

A Level History Transition Materials

The examined element of the History A Level is divided into two very different topics:

Paper 1 – The Making of a Superpower: the USA, 1865-1975

Paper 2 – The Wars of the Roses, 1450-1499

These transition materials are designed to give you some background to both elements of the course, which will give you a strong starting point for the beginning of the course in September.

Please complete the following:

1. Use the two resources called 'Lincoln task sheet' and 'Lincoln cards' to make some judgements about Abraham Lincoln, who was the president of the USA at the beginning of our study in 1865.
2. Read the 'Remember the Alamo' background reading. It provides you with small snippets of information about several issues in the USA prior to 1865 and also begins to give you some insight into the very beginning of our course. Pick out 5 things that you think help to explain the state of the USA in 1865.
3. The end of the American Civil War brings a period known as Reconstruction, when they are trying to rebuild their divided nation. Different people have different views on what this should look like. Read the Radical Reconstruction documents and then write a summary paragraph explaining which of the two men – Thaddeus Stevens or Andrew Johnson – you think has the best approach and why.
4. Read the article about the Wars of the Roses. Pick out what you think are the five key things that sum up the message of the article.
5. Watch the following clip and then write a conclusion in 1-2 paragraphs explaining reasons why Richard II's reign failed and what this meant for the future of the monarchy. We will not be studying Richard II as part of our course, but it is important to know the consequences of his Usurpation (being removed from power) as it is key to the whole of the Wars of the Roses course.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI5Am9LP8-Y>

The Making of a Superpower: The USA 1865-1975

Lincoln Task

Key question: Should President Lincoln be viewed as a hero for emancipating the slaves?

Read through the information below about US president Abraham Lincoln:

In 1863, the USA was in the middle of a bitter Civil War. It would last for another two years. North was pitted against South, with President Lincoln as the leader of the Northern Union forces.



For many black slaves in the South, this war provided them with hope. This was the hope that the North would win the war and that they would soon be freed from slavery.

In January 1863, President Lincoln issued the *Emancipation Proclamation*, which stated that the slaves in all states of America were now free.



Hero - a person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements or noble/moral qualities.

Lincoln's parents were members of a Baptist church, which had restrictive moral standards and opposed alcohol, dancing and slavery.

Lincoln's mother died when he was nine. His father remarried a year later and Lincoln became very close to his step-mother. Lincoln's only surviving sibling, a sister, died in childbirth when he was nineteen.

Lincoln was largely self-educated. He had some formal schooling from several different teachers, but it probably amounted in total to less than a year. He was an avid reader and retained a lifelong interest in learning.

He was strong and athletic and gained a reputation for brawn and audacity after a very competitive wrestling match with the renowned leader of a group of ruffians known as "the Clary's Grove boys".

In 1831 Lincoln and some friends were hired by a merchant to take goods by flatboat from New Salem to New Orleans by rivers. After arriving in New Orleans—and witnessing slavery firsthand—Lincoln returned home.

Early on, Lincoln shared the view of the 'free soil' group, which neither supported slavery nor its abolition. He made a speech about this in 1837, saying that *"slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy, but . . . abolition doctrines tend to increase than abate its evils."*

Lincoln's father-in-law and others of the Todd family were either slave owners or slave traders. Lincoln was close to the Todds, and he and his family occasionally visited the Todd estate in Lexington.

In 1836, Lincoln became a lawyer, after teaching himself law. Around this time, he was also elected to the House of Representatives - part of the US Congress (or government).

In 1836 in the House of Representatives Lincoln voted in favour of a law that gave the vote to all white men, whether they were landowners or not.

In 1840, Lincoln became engaged to Mary Todd, who was from a wealthy slave-holding family in Lexington, Kentucky. They were married in 1842.

In 1846, Lincoln wrote a bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, with compensation for the owners, enforcement to capture fugitive slaves and a popular vote on the matter. He abandoned the bill when it failed to get enough supporters.

From a speech made by Lincoln about slavery in 1854: *"I cannot but hate it. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world ..."*

In the years leading up to the Civil War, Lincoln increasingly argued that the Founding Fathers of America would have opposed slavery on the basis that all men were created equal in the eyes of God, and that it should therefore be abolished.

The Northern states of America were generally non-slave owning and supportive of the abolition of slavery. Southern states were mainly slave-owning as a result of the huge plantations that needed workers. The South, therefore, wanted to keep slavery.

When Lincoln was elected as US President in 1861, the Southern states broke away from the Union, fearful that the abolition of slavery was imminent. The Northern Union states then went to war with the South to force them to remain in the Union.

