

Module 2: The Constitution
Topic 1 Content: Historical English Government Documents

Introduction



Johnny England: Welcome to WUKG News. This is my cohost Ginger James and I am Johnny England. We are filling in for Demi Tracy and Glover Mint while they are on vacation. This evening's episode will focus on important historical English government documents from history.

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Historical English Government Documents



The slide features a red curtain background. On the right, a cartoon man with a mustache, wearing a dark pinstriped suit, white shirt, and teal tie, stands behind a wooden podium. On the left, a large black box with a yellow border contains the title 'Historical English Government Documents' in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below this box, the text 'Please Make a Selection Below' is written in orange. Three dark grey buttons with yellow borders are arranged below: 'Magna Carta' (top left), 'Petition of Right' (top right), and 'English Bill of Rights' (bottom center).

Johnny Englund: English Parliament's ultimate goal was to limit the power of the monarchy, but how did it achieve this goal? Typically power is not ceded willingly by those in possession of it, and the English government is no exception. The English monarchy and Parliament clashed several times throughout history. Some of these conflicts resulted in important legal documents that transformed the government in significant ways.

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Magna Carta



Magna Carta

- King John was a harsh ruler, who abused his power as king of England.
- King John's rule began at the end of the 12th Century.
- He waged many unsuccessful and costly wars to regain lands in France.
- To pay for these wars he demanded that the nobles pay additional taxes.
- When nobles refused to pay, King John punished them, attacked their homes, and seized their lands.
- The nobles formed an army and went to London to confront King John.
- At Runnymede, they forced King John to sign the Magna Carta.

Johnny Englund: King John was a harsh ruler, who abused his power as king of England. He used his power as king to enforce his personal desires, not necessarily the laws of the land. King John's rule began near the end of the 12th century. During his rule, he waged several wars in an effort to regain lands lost to France. Many of these wars were unsuccessful. In order to pay for these costly military efforts, he demanded that the nobles and aristocrats of England pay additional taxes. When the nobles refused, he would enact severe punishment, attack their homes, and seize their land. The nobles became extremely frustrated by King John's abuse of power and his disregard for the laws of the land. In response to this abuse of power, they formed an army and headed to London. It was at Runnymede, near London, that they forced the king to hear their grievances and sign the Great Charter, or the Magna Carta.

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Magna Carta II



King John signing the Magna Carta

Magna Carta

- People accused of a crime had a right to a trial by a jury of their peers.
- The king had to have the approval of the nobles before imposing taxes.
- English monarchs were bound by the law of the land.
- The Magna Carta limited the power of the king and protected individual rights.
- The Magna Carta did not protect the rights of all citizens, only the nobility.
- Peasants were ruled by their feudal landowners.

Johnny England: The Magna Carta detailed a list of clauses that limited the power of government and protected the rights of nobles. Some of these included:

- Individuals accused of a crime now had a right to a trial by a jury of their peers. No longer was the king able to simply imprison people, by own his will.
- The king now had to have the approval of nobles before imposing taxes.
- English monarchs were bound by the law of the land. No longer were kings and queens above the law. They were required to follow it, just as all people of England.

The Magna Carta was a move in the direction of limiting the power of the king and protecting the rights of individuals. The Magna Carta did not protect the rights of all English citizens however, only the nobility. At this time, the majority of England consisted of peasants, who were ruled and controlled by their feudal landowners. They were not able to enjoy the rights that the Magna Carta protected.

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Petition of Right



King Charles I

Petition of Right

- It was common practice for the kings to reconfirm the Magna Carta at the beginning of their reigns.
- Many kings upheld the document in word only, continuing the abuse of power.
- In the early 17th century, King Charles I asked Parliament to approve taxes to fund a war with Spain.
- Parliament refused his request, until he agreed to sign the Petition of Right.

Next

Johnny England: It was common practice for the kings who followed King John to reconfirm the Magna Carta at the beginning of their reigns and agree to uphold the clauses it detailed. Many kings upheld the document in word, not in deed, continuing the abuse of power by the monarchy.

