

Magna Carta

The Magna Carta (meaning Great Charter), issued in England in 1215, was the first document that stated that a king and his government was subject to the law. By placing power in the law rather than in the king as an individual, it limited the power of a king for the first time in history.

Although the Magna Carta was created hundreds of years before Britain even reached the American colonies, it is still considered one of the seminal documents of the United States. The Founding Fathers were influenced by this document when they created the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and The Bill of Rights, as well as state constitutions. For them, the Magna Carta, which provides for the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, symbolized the rights of the people against tyranny. Specific clauses from the Magna Carta upon which they drew included those guaranteeing the right to a trial by a jury, protection against excessive fines and punishments, safeguarding of individual liberty and property, and the prohibition of taxation without representation.

Why is the Magna Carta considered of significance in U.S. history?