From a letter written by Lincoln in August 1862: *"If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that."*

Frederick Douglass (an escaped slave who became a social reformer) once observed of Lincoln: *"In his company, I was never reminded of my humble origin, or of my unpopular color"*.

Lincoln delivered a speech on April 11th 1865, which promoted voting rights for blacks. In the audience was a Southern sympathiser called John Wilkes Booth. He was so incensed by what Lincoln had to say that he assassinated him on 14th April.

In surveys which rank US presidents that have been conducted since the 1940s, Lincoln is consistently ranked in the top three, often as number one.

President Lincoln's assassination increased his status to the point of making him a national martyr.

THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATES

1858

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates took place during the 1858 campaign for control of the Illinois legislature. Seven debates were held between Democratic incumbent Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln for the newly formed Republican Party. They traveled thousands of miles across Illinois, debating in Ottawa, Freeport, Jonesboro, Charleston, Galesburg, Quincy, and Alton. The debates centered on the contentious issue of slavery—attracting huge crowds and reporters from the national newspapers, which printed the debates verbatim—and are remembered as much for their format and eloquence as for the content of the speeches.

The two candidates held widely opposing views on slavery. Douglas was a supporter of states' individual rights, whereas Lincoln believed that allowing each territory to dictate its own policy served only to endorse and perpetuate slavery as an acceptable practice. Douglas attempted to paint Lincoln as a radical "Black Republican" intent on freeing all slaves, raising their status to equality with whites, and inciting civil war. Lincoln denied being a radical, insisting that he did not wish to bring about the political and social equality of the races, but believed nonetheless that every living man had a right to life, liberty, and the fruits of his own labor.

At Freeport, Douglas was cornered into alienating free-soil Northerners as well as pro-slave Southerners with his vague compromise, the Freeport Doctrine, which supported the Dred Scott Decision in theory but popular sovereignty in practice. He was re-elected to the Senate, but had ruined his presidential chances. Lincoln, however, emerged from the debates as a serious presidential candidate.

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CONFEDERATE STATES AND SOUTHERN SECESSION

1861



In the months after Lincoln's election, seven Southern slave states fulfilled their pre-election threat and broke away from the Union. South Carolina was the first to secede, soon followed by Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

In the "lame duck" months before Lincoln's inauguration, President James Buchanan struggled for a compromise to avert the crisis, but took no decisive action. By the time of Lincoln's inauguration, the seven seceding states had formed the Confederate States of America, and elected Jefferson Davis as their president. Davis rejected a Washington-led compromise, regarding any submission as a risk to Southern liberty. The Confederacy adopted a new constitution that defended the right to slave-ownership, declaring "the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man."

Eight Southern states remained in the Union, and Lincoln cautiously hoped secession would soon dissolve of its own accord. Many Northerners recognized the economic significance of the South, fearing secession more than they loathed slavery, but Lincoln insisted that the Union would not fire the first shot.

On April 12, 1861, Davis ordered his forces to fire at Northern-controlled Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. Lincoln responded by sending 75,000 troops into the South. Within weeks, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas joined the Confederacy, making a total of eleven states. The Civil War had begun.

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THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1860

With the slavery debate polarizing Americans as never before, the presidential election of 1860 promised to be a fierce battle. The Democrats nominated their forthright pro-slavery spokesman Stephen A. Douglas, while the Republicans, whose policy was a ban on the further spread of slavery, nominated Abraham Lincoln. Having become increasingly visible—and vocal—in the latter 1850s, dedicating much of his political energy to the condemnation of slavery, Lincoln had swiftly been propelled to the forefront of the Republican Party, and was a natural choice of candidate in an election that would focus almost solely on that issue.

Unlike his opponents, Lincoln declined to hold rallies or to give speeches, and his name did not even appear on a number of Southern ballot slips, yet he defeated his rivals—who also included Vice President John C. Breckinridge for the breakaway Southern Democratic Party, and Tom Bell for the Constitutional Party—with 180 electoral votes, at a time when 152 were needed to win. Breckinridge, his nearest rival, received only 72.

Lincoln's immense popularity in the North carried him to power, but his opponents in the Southern states—not a single one of which he had won—were incensed. Threats of secession had preceded the election, but Lincoln's move to the White House finally pushed the most radical Southern states to make an official attempt at splitting from the Union.

GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE

1861-65

From the outset, the Confederate Army representing the Southern states was vastly outnumbered by the Union forces in the North. But size was not to be the only factor determining military victories in the Civil War: conflicting loyalties also played a major role.

