<u>Henry VII: Underappreciated Icon</u>

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Henry VII is one of the most inspirational figures in all of English history, and yes, that is a hill I'm willing to die on. Everybody always overlooks him because of his nephew-murdering predecessor Richard III or his incredibly problematic son Henry VIII, and that is a tragedy, because there is so much we can learn from him. I fully credit him with giving me a new outlook on life, and in this essay, I'm going to explain why.

You see, I often find my greatest inspirations in the historical figures I read about. I've always had a deep love for history books, and it's only grown stronger with time. The people I read about aren't perfect, but they are timeless and human in a way that is deeply impactful, even centuries after their deaths. Gaining a deeper understanding for them and the world they've lived in has taught me more about appreciating and understanding life than anything else. And among these historical gems– men like Francis Drake and Abraham Lincoln– Henry VII stands out to me.

First, a little history is in order. When Henry VII was born, it would have been laughable to suggest he'd end up as king. He was the product of an illegitimate line explicitly forbidden from holding the throne, born to thirteen-year-old widow Margaret Beaufort. That he and his mother survived that birth was already a miracle. And just a few years after his birth his whole family– the house of Richmond– was removed from power in a Yorkist coup, leaving Henry disinherited and under the power of the new Yorkist king Edward IV. Though his family would briefly regain control a decade later, it wasn't to last and this time, Henry was forced into exile with the rest of his family. All the legitimate royals on his side had been wiped out, it should've ended for Henry right there, but it didn't. Because when Edward died and literal Shakespeare villain Richard III took the throne, Henry had his chance. And at the much-remembered Battle of Bosworth in 1485, he took the throne, becoming the very first Tudor monarch of England.

And then, he proceeded to rule England in the weirdest way possible. He didn't wage wars. He didn't joust. He didn't even have affairs. He didn't do anything expected of a medieval king. He fined the rich nobles in his country huge amounts of money, just because he could. He stripped nobles of their private armies and pursued diplomacy overseas, curtailing conflict at home and abroad. He understood that only financial security and lasting peace would create a secure country, and he pursued those things without caring whether others thought he was a good king. And he wasn't anything like the masculine ideal kings were supposed to live up to. He ruled England like a peaceable 21st century accountant, rather than a medieval warrior king, and it worked like a charm. England ended his reign more financially stable than it had been in decades, facing a true and prolonged peace after the serious instability caused by the Wars of the Roses. Not to mention, he started the most famous dynasty of English monarchs– the one that would end in none other than Elizabeth I.

So, why does Henry VII inspire me? A few reasons. First, his sheer persistence. He lived in exile for over a decade, and for much of that time, there was basically no chance he'd ever ascend to the throne. But he kept on, waiting for his moment, and when it came, he didn't hesitate. He sailed across the channel, won victory in battle, and then proceeded to avoid anything else exciting for his entire 24-year reign. Second, he went against the grain. He wasn't anything like most medieval kings, and even now he's judged for that. But what he did still brought peace and stability to his country. It's a living lesson in not following the path marked

out for you just because it's what everyone else expects. Sometimes, it's in reinventing your role that you can achieve the greatest good.

I love studying history. I'm not completely sure yet, but it'll probably be what I major in. Living in the year 2021, it's easy to feel disconnected and alone. I live in Hawaii with my mom, but the rest of my family lives out on the west coast. Living here, knowing I too am probably going to move far away one day, it's like I *am* an island, instead of just living on one. Since the pandemic, so many people have felt like islands, drifting alone in a vast sea.

For me, history is the proof we are all part of a larger story; that there is no such thing as a human island. History is the great record of everything people have done, and everyone gets their shot at writing part of it. I can look back, search for wisdom and inspiration in those who have come before me, even as I am writing my own small part of things. When you study history, you're never alone, never in bad company. You can sit down and talk with anyone you like, learn their stories no matter how much time or space there is between you.

One of my great goals in life is to share the wonderful things history has taught me with the world. So many people brush history aside, and that's a tragedy, because I know that in a story as vast and meaningful as history, there's something for everyone to appreciate and learn from.