

To what extent can
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This essay is going to focus upon Richard the Lionheart (1157 - 1199), whose very name is synonymous with courage and bravery. He is also recognised by the title 'Lionheart'™, as opposed to the legacy that most Kings and Queens leave, where they are recognised by a mere number; this stresses his importance as an historical figure. If there is a conclusion drawn by the majority, popular folklore would lead us to believe that Richard was the greatest King of the Middle Ages, particularly if the comparison is made against his brother King John, who myth again would believe was one of the weakest¹. Personally he was a man who displayed many fine attributes, such as being a man of culture, who would write poetry and songs, he was said to be attractive in his looks, which featured alongside a charming and chivalrous nature. Importantly, he was reported as being of a very pious nature, however, these Christian religious beliefs, where would one expect values of compassion and mercy to be at the forefront, is where one of the incongruities of his personality becomes apparent. As a man, and King, the legacy he left was that of a ruthless, cold-hearted, violent murderer.

This essay will attempt to explore the extent to which his personality was responsible for the atrocities that took place throughout the persecution of the Jews and the Saracens in the 3rd Crusade, while considering the social climate at the time, which may have contributed to his actions. Richard was born to King Henry II of England and the French born Eleanor of Aquitaine; he was the 3rd of 4 legitimate children and therefore he was never expected to ascend to the throne. When he was young his parents separated, his mother was granted custody and he grew up with her in France; reports also indicate that due to his French upbringing, Richard never really learned to speak

English. Throughout his life he had serious adversities with his father - Henry II - this came to a head when he sided with his brothers in a revolt where they tried to dethrone their father. However, again, the man of paradox showed when Henry II quelled the rebellions and took control of most of his lands. Even although Richard was the last to relinquish his position, when he realised he was going to be forced to fight his father he chose not to but meekly asked for his forgiveness instead.

The way he yielded to his father would indicate that he was not a man of strength and leadership; however, as a figure of contrasts, he wielded power in different ways by trying to contain the French nobles he was surrounded by, in their struggles to acquire more of his land, and as time progressed his personality showed more signs of ruthless cruelty in the way he would deal with these uprisings. His growing power and skill as an ??? military commander??™ was evidenced in 1179 when he defeated the nobles at the Fortress of Taillebourg, where previously treacherous nobles ended up declaring loyalty to him. This would appear to evidence the ruthlessness and mercilessness of Richard??™s character from a young age if hardened nobles yielded to his power instead of finding the strength, possibly even in numbers, to oppose him.

In contrast, Flori2 suggested that Richard played an influential role in making Aquitaine peaceful due to him being a heroic warrior and this was why he earned the affectionate nickname of ??? Lionheart??™. This does not indicate that he was using his strength of character to persecute those who were less powerful than he was. Throughout this time Richard??™s relationship with his father further deteriorated as he sought to take the English Crown for <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-can-we-attribute-responsibility-for-instances-of-persecution-in-history-to-the-influence-of-powerful-individuals/>

himself. His father, Henry II, wanted his oldest son, Henry the Young, to become King but Richard opposed this idea wanting all the power for himself and consequently refused to pay homage to Henry the Younger. This resulted in a battle in 1183, when Henry the Young and some of his nobles invaded Richard's territory in Aquitaine in order to suppress him; they managed to gain the support of the nobles that Richard had previously quashed and consequently owed him no loyalty. Despite this, Richard still defeated the invaders and once again his ruthless personality was evidenced when he order the execution of any prisoners taken. This underlying unrest continued until 1189, when after Richard had combined forces with King Philip of France and defeated Henry's army, King Henry agreed to have Richard succeed him, upon his death, to the throne of England.

Two days later King Henry was dead; many believed that it was Richard who had caused his father's death but nevertheless he was officially crowned King. This again would appear to indicate the callous and impatient nature of Richard's personality, whereby his arrogance would allow nothing to stand in the way of any goals he personally wanted to pursue. During his coronation at Westminster Abbey in 1189, Richard had decreed that there would be no women or no Jews allowed. Jews at this time were seen as unpopular figures due to the being seen as the ones who had murdered Jesus Christ and also because they were the money-lenders in the current society. Anti-Semitic feelings were running high where many of the supposedly rich land-owners owed enormous sums of money to these Jews and consequently, for selfish reasons when concerned about repayments, did not hold them in high esteem. When some rich Jews wanted to honour

Richard on his coronation and turned up at Westminster Abbey bearing gifts, it was regarded by the crowds as blasphemous and riots ensued throughout London, where persecuted Jews were murdered, burned and forced to endure forced Christian baptisms. Richard was allegedly furious when he discovered this, partly it was reported due to him regarding having his important day spoiled but more significantly he regarded the Jews as being an important source of revenue for the Royal treasury and he did not want this threatened.