A week after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, Lincoln appointed Robert E. Lee as commander of the Union forces. An experienced and well-respected colonel in the US Army, Lee had already proven his talent for tactical warfare. But he was also a Virginian, and Virginia's ensuing secession from the Union forced him to reject the commission and defect to the Confederate Army, unable and unwilling to lead the Union into battle against his home state. Other commanders and troops did likewise, and the Union was forced to fill its vacancies with new leaders and inexperienced conscripts rather than military veterans.

In the first year of the war, General Lee acted as a key military adviser to the Confederate leaders, as a result of which he was given command of the Confederate Army in June 1862. He was adept at both leading and confronting an army on the field, and many historians agree that he was one of the last great eighteenth-century-style generals. Despite facing a more modern style of total warfare, in which little distinction was made between civilian and military targets, General Lee distinguished himself during the Civil War, and was promoted to general-in-chief just months before the Confederate Army was finally forced into surrender.

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THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

1862

At the outset of war, President Lincoln's primary concern had been to keep the border slave states of Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri in the Union. To that end, Congress had passed the Crittenden Compromise, offering assurance that the Union had no plans for abolition. But when an influx of fugitive slaves joined the ranks of the Union Army, the question of slavery became impossible to ignore. Furthermore, their knowledge of Confederate movements in the South provided an invaluable source of intelligence that Union leaders couldn't afford to dismiss.

Suddenly the anti-slavery lobby was able to use emancipation as a war cry. Slave labor was the cornerstone of the Southern economy, and to outlaw it—as the government technically could, since it refused to recognize the independence of the Confederate States—would seriously undermine the Southern war effort. Emancipation was no longer a liberal aspiration but a Unionist demand.

Bolstered by military success in Maryland, a crucial border slave state, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862. The Proclamation outlawed slave-ownership in any Confederate state that failed to rejoin the Union by 1 January 1863, although Unionist border slave states were exempt. But Lincoln had not counted on the adverse effect it would have among working-class Northerners, whose support for the Civil War diminished amid fears that an influx of African-American laborers would threaten their job security. The number of volunteers consequently fell so sharply that the Union had to resort to conscription in March 1863. That same spring, African Americans were recruited for the first black regiments of the US Army.

THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

July 1863

In May 1863, the Confederates defeated Union forces at Chancellorsville, Virginia, but lost at Jackson, Mississippi, and were besieged by General Grant's forces at Vicksburg. In June, the Confederate General Lee embarked upon another campaign to push through to Washington DC by advancing into Pennsylvania toward Gettysburg.

On July 1, 1863, the Battle of Gettysburg began. It was a ferocious three-day conflict involving a total of 165,000 men, the largest battle ever to be fought on American soil. The Union put up a strong defense, digging trenches and resisting wave after wave of Confederate attacks. On the third day, Confederate leaders made a final concentrated advance of more than 10,000 men toward the center of the Union line. Almost half the advancing Confederates were mowed down by Union artillery fire as they crossed the open field.

Those three days resulted in more than 50,000 casualties. Lee ordered a retreat and Confederate troops fled the North; the decimated and battle-weary Union forces made no attempt at pursuit.

Gettysburg was a major turning point in the war: the Confederates lost a third of their total army and, as Lee began his retreat, Vicksburg capitulated to Grant's siege. This devastating surrender of 30,000 Confederate troops put the Mississippi Valley under Union control, leading many people to believe that the end of the Civil War was in sight.

SURRENDER AT APPOMATTOX

April 9, 1865

With Georgia under Union control, General Sherman led a similarly destructive assault upon first South Carolina and then North Carolina in the early months of 1865. In his wake, slaves rose up against their owners, just as Congress approved the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery throughout the Union, with no exceptions for border states. Lincoln was elected president for a second term, and pledged to "bind up the nation's wounds."

In June 1864, Generals Grant and Lee both marched on the town of Petersburg, Virginia, which controlled the railroad into the Confederate capital, Richmond. Confederate forces arrived first, so Grant embarked upon a siege of the city that was to last nine months. General Lee had seen Grant's siege tactics work with devastating effect at Vicksburg the previous summer, but his need to protect Richmond left him little choice.

Daily shellfire and intense hunger took its toll, and Lee's men began to desert. On April 2, 1865, Grant drove the Confederates out of Petersburg, and Richmond fell the following day. Lee and his considerably depleted army fled the city but were easily apprehended, and he surrendered to the Union at the Appomattox Court House in Virginia on April 9.

