

Magna Carta

Biography / Overview

Magna Carta, Latin for "Great Charter," is a foundational document in English legal history that was issued in 1215 during the reign of King John of England. It was the result of a political crisis between the king and his barons, who were unhappy with his tyrannical rule and heavy taxation. The barons pressured King John to agree to a list of concessions that would limit his power and protect their feudal rights. The document was originally written in Latin and consisted of 63 clauses, addressing various grievances and establishing principles of justice and fairness. Despite being annulled by Pope Innocent III shortly after its creation, it was reissued and revised multiple times over the following decades.

Bibliography / Primary Sources

Holt, J.C. "Magna Carta." *The English Historical Review*, vol. 61, no. 239, 1946, pp. 1–23. JSTOR

Magna Carta. The British Library, 1215. British Library

Birth Date / Death Date

Magna Carta was first issued on June 15, 1215, at Runnymede, a meadow by the River Thames in England. It was a product of negotiations between King John and his barons, who were seeking to address grievances about the king's abuse of power. The document was later revised and reissued in 1216, 1217, and 1225 during the reign of King John's son, King Henry III.

Notable / Best-Known For

Magna Carta is best known for establishing the principle that the king is subject to the law rather than above it. It limited the power of the monarchy and protected the rights of the nobility, laying the foundation for constitutional law and individual liberties. While some of its clauses were specific to the feudal context of the time, others have had enduring significance in the development of common law and democratic governance.

Famous Quotes

"To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice." (Clause 40)

"No freeman shall be taken, or imprisoned, or outlawed, or exiled, or in any way harmed... except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land." (Clause 39)

Major Works / Textual Contents

The *Magna Carta* consists of 63 clauses addressing a range of issues related to feudal rights, taxation, and the administration of justice. Some of the key provisions include protection against arbitrary imprisonment (Clause 39), limitations on the king's power to levy taxes (Clause 12), and the establishment of due process rights in legal proceedings (Clause 40).

Influences / Intellectual Context

The *Magna Carta* was influenced by a combination of legal traditions and political developments in medieval England. It drew on earlier charters and legal customs that sought to limit the power of the monarchy and protect the rights of the nobility. The document also reflected broader trends in European political thought, including the idea of a social contract between rulers and subjects and the concept of natural law. The *Magna Carta* has been seen as a precursor to later constitutional documents, such as the English Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution.

Legacy and Modern Significance

The legacy of the *Magna Carta* can be seen in its enduring influence on legal and political systems around the world. It has been cited as a source of inspiration for constitutional documents and declarations of rights in countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. The principles of limited government, due process, and individual liberty that are enshrined in the *Magna Carta* continue to shape debates about the rule of law and the relationship between rulers and citizens.

Modern Moments / Impact on 21st Century Society

In 2007, the *Magna Carta* was designated as a UNESCO Memory of the World, recognizing its global significance as a foundational document of human rights and constitutional law.

The 800th anniversary of the *Magna Carta* in 2015 was marked by a series of events and exhibitions around the world, highlighting its continued relevance in the modern era.

Digital resources such as the British Library's online exhibition on the *Magna Carta* have made the document more accessible to a wider audience, fostering greater awareness of its historical importance.

Suggested Reading & Resources

Brundage, James A. "Magna Carta and the Rule of Law." Cambridge University Press, 2014. Cambridge University Press

Carpenter, David. "Magna Carta." Penguin UK, 2015. Penguin

Magna Carta: Muse and Mentor. British Library, 2010. British Library