

Why was henry tudor able to overthrow richard iii essay sample



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There were many different factors that aided Henry in his overthrow of Richard. Commynes, their contemporary said he was a “ virtuous Prince”, implying it was his personal qualities that aided his cause. Many historians say that it was Richard III’s qualities that made him vulnerable, John Rous likening him to a scorpion with a “ smooth front” yet a “ stinging tail”.

Although Ross implied that the events at Bosworth and the treachery of his nobles were the downfall of Richard, saying, “ never again were the attitudes of three or four over-mighty subjects able to exercise so decisive an influence on the survival or death of an English Monarch”.

Although, a thought that cannot be ignored is that the outcome of Bosworth may have just been an unlucky and remarkable occurrence because not since 1066 had the English throne been won by an adventurer with such obscure claims as Henry Tudor. Even the events of 1688 when William of Orange overthrew James II have insufficient parallel with what happened at Bosworth. Richard III is reputable by many for being the most hated king in history for many reasons. The nature of his usurpation almost condemned him from the beginning, Richard made no attempt to quash the rumour that he had murdered his nephews; Richard would not even produce the boys!

Thus creating a great deal of mistrust and people seeking alternative monarchs from the very beginning of his reign. By bastardising Edward’s children to gain the throne Richard again angered many of Edward’s bereaved loyal subjects. Edward had been quite a respected and loved monarch and to make his children bastards was not only insulting the people’s beloved dead king, it in turn insulted them. Richard’s two pre-

emptive strikes before he seized the throne (he captured many potential rivals and had them murdered) led to chaos amongst the people.

It alienated many and made them believe he had planned the coup to seize the throne and this meant he could not get the initial support and respect he needed, unlike his brother. When he arrested the Archbishop of York, Bishop Morton and Thomas Lord Stanley, it led to uproar, meaning even more people despised him before he took the crown. This mistrust that stemmed from his usurpation meant he already had great enemies, many were upset and angered by their new king and therefore sought an alternative, which became Henry Tudor.

Richard's inability during his reign to be an effective king meant that his people were desperate for a more able alternative. Richard's growing indebtedness meant that he pledged the crown jewels and was allegedly taking forced loans, this upset and angered many. Richard's character, although we cannot be sure due to nearly all sources being affected by Tudor myth, was a deceitful one and reactions to him, shown by the immediate acceptance of Henry Tudor, can be seen as being negative. The nature of his usurpation shows him to be a strong and powerful leader, determined to do anything to get what he wanted.

This can be seen as a positive aspect to his character, but this also becomes a negative one. His tendency to act quickly (shown by his actions at Bosworth) and not thinking out fully the consequences of his actions meant that Henry Tudor almost had an open path at Bosworth to defeat him.

Richard's failure to stamp out significant opposition to him, despite his

suppression of the rebellion against him in 1483 caused significant problems. Most rebels journeyed abroad and joined in alliance with Henry Tudor – another element that increased Henry Tudor's ability to overthrow Richard.

Richard's limited success at courting popularity and his decreased power base were other main reasons as to why Henry was able to overthrow Richard. Finding men loyal to him rather than the House of York proved difficult and the few he found were generally men who were part of his ducal affinity built up in his brother's reign when he controlled the north. Putting these northerners in key positions in the south caused resentment among the southern nobility. Northerners therefore had vested interest in trying to prevent Richard from expanding his power base (so they could maintain their influence in the south).

Richard's inability to control his nobles was a great problem because many joined Henry, shown at Bosworth because with only one exception, no southern gentry fought for Richard. This treachery of his people again gave Henry Tudor a greater ability to overthrow Richard. This treachery at Bosworth again gave Henry greater advantage and although many say Richard was a courageous leader in battle, he failed to bring around all the "super magnates" during his reign. Richard's fate depended on his greatest magnates, aristocratic power and this was concentrated on three people and only one of these magnates was loyal, John Howard, Duke of Norfolk.

Richard was unable to keep Lord Stanley and the Stanley's unreliability was compounded by the fact he was married to Henry Tudor's mother.

Northumberland was angered by Richard's instatement of his nephew as

leader of the “ Council of the North” and therefore did not stay loyal to Richard. This failure meant Henry Tudor had even more advantage over him. Events at Bosworth underlined Richard’s tendency to act quickly without fully thinking out the consequences because he put everything on the outcome of one battle.