President Lincoln insisted upon generous treatment of the surrendering Confederate forces, echoing the speech he had made at his second inauguration, in which he called for "malice toward none" and "charity for all." The Civil War, in which over 600,000 men died either in action or from their injuries, was finally over.

THE ASSASSINATION OF LINCOLN

April 14, 1865

John Wilkes Booth was an actor from Maryland with strong Confederate sympathies. In 1864, Booth and eight others plotted to kidnap President Lincoln and hold him hostage until the federal government released Confederate prisoners of war. But their plans were foiled by a late change in Lincoln's schedule.

In early April 1865, General Lee's surrender and Lincoln's speech calling for African Americans to be granted the right to vote prompted Booth to renew his scheme. Vehemently opposed to African-American suffrage and determined the war was not over, Booth and his fellow conspirators now planned a series of assassinations: President Lincoln and General Grant would be killed at Washington's Ford Theater on April 14. Vice President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward would be killed that same evening.

General Grant escaped his fate through a last-minute change of plans, but Booth made his way to the theater's Presidential Box and shot Lincoln in the back of the head before leaping onto the stage and absconding through the wings. Lincoln died the following morning. Seward survived a savage knife attack in his bed that evening, while Johnson was spared by the failed nerve of his would-be assassin, George Atzerodt, who instead sat drinking in the bar at the hotel in which the vice president was staying, before disappearing.

Booth was later tracked down in Maryland and killed by Union soldiers. All eight conspirators, including Atzerodt, were arrested and tried by military tribunal, and all were found guilty; four were hanged.

THE HOMESTEAD ACT 1863

The Civil War brought about a dramatic transformation of the American economy, as the storekeepers and farmers who had previously typified the Northern states made way for industrialization on a grand scale. The pre-war secession of eleven Southern states also gave Northern Congressmen the chance to pursue policies they had long wanted to implement.

For several years, Congress had hotly debated a Republican-backed plan to give free land to settlers in the West. But Southern Congressmen had thrown it out at every opportunity, fearing that a rise in the number of small farms would threaten large plantations. Southern secession gave the Republican Party the chance it needed, and the Homestead Act came into effect on January 1, 1863, the same day as the Emancipation Proclamation.

The Homestead Act offered the opportunity for settlers to claim 160 acres of publicly owned land in exchange for a nominal fee, on the condition that they remain resident on the land for the first five years.

Homesteads were particularly attractive to new immigrants and to the sons of previously established farmers. By the early twentieth century, the act had enabled over 600,000 families to claim farms of their own. Its honorable, small-scale intentions became outdated as agricultural corporations increased, however, and it was eventually repealed in 1976.

ANDREW JOHNSON AND RECONSTRUCTION 1866-77

After Lincoln's death, Vice President Andrew Johnson took over the remainder of his term. Johnson had entered Tennessee politics as a pro-slavery Democrat, but with a deep-seated mistrust of plantation owners. After Tennessee's secession, Johnson was the only Southern senator to remain in Congress, where his "unwavering commitment to the Union" impressed Lincoln.

Johnson's plans for Reconstruction focused on the interests of working-class, white Southerners. He implemented Lincoln's amnesty for any Confederate who pledged allegiance to the Union, and ignored radical Republican cries for harsher punishment. But he excluded plantation owners, whom he blamed for the war, insisting they beg in person for a presidential pardon. Finally, he allowed any state that adopted the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery, back into the Union before passing control of the plantations back to former slave-owners and declaring Reconstruction complete.

Steadily, the former Confederate states rejoined the Union but retaliated against the Thirteenth Amendment with Black Codes, depriving freed slaves of the rights to vote, own property, testify against whites, or bear arms. In 1866, Congress counteracted with the Civil Rights Act, denying states the power to restrict African-American voting rights. Johnson tried to veto the act, but the Republicans pushed it through and subsequently adopted the Fourteenth Amendment, making the protection of the rights of all Americans a government responsibility. As Reconstruction deepened the divide between Johnson and the Republicans, the states were also still far from united.

Thaddeus Stevens (ORIGINAL)

The cause of the war was slavery. We have liberated the slaves. It is our duty to protect them, and provide for them while they are unable to provide for themselves. Have we not a right, in the language of Vattel, "to do ourselves justice respecting the object which has caused the war," by taking lands for homesteads [sic: for] these "objects" of the war?

Have we not a right, if we chose to go to that extent, to indemnify ourselves for the expenses and damages caused by the war? We might make the property of the enemy pay the \$4,000,000,000 which we have expended, as well as the damages inflicted on loyal men by confiscation and invasion, which might reach \$1,000,000,000 more. This bill is merciful, asking less than one tenth of our just claims.

