

The Magna Charta

- Granted by King John, June 15, 1215
- After many years of unchecked expenditures and campaigns by Richard I, the "Lionheart," the Royal treasury was already in a shambles.
- Richard's brother, John (r. 1199-1216) did nothing to help the problem, rather making it worse through failed wars in France.
- To cover his own expenses John raised taxes repeatedly, and adopted totalitarian policies which were nothing less than abuse of the traditional royal privileges and feudal contracts.
- Among other actions, John refused to acknowledge the Pope's choice for Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, and seized the Church's feudal lands for the crown.
- He also put an end to all religious observances except for Baptism and the Sacraments for the dying (last communion and Extreme Unction.)
- Between excommunication and the threat of an invasion by French barons John backed down.
- In 1213 Stephen Langton absolved him, but as "penance" he exacted an oath of "good government" and a return to the regular laws of England, to which he was also to be subject.

The Magna Charta, part 2

- Putting reform into practice was not so easy.
- When the Barons of England began demanding actual reversal of policies, John responded 'Why not ask for my kingdom?' but held them at bay through promises.
- Additionally, John swore to "take up the cross" as a crusader, which would grant him immunity from attack by other Christians.
- John also amassed a large army.
- In May of 1215 the Barons attacked London and quickly overwhelmed it.
- As a result John agreed to the Barons' demands and signed the *Magna Charta* on the field of Runnymede outside London, on June 15.
- As soon as the pressure was off, John appealed to the Pope to annul the charter, since he was a "crusader" and such an agreement could not be signed without the Pope's permission.
- The Pope agreed, and John began building support again.
- Langton was suspended, and the Barons were excommunicated.

The Magna Charta, part 3

- In March of 1216 John had trapped the leaders of the opposition in London.
- In desperation the Barons offered the English crown to Louis, King of France if he would come and take it.
- He came, and a military deadlock ensued.
- John's death broke the stalemate, but England did not prove healthy for Louis, who died of dysentery at Newark, in October of 1216, while mopping up the opposition.
- In spite of a rocky beginning, the *Magna Charta* was in place.

The Magna Charta: What did it Do?

- The *Magna Charta* was not a revolutionary document.
- It was novel only in the sense that the traditional rights and privileges of feudalism were now set-down in a formal document which transcended the reigns of individual kings.
- Abuses by the crown were formally proscribed, and the courts were regulated.
- All classes of society, but especially "freemen" and "nobles" were granted some guarantee of civil liberty, and protection against arbitrary government.
- Life, liberty, and property were not to be denied to freemen or nobles without due process and the judgement of peers.
- The traditional limits on the various strata of feudal society, and the rights guaranteed to each, were now arranged in a governing document -- an early form of constitution.
- The *Magna Charta* put in writing a principle which is often forgotten about all medieval monarchy: it was *never* absolute, and always the product of negotiation and statecraft.

Discussion

The Fall of Richard II

The 100 Years' War: Background

- 1328 King Charles IV of France died without a male heir.
- Edward III of England claimed the French throne as well, since his mother, Isabella, was sister to the former king.
- The French insisted that inheritance could not pass through a female and gave the crown to Philip VI, the French King's cousin.
- More was at stake than the crown, here. Feudal lands held by the English King had been slowly taken-over by French lords and the French King for many years. Edward did not want to lose any more of his holdings, especially since they gave him a trade outlet on the Continent.
- At stake was trade and the control of the English Channel.
- 1337 -- Philip follows his predecessors and seizes the last major English holding in France, Guyenne.
- From 1377-1386 a series of military campaigns by the English in France was punctuated by temporary treaties of peace.