3 The Jews through paying their taxes to the Crown were to be some of the largest financial contributors to Richard's desire to lead the Third Crusade and re-conquer the Holy Lands. He consequently ordered that three of the perpetrators of the riots should be hanged immediately and also allowed one of the Jews who had been forcibly baptised to continue with the Jewish religion. He further nationally issued a Royal Writ stating that Jews should not be persecuted. To his apparent credit this should make Richard appear to be a man of justice and compassion, who was concerned about all members of his realm; however on closer analysis, the reality would appear to be that his selfish nature was more concerned about the stability of the incoming funds from the Jewish money-lending sector and also he did not want his country de-stabilised just prior to his departure for the Holy Lands. Even the Writ that was produced was not wholly convincing, given what is known about the ruthless way he condemned prisoners to death and quashed the nobility in his earlier life, the Writ was a piece of weak legislation that did not count for much because as soon as Richard had left for the Crusades in 1190, the people of York turned on their Jewish

inhabitants and it led to the terrible atrocity of mass-suicide and massacre in York??™s Clifford Tower. 4 Whilst Richard cannot be directly blamed for the atrocities at York as he was out of the country at the time, he showed a degree of personal weakness at appointing four men who were to act in his name while he was gone.

These men did not have the benefit of the country at heart but rather were weak and self-serving. 5 William Longchamps was made Chief Justiciar and Chancellor and left in complete control of England; he appeared loyal to Richard and this was also bi-directional as Richard was loyal to Longchamps despite charges levelled at him of corruption and incompetence⁶

Longchamps also had little time for the plight of the Jews. 7 When Richard eventually returned from the Crusades in 1194 he was furious to learn about the attacks on the Jews as they were meant to be under royal protection; (but interestingly, due to another personality characteristic of his, did not blame Longchamps) this was because the Jews were the only money-lenders of the time and the money they provided helped to pay for a ransom to free him from Germany, where he had been kidnapped on the way home from the Crusades, but also for the vast expenditure that had been outlaid for the Third Crusade to take place. Richard, recognising his dependence upon the Jews, reformed the system of money-lending in order to protect the Jews; written documentation or bonds had to be supplied and stored at closely guarded institutions, often cathedrals, which were in the charge of a ??? troika??™ of officials, two of who were Jewish, two were Christian and the other two appointed by the Royal court. 8 This meant no-one could borrow money from a Jew and then murder him in order to destroy the bonds on

which the debt was written, which was allegedly common practice in these days.

9 This would indicate that while Richard had the ruthlessness in his character to ignore, or even encourage, the anti-Semitic of the age as a distraction to other issues that were occurring in England, or even the safer option of ignoring the rise of anti-Semitism as the masses appeared to believe in this principle and for the masses to turn against the ruler is always very potentially dangerous, he used his ruthlessness to protect the abused and unpopular minority. It can therefore be said that his personal characteristics prevented the overt persecution of the Jews at this stage, however, on closer examination, it would appear that this did not happen for charitable reasons but to protect his own reckless self-interest. In reality it meant that the Crown had full knowledge of the financial positions, not just of the Jews but also of those requiring loans and this could potentially be used for exploitation. 10As has been demonstrated previously Richard??™s character was full of paradoxes; whilst he was prepared to use his strength to prevent the persecution of the English money-lending Jews that were blamed and castigated throughout his land for their predecessors persecution of Christians and ultimately Jesus Christ, Richard was insistent upon going to the Holy Lands to persecute the Saracens because he viewed them as infidels, or unbelievers, and he felt urged to convert them to the Christian view. There is a belief that Richard, despite raising English taxes (known specifically as the Saladin tithes) to pay for the Crusades and further despite his deep overt piousness and declarations of wanting to convert the infidels,

was not doing this for English benefit but for personal glory and immortalisation and also to guarantee him a place in heaven.

11 With this form of egocentrism, he would surely believe God was on his side and his ruthless acts of persecution would be divinely encouraged and forgiven. In order for Richard to pursue his Crusade dream it meant his absence from England for a number of years. His dislike of cold, wet England after growing up in France was well-known but this impetuous side of his nature as demonstrated by his willingness to leave the country he had fought for and was meant to rule was potentially irresponsible as without the iron fist to rule it could leave the floodgates open for the persecution of minorities. However, Gillingham¹² conversely suggested that Richard instead of being reckless was in fact a strong, responsible leader, whose presence abroad was required in order to project England as a formidable, powerful country, in order to prevent the persecution of England from other, potentially more powerful nations.

He left England with an efficiently operational central administration in order for the smooth running of the country and therefore Gillingham believes any accusation of irresponsibility with Richard going off to the Crusades should be rejected. The reality of the situation is that Richard only spent six months of his ten year reign actually in England¹³ and speculatively this impulsivity in pursuing his other options could have lead to a more lawless society in Britain with an increase in persecutions. The real indication that Richard'sTM personality was directly responsible for persecution was in his reckless pursuit of the Third Crusades and his invasion of the Holy Lands. This was allegedly carried out in order to convert the infidels to Christianity, however, <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-can-we-attribute-responsibility-for-instances-of-persecution-in-history-to-the-influence-of-powerful-individuals/>

Bernal Diaz¹⁴ has said when describing the conquistadors over 400 years later the motive was ??? to serve God and become rich??™, the motives for the Crusades could be extremely similar.