I suppose none will deny the right to confiscate the [sic: preperty] of the several belligerent States, as they all made war as States; or of the Confederate States of America; for no one ever denied the right of the conqueror to the crown property of the vanquished sovereign, even where the seizure of private property would not be justified by the circumstances. . . .

The fourth section provides, first, that out of the lands thus confiscated each liberated slave who is a male adult, or the head of a family, shall have assigned to him a homestead of forty acres of land, (with \$100 to build a dwelling) which shall be held for them by trustees during their pupilage.

Let us consider whether this is a just and [sic: politic] provision.

Whatever may be the fate of the rest of the bill, I must earnestly pray that this may not be defeated. On its success, in my judgment, depends not only the happiness and respectability of the colored race, but their very existence. Homesteads to them are far more valuable than the immediate right of suffrage, though both are their due.

Four million of persons have just been freed from a condition of dependence, wholly unacquainted with business transactions, kept systematically in ignorance of all their rights and of the common elements of education, without which none of any race are competent to earn an honest living, to guard against the frauds which will always be practiced on the ignorant, or to judge of the most judicious manner of applying their labor. But few of them are mechanics, and none of them skilled manufacturers. They must necessarily, therefore, be the servants and victims of others, unless they are made in some measure independent of their wiser neighbors. The guardianship of the Freedmen's Bureau, that benevolent institution, cannot be expected long to protect them. It encounters the hostility of the old slaveholders, whether in official or private station, because it deprives these dethroned tyrants of the luxury of despotism. In its nature it is not calculated for a permanent institution. Withdraw that protection and leave them a prey to the legislation and treatment of their former masters, and the evidence already furnished shows that they will soon become extinct, or driven to defend

themselves by civil war. Withhold from them all their rights, and leave them destitute of the means of earning a livelihood, the victims of the hatred or cupidity of the rebels whom they helped to conquer, and it seems probable that the war of races might ensue which the President feared would arise from kind treatment and restoration of their rights. I doubt not that hundreds of thousands would annually be deposited in secret, unknown graves. Such is already the course of their rebel murderers; and it is done with impunity. . . . Make them independent of their old masters, so that they may not be compelled to work for them upon unfair terms, which can only be done by giving them a small tract of land to cultivate for themselves, and you remove all this danger. You also elevate the character of the freedman. Nothing is so likely to make a man a good citizen as to make him a freeholder. Nothing will so multiply the productions of the South as to divide it into small farms. Nothing will make men so industrious and moral as to let them feel that they are above want and are the owners of the soil which they till. It will also be of service to the white inhabitants. They will have constantly among them industrious laborers, anxious to work for fair wages. How is it possible for them to cultivate their lands if these people were expelled? If Moses should lead or drive them into exile, or carry out the absurd idea of colonizing them, the South would become a barren waste.

Source: Thaddeus Stevens, speech to Congress, March 19 1867.

THE HISTORY ESSAY



Henry Payne's *Plucking the Red and White Roses in the Old Temple Garden* (1910) shows noblemen declaring their allegiances by choosing colors, an interpretation of the conflicts that is "misleading, distorted, oversimplified and – in parts – deliberately false"

DID THE TUDORS INVENT THE WARS OF THE ROSES?

It was in Henry VII's interests to propagate the concept of a titanic clash of dynasties in the 15th century – and for 500 years we've bought the lie

By Dan Jones

BOOKS

THE HISTORY ESSAY

In an early spring day in 1592, The Rose – a theatre in the London suburb of Southwark – filled with one of the largest crowds seen that year. The men and women who crossed London Bridge and scurried into the theatre from the dirty streets lined with brothels and bear pits had come to

see *Henry the sixth*, performed by Lord Strange's Men. Today we call it *Henry VI, Part 1*, by William Shakespeare.

Henry the sixth was a hot ticket. Its exciting storyline – noble intrigue and monarchy in peril – echoed the uncertain spirit of the 1590s. Its battle scenes made full use of the Rose's wide stage, thrilling the audience with maces and slaughter, explosions and duels. It was tender, too: Lord Strange's actors could move theatregoers to tears.

But there was another thrill to this new drama. *Henry the sixth* belonged to a new genre of "history" plays, which depicted – or claimed to depict – England's recent past. In this case, the subject was the period of upheaval we now call the Wars of the Roses.

"The first friends to wear my bleeding roses," cried Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, in *Henry the sixth*. Standing in a rose garden, he has plucked a red flower from a great bush that stands between him and his mistress, Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York. York has selected a white rose – "with this maiden blossom in my hand I scorn thee," he spits – and the nobles standing by have followed suit, choosing the colour of their rose to advertise their allegiance.