The 100 Years' War: part 2

- 1346 -- Battle of Crécy: English (Welsh) Longbow proves decisive against the amassed French army and their Genoese mercenaries.
- 1356 -- Battle of Poitiers: England's "Black Prince," (Edward, son of Edward III, and father of Richard II) after capturing Bordeaux, marched on Poitiers. The Longbow again turned the balance, though the battle was not without daring cavalry charges as well.
- As a result of the treaty which followed, England had control of large sections of France.
- 1376 -- Black Prince Edward dies.
- 1377 -- Edward III dies, the boy king, Richard II, takes the throne.
- Lacking strong military leadership, fighting stopped in 1386 with the French recovering most of the territories lost.

Chapter One: Summarized, part 1

- 1377 -- Death of Edward III leaves 10-year-old Richard II King. In reality, Richard's uncles have the real power until he comes of age.
- 1397 -- Richard makes a play to take power from his uncles:
 - One is exiled
 - One is imprisoned and smothered
 - One is executed for treason
- 1399 -- The remaining uncle, John of Gaunt, dies. Against traditional property law and his own oath, Richard confiscated his uncle's lands, effectively disinheriting his cousin, Henry Bolingbroke, Earl of Derby. (What did Bolingbroke's exile have to do with it?)
- This was too far... All landed gentlemen were potential targets when the King, not the law, was supreme.

Chapter one, part 2: Henry returns

- Sensing that he would have tremendous support, Henry returned early from exile, declared his rights to his ancestral lands, and rallied tremendous military support.
- Richard II was trapped in Conway Castle, in Wales.
- Henry promised Richard safe passage through the armies surrounding Conway if he would come out.
- "Safe passage" was rather loosely interpreted: Richard was seized and taken safely to prison, where he was "encouraged" to abdicate the throne while remaining a Knight. (Note the reversal -- this is what Richard had effectively done to Henry.)
- This left a king-shaped void in English politics, which Henry determined to fill.

Chapter 1, Henry(IV), Continued:

- Henry had three ways to claim the crown:
 - Inheritance
 - Conquest
 - Act of Parliament
- The first two were not justified. He was not first in line to inherit, and his "conquest" represented a setting-aside of the very common law by which he had justified action against Richard.
- He was, however, one of the few people in the realm who had any claim at all, and who would make a competent King. All three claims were recognized.
- The crown was made more secure through the sudden "recovery" of the oil by which Edward the Confessor was made King nearly four centuries before.
- It was also made more secure by the convenient "natural death" of the former King, Richard, in his prison cell.
- However, a dangerous precedent had been established for the fifteenth century: Laws of succession and inheritance could be set aside when a powerful Baron found it convenient and possible.

Chapter 1, part 3: Henry V and VI

- Henry's son, Henry (V), had all the best qualities of kingship, according to the medieval ideal of the pious warrior king.
- Long before IV's death, nobles of the realm were courting the favor of V.
- When he took the throne V was very popular, but faced the lingering threat of serious debt (incurred by the first phase of the 100 Years' War, among other things), as well as the lingering uncertainty regarding the succession of his father.
- Renewed war with France was a means to solidify his Royal image and consolidate power.
- In addition, V firmly believed that God wanted him to have France. Battles such as Agincourt, especially, where the English won while outnumbered 10 to 1 seemed to bear this out.
- 1422 -- Henry V dies on campaign (dysentery and exhaustion.) The crown passes to Henry VI, who was 9-months old.
- Momentum for the war winds down (as it had the last time the crown passed to a child.)

Chapter 1, Epilogue:

- 1435, Henry's brother, the duke of Bedford, dies of campaign exhaustion while trying to finish up business in France.
- 1453, Hundred Years' War officially ends. Results?
 - France and England both essentially bankrupt.
 - The sense of National identity in both countries is firmly established.
 - National politics in France is opened to the development of consolidated power in an absolute monarchy.
 - National politics in England becomes less centralized, and the role of parliament figures more strongly, and the way is opened to the development of a constitutionally regulated monarchy.
- In addition: Henry VI is widely regarded as pious, but inept = not a fit King. The question of succession which had haunted his father and grandfather returns in full force, especially in light of losses in France.

