Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others – Source 5

A summary of Cromwell's character by a royalist

(Earl of Clarendon, Edward Hyde: *The History of the Great Rebellion*, Vol. III, part 1, p.432, p.509. Published at Clarendon Printing House, 1767-1786)

What is this source?

These are two extracts from 'The History of the Great Rebellion' by the Earl of Clarendon, Edward Hyde (1609-1674).

His writings, published in the early 1700s, have proved to be a very useful source for historians.

What's the background to this source?

Working out the viewpoint of this source is an interesting challenge for an historian. The writer had no reason to like Cromwell, but may also have had reason to dislike the royal family.

- The Earl started out as a country gentleman.
- He became an MP in 1640.
- At first he was a strong critic of Charles I.
- However, when war broke out he joined the Royalist side. During the Civil War he stayed with the king in Oxford. He became very close to Charles I.
- He continued to support the Royalist cause after Charles was executed. He lived in exile with Charles's son.
- In 1660, when this son became Charles II, Hyde was rewarded for his loyalty. Charles II made him Earl of Clarendon.
- However, in 1667 he fell out of favour with Charles II for criticising the king's personal lifestyle. He then went into exile.



It's worth knowing that ...

Machiavelli was an Italian political writer. He wrote a book called 'The Prince', which explained how rulers stayed in power.

He recommended that rulers should use every possible way to destroy their enemies. Even today we describe someone who uses cunning and dirty tricks as being Machiavellian.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. According to source 5a, what were people's attitudes towards Cromwell?
2. Does source 5b tell us anything about Cromwell's bad qualities?
3. Does source 5b tell us anything about Cromwell's good qualities?
4. Why might an enemy of Cromwell have written about Cromwell's good points?
5. What overall impression does this source give of Cromwell?



Source 5a

THERE cannot be a greater Manifestation of the univerfal prejudice and averfion in the whole Kingdom towards *Cromwell*, and his Govern-ment, than that there could be fo many defigns and conspiracies againft him, which were communicated to fo many Men, and that fuch fignal and notable Perfons could refort to *London*, and remain there, without any fuch information or difcovery, as might enable him to caufe them to be apprehended;

Source 5b

TO conclude his Character, *Cromwell* was not fo far a Man of blood, as to follow *Machiavel's* method; which prefcribes, upon a total alteration of Government, as a thing absolutely neceffary, to cut off all the heads of thofe, and extirpate their Families, who are Friends to the old one. It was confidently reported, that, in the Council of Officers, it was more than once propofed, "that there might be a general Maffacre of all the Royal Party, as the only Expedient to cure the Government, but that *Cromwell* would never confent to it; it may be, out of too great a contempt of his Enemies. In a word, as he was guilty of many Crimes againft which Damnation is denounced, and for which Hell-fire is prepared, fo he had fome good Qualities which have caufed the Memory of fome Men in all Ages to be celebrated; and he will be look'd upon by Poffterity as a brave wicked Man.