

The Magna Carta

CELEBRATING THE 800TH ANNIVERSARY

On June 15, 1215,

King John of England signed the Magna Carta in Runnymede, which is near London. Twenty-five English noblemen presented the Magna Carta to King John and threatened to lead a rebellion against him if he did not sign it. The most famous parts of the document are:

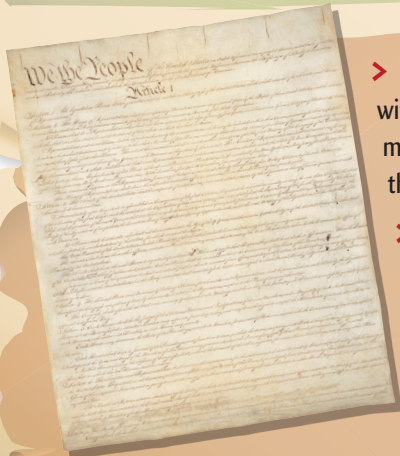
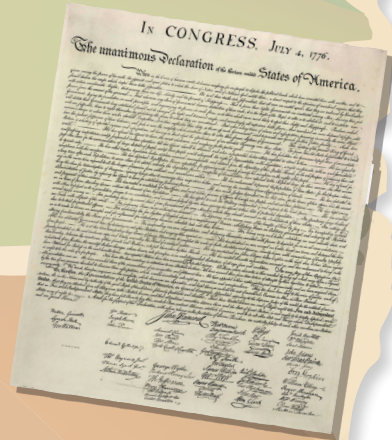


- > the right for a person accused of a crime to know the charges against him and to have a trial by jury;
- > the right of the people to check the power of the king; and
- > the principle that no one, even the king, is above the law.

The Magna Carta was the beginning of representative government, which meant the people had a say in their government.

IF THIS IS AN ENGLISH DOCUMENT, WHY DO AMERICANS MAKE SUCH A BIG DEAL ABOUT IT?

The American colonies formed governments based upon the principles of the Magna Carta. The men who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were heavily influenced by the document. The Declaration of Independence was a statement to King George III of England that he was treating the American colonists unfairly and, therefore, they had a right to rebel, just as the barons had in 1215.



- > The U.S. Constitution begins with the words, "We the People," meaning that power belongs to the people, not the government.
- > The three separate but equal branches of government are meant to insure that no one part gets too powerful.
- > The 4th Amendment in the Bill of Rights requires that
- > The 5th and 6th Amendments make sure that an accused person gets due process. Due process includes the right to remain silent, the right to have a trial by jury and the right to an attorney.
- > The 8th Amendment forbids cruel and unusual punishment for a crime.

the government has to have a reason to search someone's house or belongings.

The principles expressed in the Magna Carta are as important to Americans today as they were to our Founding Fathers. It is so important to the United States that one of the original copies of the Magna Carta is housed at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.