“Feudalism” -- the political structure (According to the Continental Ideal)

- A hierarchy of protection and service created by the act of a lesser noble acknowledging the superiority, or “lordship” of a greater noble, and swearing an oath of service in exchange for the protection of being attached to a larger political/military reality.
- Lesser noble = “vassal”; greater noble = “lord”
- Oath sworn was known as the oath of “fealty,” and was highly ritualized.
- “Service” was principally the promise of military service in time of war.
- One had to be at least a “freeholder” (a free individual owning or holding land) in order to make such an oath.
- Hence Feudalism is best understood as an arrangement among “nobles.”
- Contract was essentially oral. (Although it was often recorded in writing later.)
- Hence the importance in the West of “giving one’s word.”

Social Order -- the “Three” Medieval “classes” or orders:

Those who:

- Work (Peasantry)
- Fight (Nobility)
- Pray (Clergy and Monastics)
- (increasingly) sell and pay taxes (Merchants)

(Agrarian Society)

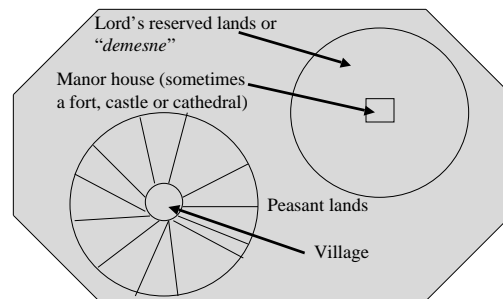
The classes were hierarchical and static, in theory, but in England there was tremendous fluctuation in social status.

Manorialism: the economic structure

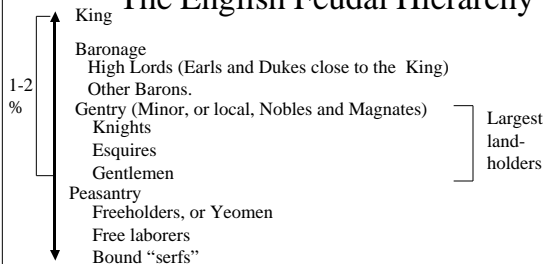
- Best understood as the relationship between nobility and peasantry.
- Peasantry receives protection in return for produce and labor.
- System was partly inherited from the old Roman “Villa” farming system.
- The noble or lord “held” the land, while the peasants worked it.
- The exact relationships varied widely across Europe.



The “Estate” or “Manor” (idealized)



The English Feudal Hierarchy



Note: Especially by the 14th-15th centuries

- a) boundaries are fuzzy
- b) Wealth complicates status and often sends lower orders upward
- c) Higher orders could move downward as well.
- d) Because of Plague and economic developments the number of serfs drops, yeomen rises

“Bastard Feudalism”

1. Has been overemphasized in the past.
 - A. England, especially, never had a standardized Feudal system -- it varied widely from location to location.
 - B. In the Fifteenth Century Economics played a much greater role at all levels, and it wasn't “at odds” with the structure of society.
 - C. It wasn't inherently corrupt, leading inevitably to bad government and civil war.
2. Changes did occur which can be noted under this name:
 - A. Contracts were increasingly written, legal documents rather than oral agreements.
 - B. The role of money and trade entered into negotiations more often than land and labor.
 - C. Far from destabilizing society, these changes added stability to something otherwise chaotic.
3. Instability and civil war were the result of problems with the monarchy -- a vacuum at the top.

Textbook and History Channel myths that need to be qualified (or rejected):

- The “standard of living” was much higher for nobles than for Peasants.
- The interests of the different classes were at odds with each other.
- The Peasants’ Revolts, in England, were the result of working classes attempting to throw off oppression.
- Life expectancy was low in the Medieval world -- few people lived past 40 or 50.