The treachery in Richard’s ranks (caused by his inability to keep all of his nobles happy) meant that although Richard’s army outnumbered Tudor’s he was let down by Northumberland’s inability to engage his force, which was large and well equipped. The lack of support at his critical hour reflected Richard’s mismanagement of patronage earlier in his reign. The vanguard success of the earl of Oxford against the loyal duke of Norfolk meant Henry Tudor had an advantage and the Stanley’s who were renowned for their tendency to change sides at the last moment were also the cause of Richard’s downfall and Henry’s ascension.

By Richard’s reckless charge (displaying his personality trait of behaving without thinking) it meant that Lord Stanley engaged his forces against Richard, having previously remained neutral (due to the fact that Lord Stanley’s son was being held captive by Richard). These 3, 000-8, 000 (the exact figure is unknown) men now being led against Richard meant that the battle ended quickly, resulting in Richard’s death. With their King dead, the path was cleared for Henry and the people declared Tudor as their new monarch. Richard’s misfortune played a great part in the acceptance of Henry Tudor as the new King.

Richard was unfortunate because he gained the throne when English overseas policies were at low ebb and when relations between England's closest neighbours (Brittany, Burgundy and France) were becoming more complex and unstable. If relations had not been so bad, the French may not have been so generous to Henry Tudor and he then would not have been able to lead an army against Richard. During the rebellion of 1483, Richard was unlucky because he did not manage to catch all of the rebels and many fled to France to join Henry Tudor and therefore it was unlucky that he never captured Tudor either.

Timing was all against Richard. If Henry's fleet had sailed only 2 days later than they did, Richard would not have gone to battle and therefore been killed. Henry was used by the French to protect France against invasion, although to dispel the Anglo-Breton-Burgundian-Orleanist threat, the French invaded Brittany with success and a treaty was signed on the 9th of August. Anne of Beaujeu then had no further need for Henry, but he had already set sail two days earlier, on the 7th.

It was an unhappy and unlucky occurrence that his only legitimate son, the heir to the throne, died. If he had lived, this would have strengthened the crown and the dynasty may have continued. Richard's wife, Anne Neville, died shortly after their son's death and therefore he did not have any legitimate heirs or a wife to mother them, which could not then secure the throne for his dynasty, weakening his position. Meaning that after Bosworth, they could not crown any of Richard's heirs – there was no real alternative.

The lack of alternatives for Richard meant that Henry Tudor's personal qualities aided him. Henry's age was suitable, he was 26 and of an age to fight. Whereas Edward earl of Warwick, another possible claimant was only a child (and in "honourable confinement by Richard".) Henry was male and therefore a strong claimant in that sense. The daughters of Edward IV (although they had been bastardised and were hiding in sanctuary) were unsuitable because they were female and would be unable to fight for power, unlike Henry.

Henry's mother gave him great advantage, she had Yorkist connections and landed great influence through her marriage to one of Richard's super magnates, Lord Stanley. She had friendship and connections with Elizabeth Woodville and John Morton the bishop of Ely. These informants meant that Henry could be one step ahead of his opposition. As Henry lived in France and had done so since 1471 no one knew anything about him, he had no bad reputation like Richard and no apparent baggage from his past, unlike Richard.

This freedom he gained from being abroad meant that he could act to gain support and plan campaigns. The only other alternative that had claim was male (although of female descent) and of age was John, the earl of Lincoln. However, John of Lincoln was loyal to Richard, and therefore was not a very good alternative to the King they despised. Henry, in the eyes of the subjects of Richard was perfect, he had claim through the line of John of Gaunt and had Lancastrian credentials. The Lancastrians were the enemies of the Yorkists and therefore, he the ideal alternative.

Although there were many different reasons for Henry Tudor's support during Richard's reign and after his death, the main reasons were Richard III himself and Henry Tudor's attractiveness in comparison. All of the aspects of Henry's support – his personal qualities, the support of Henry by the French and attitude of the French government towards Richard and the events at Bosworth were all for the same underlying issue, they all wanted Richard off the throne and Henry was their only alternative. Rous concluded that “ Although Richard III's days were short, they were ended with no lamentation from his groaning subjects. “