In 1592, this image made perfect sense. This was how the Wars of the Roses were generally understood. Against the backdrop of weak kingship and disastrous military defeat in France, two rival branches of the Plantagenet dynasty – Lancaster and York – had gone to war for the throne, using red and white roses as emblems of their causes. The war had shattered the country, causing tens of thousands of deaths and incalculable misery.

Only after decades of chaos had the family rift been healed by the victory of a Lancasterian, Henry Tudor, over a Yorkist, Richard III, at Bosworth in 1485. Henry's victory, and his subsequent marriage to Elizabeth of York, reconciled the warring factions. Thus had been created the red-and-white "Tudor rose" that seemed to be painted everywhere, reminding the populace that the Tudors stood for unity, reconciliation, peace and the incontestable right to rule.

It was a powerful and easily grasped story that, by Shakespeare's day, had already been in circulation for 100 years. And, in part thanks to the success of Shakespeare's brilliant cycle of history plays, this vision of the Wars of the Roses remains in circulation – on television, in film and in popular historical fiction. Lancaster versus York, red versus white: it is a story as easy to grasp as a football match at the end

of which everyone swaps shirts. Yet it is misleading, distorted, oversimplified and – in parts – deliberately false.

In England, the 14th century ended badly – with regicide. Richard II, having been deposed by his cousin, Henry Bolingbroke, was murdered in prison during the early days of 1400. The usurper Henry IV endured a troubled reign, but his son, Henry V, achieved stunning successes in the wars with France – notably the battle of Agincourt in 1415 and the treaty of Troyes in 1420, by which Henry V laid claim to the French crown for his descendants.

But in 1422 Henry V died of dysentery. His heir was a nine-month-old son, Henry VI, whose birthright – the dual monarchy – required the men around him both to pursue an expensive defensive war in France and also to keep order in an England that was fairly glowing with dukes, earls and bishops of royal blood. Disaster surely loomed.

Or did it? It is often assumed that the Wars of the Roses began simply because, by the 15th century, there were too many men of royal blood clamouring around the crown, vying for power and influence over a weak-willed king. Yet if that were the case, civil war would have broken out straight after Henry V's death. The baby king was watched over by two charismatic and extremely "royal" uncles, John, Duke of Bedford, and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. In addition, many more adult relatives of royal descent were expecting a stake in power, including Cardinal Henry Beaufort, bishop of Winchester, who maintained a bitter feud with Gloucester.

Yet the 1420s saw no serious unrest. Rather than fighting one another, the English nobles showed a remarkable unity of purpose at the moment of greatest royal weakness. They did not live off into dynastic factions, but stuck together, kept the peace and attempted to preserve a normal system of royal government. Even when men came to blows, as Beaufort and Humphrey did in 1426, the violence was quickly stopped and the protagonists reprimanded. There were no roses. There was no blood. And this peace lasted a long time.

But Henry VI grew up a very strange man. Perhaps this was unsurprising: denied the apprenticeship of prisonhood, child kings tended not to become very able rulers – witness Henry III and Richard II. Yet no medieval English king was ever as weak as the adult Henry VI.

He was indecisive, absent, vague and naive, an impossibly innocent and superstitious king whose flaws could be explained by embarrassed courtiers only



The Bosworth Crucifix, found at, or near to, the battlefield site in the 18th century, may have been carried by Richard III's retinue

BBC History Magazine

BBC History Magazine

THE HISTORY ESSAY

"Though the white rose was one of a number of badges used by York and his family, the 'Lancastrian' royal family never used the red rose as a symbol during the conflict"

in terms of his great personal piety. But this was of little use in winning a war with France, and Henry's gentle, bovine incompetence and lack of military leadership soon became a terrible problem.

Henry was anointed king of France in 1418, but never fought for his crown. At home, meanwhile, he was hopeless: unable to offer any direction to government, unable to keep the peace between noble families who fell out (such as the Beaufort and Courtenay families in south-west England, and the Neville and Percy clans in the north) and incapable of choosing wisely between competing counsellers.

Yet Henry's weak kingship did not immediately cause a dynastic war. England coped for a remarkably long time – thanks chiefly to the efforts of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk. With office in the royal household, a post on the royal council, a close personal relationship with Henry VI and a substantial array of landholdings across southern and eastern England, Suffolk directed royal government from behind the scenes to an increasing extent through the 1440s, tacitly supported by a large group of other nobles. By the time Suffolk fell from power (impeached by parliament and murdered by rebellious sailors off the coast of Kent in May 1450), Henry VI's reign was 28 years old – yet still there had been no civil war.