The Role of the Church:

- The Church was the center of all religion and social life. It was the hub of the culture.
- There was a Church at the center of every village.
- There was a prominent chapel in most manor houses.
- (Each had its own priest, if the noble could afford it)
- Monasteries were special places of spiritual activity as well as the centers of learning in the countryside.
- Church rituals, times for prayer, and sacred days and seasons focused and regulated all of life.
- Christianity, and its rules, were taken very seriously by all classes (whether Christianity was understood or not)



Those who pray (Ecclesiastics):



- MONKS ARE NOT THE SAME AS PRIESTS.
- Monks and clergy were the educated elite (though as we move from early to high middle ages the nobility were more associated with education as well.)
- Male monastics could be drawn into courtly service for a noble.
- Church orders were open to nobility and peasantry alike, but usually the positions and offices were striated along class lines.
- Often a fast career track for younger brothers and sisters in noble families.
- Did offer the only real possibility of social advancement for the peasant classes as well, much more so in England than elsewhere.
- Not only monasteries and parishes, but also universities were institutions of the Church.

The Presence of the Church in Society:

- It is a real distortion to see the priest as a “foreign ambassador” of Rome -- usually they served the very people from which they themselves came.
- Monks, also, remained full members of English society, with close ties to family and village.
- On the one hand, the Church can be said to form a separate sub-culture which transcended geographical and political boundaries: A ubiquitous and unifying presence throughout Europe.
- On the other hand, the Church, wherever it was found took on the local character and culture, so that (for example) there was something decidedly “English” about the Mass in England, and about the flavor of English monasteries.

Monasteries in the Fifteenth Century:

- 825 monasteries with around 13,000 male and female monks.
- Monasticism was a separate way of life, a separate society, a separate culture, based on the ideals of “the love of learning and the desire for God.”
- By this time there were many different types of monasteries in England, each with its own cultural distinctiveness and special religious focus:
 - Benedictines, Carthusians, Cistercians, Augustinians, etc.
- In addition to the “cloistered monks” there were the “mendicant orders” which lived much more *in* society, and were dedicated to service. The “Greyfriars” -- Franciscans, and the “Blackfriars” -- Dominicans.
- England also had a home-grown monastic trend, the enclosed hermit, or Anchorite.
- Monasteries were primarily rural, but with exceptions, especially among the “houses” of the mendicants.

The Uniqueness of the English Church:

- The English Church was marked by:
 - Geographical Isolation
 - Different “waves” of conversion
 - The synthesis of Christianity with many different cultures
- A remarkable diversity of liturgical and theological tradition, a lower concern with the affairs of Rome than in the south, and a heritage of “going its own way.”
- The first wave of conversion came through the Gallican tradition, which was more Greek and less Latin in perspective.
- This blended with Latin Christianity when the Saxons converted, but older traditions remained, such as married priests.
- 1066 Marked a crackdown on the wayward English, and many priests fled East. It was only partially successful.
- Throughout the Norman Era England continued to develop separate liturgical traditions, and scholars such as Ockham, Roger Bacon, and John Wycliffe are merely the most visible manifestations of an English willingness to critique the directions of the Continental Church.



“Lollardy”: in perspective:

- With the corruption of the Roman hierarchy evident as a result of the “Great Schism” an Oxford clergyman, John Wycliffe, began to raise serious questions publicly about what he regarded as recent digressions from the true Catholic Faith. (c. 1378)
- He was concerned that the Church had lost touch with the Scriptures.
- He was concerned that the laity did not understand the faith well enough to recognize the corruption in the Church. Therefore he translated the Bible into English. (This was not so radical for a Franciscan, or a Dominican.)
- He sent out preachers to help spread the true message of Christianity, meaning a renewed focus on the life and merits of Jesus Christ.
- He questioned the Scholastic understanding of Transubstantiation in the Mass, but on *logical* grounds: he advocated a return to an older concept in which the bread and wine were recognized *along with* the Body and Blood of Christ (which was truly, though spiritually, present).
- He advocated, along with many reform movements, a return to the “ideal” of St. Augustine’s theology.
- He became dangerous by advocating his doctrine of “dominion” -- the concept that clergy and rulers were given their authority from God only so long as they remained faithful to God and pure in motive otherwise they should be removed.
- (Who gets to be the judge?)