This would show Richard??™'s personality again as being egocentric, where he could only see the world from his perspective; he was also going to show a ruthless, cold-hearted murderous side to his character as he quickly moved from town to town slaughtering many innocent people from the Holy Lands that may have unfortunately stood in his way. There was absolutely no recognition by Richard that to the ??? infidels??™ they were being persecuted by invaders from an inferior civilisation, not only in the arts and medicine but also in morals and justice. ¹⁵ The reason Richard felt compelled to embark upon the Third Crusade was that Saladin, a Kurdish man from lowly beginnings, had personally inspired the Saracens to regain the Muslim control of the Holy Lands, which had been taken from them during the First and Second Crusades. Richard, after an event free trip through Europe, arrived at the city of Acre, which was a strategic port, where he helped another Crusading army who were besieging the port to gain control of it. There were 3000 prisoners Saracen taken and Richard told them they would be freed if Saladin would pay for their release or else they were to be made slaves.

Due to Saladin not being able to meet the conditions of paying 200, 000 gold pieces, release 1500 Christian prisoners and return the Holy Cross to the Crusaders, Richard publically slaughtered 2700 of them in a brutal display of supremacy. This again demonstrates Richard??™'s personal brutality and callousness, while being able to justify his behaviour by stating his need to <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-can-we-attribute-responsibility-for-instances-of-persecution-in-history-to-the-influence-of-powerful-individuals/>

convert the infidels. If his need to convert the infidels was so great then surely the bargaining process would not have been necessary in the first place as he would have been able to start educating the prisoners in Christianity to start the process of their conversion, however, it would appear by his further actions of massacring his prisoners that conversion was not his main aim but rather the inexhaustible greed and egocentrism that drove him. Richard's next battle was the Battle of Arsuf, which was meant to be a skirmish as Richard realised he needed to move from water to water as he had to keep his armies hydrated.

He was under constant attack from Saladin's armies as he moved but the main ambush had been reserved for Arsuf but Richard had been made aware of the plans and managed to gain control due to Richard's extremely good strategic abilities, which gained him much respect both from his own men and Saladin's. It also made Saladin alter his military strategies, where he did not directly attack Richard again even though he was fighting on his home territory he would then use more cautious forms of fighting. Contrary to most Westerners viewpoints at the time of seeing the Saracens as uneducated, vicious heathens it transpired they had civilised societies with a fair, if harsh, judicial system where people got along in relative harmony. This was emphasised by their leader, Saladin, who was alleged to be very courteous, particularly in his treatment of women.

This can be seen in direct contrast to Richard, who had forbidden women from attending his coronation. Saladin was also renowned for his great diplomatic and military skills, both of which Richard were also meant to have in abundance. 16 Perhaps one of the main differences of character between <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-can-we-attribute-responsibility-for-instances-of-persecution-in-history-to-the-influence-of-powerful-individuals/>

the two men is that Saladin was renowned for being a very peaceable man, whose conquest of Jerusalem in 1187, (the reason for the Third Crusade) was a peaceful one; there was no bloodshed and he let everyone go free.

This is despite Jerusalem at the time having a large Christian population; he could in no way be accused of persecuting them. In contrast, as has been demonstrated by Richard??™s willingness to slaughter prisoners at Acre, the same abilities of reasoned justice did not apply to him when he was persecuting the indigenous population. Saladin??™s fairness was further demonstrated when Richard was trying to take Jerusalem and in battle was knocked off his horse. When Saladin witnessed this he sent another horse to him, in an act of chivalry and respect for Richard.

Richard then went onto relieve his forces at Jaffa, and sign a treaty with Saladin declaring a truce. In conclusion, it would appear that responsibility for instances of persecution in history can be due to the influence powerful individuals. As has been demonstrated in the case of Richard the Lionheart there are many instances both in his early days at Aquitaine when he struggled to maintain control of his lands and freely persecuted those he felt were usurping his authority. He did this with a callous ruthlessness that can only mainly be attributed to personality characteristics; within this though the caveat must be added that they were cruel, brutal times in which he lived and the value of life then is hard to quantify with how we now view it. A further defence of his actions in Aquitaine was that he may have been defending what he rightly felt to belong to him and therefore felt that the persecution of those that stood against him was justified.

It has however been further argued that his persecutory actions throughout the Holy Lands was indefensible. He cold-heartedly murdered defenceless prisoners, which was a repetition of his previous actions at Aquitaine, which was done purely as a result of his orders and consequently the argument of how influential one powerful individual is in the persecution of others needs very little further justification. This is particularly so when the comparison is drawn between the diplomatic Saladin and the more blood-thirsty Richard, who were both fighting the same battles at the same time; it indicates that there are other fairer ways to win battles, that circumstance and a reflection of the era of the time is not sufficient justification for persecution and consequently it is suggested that the persecution of individuals by those in more power ultimately reflect the cruel personal characteristics of the persecutor.