What had happened, however, was a devastating English collapse in France. It began around 1429 with the arrival of Joan of Arc before the walls of Orléans, continued with the gradual loss of Normandy

to the forces of Charles VII of France, and ended on 17 July 1453 with humiliation and defeat at the battle of Castillon, when the renowned captain John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, was killed.

This war rooked English pride, wrought havoc on royal finances and created personal feuds (but not dynastic rivalry) between men such as Richard, Duke of York, and Edmund, Duke of Somerset. It also sent Henry VI mad.

Henry's illness rendered him catatonic. It came in bouts, the first in 1453–54, and it emboldened his mistress, resulting in civil war. At the first battle of St Albans on 22 May 1455, the king's cousin, Richard of York, and his allies including Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick – the "Kingmaker" – defeated forces led by Somerset. What followed, it's usually suggested, was 30 years of intermittent civil war in which York fought Lancaster, the crown changed hands and eventually the Tudors won at Bosworth. But it wasn't quite that simple.

We will understand the Wars of the Roses better if we divide them into four phases.

During the first, from 1455 to 1460, there was a confused attempt to vie for control of government. Richard of York argued that his great aristocratic lineage and proximity to the king in blood (as third cousin, once removed, on his mother's side) gave him the right to steer government during the king's incapacity. Queen Margaret, though, jealously defended her own rights and those of her infant son, Edward, Prince of Wales, by allying with the Beaufort family and others. This was not chiefly a dynastic conflict, though all protagonists had royal blood, but a tussle for political dominance.

This phase came to an abrupt end in 1460 when York, having been defeated in battle at Ludford, begged the previous year, and assumed that his only hope for survival lay in escalating the argument. Finally, he decided to claim the crown itself. When Neville defeated a royal army at Northampton, Henry VI was forced to disinherit Prince Edward and appoint York and his descendants to the royal succession.

Then – and only then – the wars became dynastic. And it is worth noting that, though the white rose was one of a number of badges used by York and his family, the "Lancastrian" royal family never used the red rose as a symbol during the conflict.

This second phase lasted about a decade. York died at the battle of Wakefield in 1460, but his son Edward took up his royal claim and, after victories at the battles of Mortimer's Cross and Towton in 1461, took the throne as Edward IV. Yet he had neither killed nor captured Henry VI or Prince Edward, so spent the first 30 years of his reign fighting to secure his crown. He won battles at Hexham and Hedgeley Moor, and wed a "Lancastrian" – a widowed minor noblewoman, Elizabeth Woodville – pre-empting Henry VIII's inter-factional marriage by more than 20 years. Alas, no intertwined roses were produced – and Edward's omission would be the Tudors' gain.

PLACES

THE HISTORY ESSAY



This 19th-century miniature depicts Edward IV striking Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick – the "Kingmaker" – with a lance during his victory at the battle of Barnet in 1471. The fall of Warwick fatally weakened the Lancastrians, leading to 14 years of Yorkist rule

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A portrait of Henry VI. For all his frailties, Henry's accession didn't pitch England into dynastic war. In fact, at the start of his reign, the nobility showed "a remarkable unity of purpose"

'After securing victory, the Tudors devoted a great deal of energy and propaganda to portraying Bosworth as the end of the story - but in a sense it was only the beginning'



Henry VI is captured at the battle of Northampton in 1470, bringing the first phase of the Wars of the Roses to an end

Edward's reign was not straightforward. He was forced from the throne in 1470, when the disgruntled Warwick defected to Queen Margaret and helped her restore the moth-eaten Henry VI. But Edward struck back - conclusively. In 1471 he killed Warwick at the battle of Barnet and Prince Edward at Tewkesbury, and had Henry VI murdered in the Tower of London. This marked an end to this truly 'dynastic' phase of the Wars of the Roses: one side was comprehensively defeated, and the other had comprehensively won.

Yet, as we know, that was not the end. A third phase began in 1483 after Edward IV's death when Richard III usurped the throne, reopening the old wounds of 1460-71. Whatever his arguments for seizing the crown - almost uniformly specious - the new Yorkist king's brutal power-grab and the dreadful fate met by the Princes in the Tower created a huge faction of implacable opponents who preferred to see anyone but Richard in charge. It was in this context that they turned to Henry Tudor, a Welshman who had lived much of his life under house arrest in Brittany.