Lollardy, Effects of Wycliffe’s teaching:

- Wycliffe initially drew a large and respectable following, including such notables as John of Gaunt.
- Wycliffe’s followers became known as the “Lollards” or mumblebers, for their objections to the current status of the Church.
- In 1381, Lollardy became implicated in the Peasants’ Revolt.
- Whether this was valid or not, the doctrine of “dominion” did teach that such acts of rebellion as the Peasant Revolt were justified -- a corrupt government is not from God.
- In 1382 Lollardy was denounced as heresy.
- After this point a wealth of information “came out” about its radical doctrines - that Lollards despised the Sacrament, wanted to do away with clergy, etc.
- Far too many scholars look to this later smear campaign rather than to the writings of Wycliffe to understand Lollardy.
- While reformist, there was little in Wycliffe’s views which could not be found throughout the critiques of others (who were not condemned) at this time.
- (Keep the doctrine of “dominion” in mind as an undercurrent of English thought. Note the similar rationale behind the deposition of Richard II, the Yorkist claim to the throne, and any number of themes in the Reformation.)



- ⌘ 1347- hit
- ⌘ N Europe
- ⌘ Began in Asia
- ⌘ Imported by
- ⌘ N trading
- ⌘ The Problem: *yersinia pestis* bacteria, (in fleas on rats.)
- ⌘ Bubonic Plague: spread through flea bites
 - ⌘ Black Spots -- hence “Black Plague”
 - ⌘ Swollen lymph glands “buboes” -- hence, “bubonic plague”
- ⌘ (Septicemic -- plague in blood)
- ⌘ Pneumonic -- plague in lungs, spread through coughing.

The Plague:

Its effects and how it killed 1/3 of the population of Europe, More in England.

- Deaths were unevenly distributed: Some communities wiped-out others “spared.”
- Widely seen as the Judgment of God, but raised big questions:
 - Why are good people dying?
 - Why do the wicked survive?
 - What are we to do now? (morally, and to survive)



Effects of the Plague on:

- **Religion:** forced a reexamination of “comfortable assumptions.”
- **Economics:** ended the “population boom” and increased the standard of living (ended famine conditions). Created a labor shortage contributing to the rise of Yeomen in England.
- **Art and Culture:** The theme of untimely and arbitrary death gains force in the rise in death as a theme -- consider images such as the “Grim Reaper” and the “Dance of Death.”

Chapter 3, Summary, part 1:

- Henry VI resembled his kingly father only in the area of piety.
- As an adult he gave no particular indication of having grown-up: The only difference was a bad one -- he now had the authority to bankrupt himself (esp. through favors to certain barons.)
- Parliament, meanwhile, steadily gained real political power, but had no idea how to use it. Many laws were made which could have stabilized the realm, but they were not enforced.
- The dynastic question came back in full force -- since the Lancastrian line had come to power as a means of replacing an inept, but lawful, king with a better one, wasn’t it appropriate to turn to that same principle? Wasn’t it now time to return to the old line, now that Richard, duke of York, would make a better King than Henry VI?
- The details of this argument flowed through all levels of society, as Cade’s rebellion of 1450 shows. (see p. 57 for the specific grievances.)
- The most significant turn of events for York was Henry VI finally “falling off his rocker.”