In the early 17th century, King Charles I of England called for a session of Parliament. He sought the approval of Parliament in order to impose taxes to fund the continuation of a war with Spain. Parliament refused to grant his request until he agreed to sign the Petition of Right, which was drafted by the House of Commons.

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Petition of Right II



King Charles I

Petition of Right

- English citizens were guaranteed the right to a trial by a jury of their peers.
- Monarchs were prohibited from unlawfully imprisoning people.
- Citizens were protected from being forced to provide shelter for soldiers.
- The establishment of military rule during peace time was prohibited.
- Private property was protected from unlawful seizure by the government.
- King Charles I agreed to sign the Petition of Right, but failed to uphold it, leading to a civil war with Parliament.
- Parliament's army defeated King Charles I, which established its authority in England.

Next

Johnny England: The Petition of Right had some of the following effects:

- It guaranteed English citizens the right to a trial by a jury of their peers.
- It prohibited monarchs from unlawfully imprisoning people.
- It prohibited citizens from being forced to provide their homes as shelter for soldiers.
- It prohibited the establishment of military rule during peace time.
- It protected private property from unlawful government seizure.

King Charles I agreed to sign the Petition of Right, but did not feel obligated to uphold any of its statutes. He believed himself to have the power of absolute rule by divine right; therefore he did not have to abide by these rules. His continued disregard of the Petition of Right led to a civil war, in which Parliament raised an army and defeated King Charles I, establishing its power and authority in England.

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English Bill of Rights



King James II

English Bill of Rights

- In 1685, there was another conflict between Parliament and the crown.
- King James II was a Roman Catholic at a time when most English were Protestant.
- Parliament feared that King James II would impose his faith on the country.
- Parliament raised an army, which was led by the king's son-in-law William.
- The Parliament forces defeated the king.
- In February 1689, William and Mary were offered the crown, if they agreed to rule according to the laws of Parliament.
- William and Mary signed the English Bill of Rights.

Johnny Englund: Parliament persisted in its work toward the goals of limiting the power of the monarch and protecting the rights of citizens. In 1685, there was another conflict, this time involving religion. King James II was a practicing Roman Catholic at a time when most English were Protestant, including King James II's daughter Mary and her husband, William of Orange. Parliament began to fear that King James II would impose his Catholic faith on all of England, so it raised an army and battle ensued. Under the leadership of the king's son-in-law William, the Parliament forces defeated the King and his men.

In February 1689, Parliament offered the crown to William and Mary, under the condition they agree to rule according to the laws of Parliament. They were also required to sign English Bill of Rights, which had been drafted by Parliament.

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English Bill of Rights II



King William III

Queen Mary II

English Bill of Rights

- The right to petition the government was secured.
- Armies were prohibited from assembling during peace time.
- Free elections of members of Parliament were ensured.
- The monarch's authority was limited by imposing Parliamentary checks on power.
- The monarch could only pass laws, raise taxes, or raise an army with Parliament's approval.
- Freedom of speech was protected.
- The English Bill of Rights was a social contract that transformed England into a constitutional monarchy.

Next

Johnny England: The English Bill of Rights had some of the following effects:

- It secured the right to petition the government,
- It prohibited the assembling of an army during peace time.
- It ensured that the elections of members of Parliament would be free.
- It limited the authority of the monarch by imposing Parliamentary checks on power.
- The monarch needed Parliament's approval in order to pass laws, increase taxes, or raise an army.
- Since Parliament had established itself as a strong political force, the Bill of Rights also protected the freedom of speech of the members of Parliament, as they would need to be able to speak freely in order to debate government issues.

The establishment of the English Bill of Rights marked the end of a time that came to be known as the Glorious Revolution. England had now been transformed into a constitutional monarchy, with the English Bill of Rights as its social contract.

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End of Episode



Ginger James: That is quite interesting, Johnny. I can see several parallels between the rights and freedoms protected in those documents and those protected by the American Constitution and Bill of Rights. It was our pleasure to host tonight's episode for you, America. This is Ginger James and Johnny England, saying goodbye.