This brief third phase of 1483-85 was also not dynastic. It was confused, desperate, opportunistic and lucky. Henry Tudor's Lancastrian royal lineage was threadbare (he had a better claim to the French throne than the English), and his main attraction was his promise to marry Edward IV's daughter, Elizabeth of York, and continue the 'true' legacy of the old king. This made him useful to the

angry Yorkists, and earned him just enough support from exiled Edwardians to make invasion possible.

In 1485, Henry won at Bosworth. It was a close-run battle that could easily have gone the other way, but he killed Richard III and took the crown - and then, true to his word, he married Elizabeth of York. The Tudors subsequently devoted a great deal of energy and propaganda to portraying Bosworth as the end of the story - but in a sense it was only the beginning.

Henry VII was acutely aware of how hard he would have to fight to keep his crown. His success at Bosworth was impressive, but it also encouraged others to see the English crown as a bauble, a thing so denuded that anyone with a drop of royal blood could raise an army and take it. One by one, they tried. So began the fourth phase of the Wars of the Roses in 1485; it lasted for at least 30 years.

In 1487 John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln invaded England with the pretender Lambert Simons (who claimed to be Edward IV's nephew Edward, Earl of Warwick) and a gang of Swiss mercenaries. Henry defeated them at the battle of Stoke Field, but others continued to plague him. Perkin Warbeck pretended to be Edward IV's younger son, Prince Richard; he was sponsored by Edward IV's sister Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, and raised an army that disrupted the whole of south-west England before he was captured in 1487.

Warbeck was executed in 1489, alongside the real Edward, Earl of Warwick, who had lived his whole life in prison and certainly offered no genuine threat to Henry beyond his potential as a figurehead for further rebellion. Yet these deaths did little to calm Tudor minds. As Henry VII's reign progressed, he devoted much time and money to continuing to fight the Wars of the Roses.

The Tudor rose appeared everywhere, its implied narrative of 'families reunited' popping up in cathedral doorways, the margins of prayerbooks and manuscripts in the royal library. The king's second son, Prince Henry, was created Duke of York in 1494 to try to shut down all other claims to that family's legacy. Potential rivals, however minor, were mercilessly hunted. Edmund de la Pole, a nephew of Edward IV who had fled the realm, was captured in 1506 and remained imprisoned for life. The warning to others was clear.

This paranoia outlived Henry VII. His son Henry VIII grew up fearing the spectral 'Yorkists' and, like his father, treated them mercilessly. Henry had Edmund's brother, Richard de la Pole, across Europe, and celebrated heartily on learning of his death at the battle of Pavia in 1525. In 1541, the 67-year-old Margaret Pole, one of the last living pieces of Edward IV, was hauled to death in the Tower by a novice executioner, a spectacle that shocked Europe. Margaret was branded a potentially rebellious Catholic, but her fate was almost certainly decided by the fact that she was - in theory, at least - a Yorkist.

By the time Margaret Pole died, the Wars of the Roses had all but spouted out. Yet for half a century they had been a vital part of the Tudors' programme



The Flemish impostor Perkin Warbeck - depicted in this 16th-century sketch - claimed to be Edward IV's son Richard, but was executed by Henry VII in 1489

'The Tudor rose appeared everywhere, its implied narrative of families reunited' popping up in cathedral doorways, the margins of prayerbooks and manuscripts in the royal library'



Portraits of Elizabeth of York and Henry VII are combined in a 19th-century watercolour by Sarah, Countess of Essex. The motif of interwoven red and white roses was earlier used in a street pageant during the coronation of Elizabeth I

of self-justification. It was this part of the war that had been the most overtly 'dynastic', and it is no surprise that historians writing in the mid-16th century viewed the 15th century through that lens. Edward Hall's huge chronicle history of England called to give it its short title: *The Union of the Two Noble and Brave Families of Lancaster and York* gave a decidedly 'Tudor' version of events. Hall was followed by writers such as Raphael Holinshed, who provided source material for Shakespeare. By the 1590s, history had been determined - even if it had been somewhat warped in the process.

A middle-aged theatregoer watching *Henry the sixth* in 1592 might have remembered the coronation of Elizabeth. Perhaps, as they watched York and Somerset pluck white and red roses from a bush, they recalled a stage that stood on Fenchurch Street during the coronation. On it was representations of English royal history as an intertwining rose, with branches of red and white blooms twisting together and emerging as one plant in the person of Henry VIII.

They could have reflected on how poetically neat English history in the 15th century had been, and how consistent it had been in the telling ever since. It is testament to the power of that original Tudor myth that it persists to this day. ■

Dan Jones is a historian and journalist. He will be discussing the Wars of the Roses at our History Weekend in October - see historyweekend.com

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