Chapter 3, part 2:

- 1454 -- Henry's obvious insanity gives York the chance to assume, with the force of Parliament, rulership in the name of the King (as "Protector").
- December of 1454 -- Henry VI comes to his senses (well, enough for him to demand his crown back, anyway.)
- 1455 -- York and his cousin Warwick, moved against the favorites with which the King had surrounded himself, demanding that the King "deliver up such as we will accuse" and they would give their loyalty in return.
- Not a way to make friends -- the Battle (Brawl?) of St. Albans ensued, with Lancastrian and Yorkist Barons attacking each other, and Baronial losses on both sides.
- The lines were drawn -- the White Rose of York was at war with the Red Rose of Lancaster.

Chapter 3, part 3: War of the Roses

- 1460 -- Richard claims the throne.
- December 1460 -- Battle of Wakefield, Richard is killed and his head paraded as the "King without a Kingdom. His second son also dies.
- March 1461 -- Edward, Richard's heir, wins at the Battle of Towton, and the Lancastrians were crushed.
- Edward IV imprisoned Henry VI in the Tower of London and assumed the throne.
- Edward was at odds with his cousin, the Earl of Warwick, who had given him the military clout to pull-off Towton. Warwick sought to end all Lancastrian claims through a marriage alliance with France. Edward had already sought to consolidate the realm from within through a series of marriages through the minor Woodville family.
- Edward's plan had alienated the old Barons by creating a new central family, the Woodvilles.
- In anger, Warwick sought the alliance of the exiled Lancastrian queen, Margaret of Anjou.

Chapter 3, part 4:

- After extensive planning, in the fall of 1470 Warwick, Queen Margaret, and Edward's own brother, George, Duke of Clarence, declared the imprisoned Henry VI king. They landed and Edward, sensing a loss in support, fled.
- By the time Henry VI came out of his imprisonment the old cheese was permanently off his cracker. Lancastrian support for Henry evaporated when they realized he was now a complete moron.
- March 1471 -- Edward returns, and two battles follow: Barnet, where Richard of Warwick dies; and Tewkesbury, where, or after which, Margaret and the young Prince of Wales die.
- May 1471 -- Edward IV is secure on the throne and Henry VI, back in prison, dies of "pure displeasure and melancholy." (Or so they say.)
- Edward IV is remembered for a bipolar reign: He restored money, dignity, and stability to the crown; he also had long binges of dissolute living and "inactivity." By confiscating the lands of dead enemies he replenished the coffers. However this angered noble families, as did his habit of replacing old nobles with new, lower ranking nobles, at court.

Chapter 3, part 5:

- April 9 1483 -- Edward IV dies, probably from the excesses of his living.
- April 9-July 6, 1483 -- 12 year old Edward V reigns. Quickly, his uncle Richard of Gloucester, moved against the King and the Woodvilles. He imprisoned them, and declared himself protector of the young King. The two main Woodville Lords, Grey and Rivers, were executed.
- June 22, 1483 -- Edward V is declared to be a bastard.
- July 6, 1483 -- Richard III takes the throne.
- Summer, 1484 -- Edward V and his 10-year-old brother, imprisoned in the Tower, "disappear."
- Richard's reign is not so despised as Shakespeare made it sound, but it is certainly short on legitimacy by all estimations. His policies were sound, but his image was tarnished by usurpation and murder, except among staunch Yorkists.

Chapter 3, conclusion: Bosworth Field

- The Lancastrians and Woodvilles made common cause and began plotting against Richard III.
- The only thing they lacked was a legitimate claimant to the throne.
- In searching for a worthwhile candidate, they finally came up with Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond. Henry was a capable young lord, but with at least two separate instances of bastardy in his line which legally eliminated him from the succession.
- By this time, succession was a technicality compared with the support of the Barons. When Henry took the field at Bosworth in combat against Richard III his small army of mercenaries was joined by forces from his Welsh homeland. A number of Richard's barons made their preferences known by deserting their king before the battle. The Stanleys, for example, saw the imbalance in forces and decided to even the odds by keeping their men out of the battle.
- This set the stage for Henry to take the crown by right of Combat if Richard were to die in battle, which Richard did.
- A new rose had blossomed. The Tudor era had begun.