

THE MAGNA CARTA

Vocabulary

Magna Carta- document declaring the sovereign or monarchy was subjected to the rule of law

Monarchy- a form of government with a king or a monarch

Parliament- assembly of prominent men that deal with matters of state and law.



LIMITED GOVERNMENT

In a **limited government**, the powers of government are restricted by law, usually in a written constitution. "Limited government" stands in contrast to the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. Under that doctrine, the king, and by extension his entire government, held unlimited sovereignty (control or power) over its subjects. In Western Civilization, the Magna Carta stands as the early model of a document limiting the reach of the king's sovereignty. While its limits protected only a small portion of the English population, it did state that the king's barons possessed rights which they could assert against the king.

THE RULE OF LAW

The rule of law is the idea that written law is applied evenly and equally to the population. The phrase "nobody is above the law" comes to mind. The concept was familiar to ancient philosophers such as Aristotle, who wrote "Law should govern the people, not a superior ruler and his judgement, or lack thereof". Rule of law implies that every citizen is subject to the law. It stands in contrast to the idea that the ruler is above the law, for example by divine right.

INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

The **individual** is the basic unit of society, and since the time of ancient republics individuals have been understood to have certain **rights**. Philosophers like John Locke theorized that natural rights come from nature or from God, and are not “granted” by government. Individual rights include life, liberty, and the right to own property. Individual rights were extended by the Founding Fathers (of the United States) to include the freedom of speech, religion, and press, as well as the right to freely assemble and to petition government.

SHARED POWER

Shared power means just that - power that is shared between two or more people or bodies or people. The United States has shared power since no one is in complete control - the people elect their leaders, and their leaders are prevented from having complete power by having a rigorous system of "checks and balances." On the contrary, complete and absolute power was a practice exercised by the kings of the Middle Ages. Kings gave orders and did as they pleased with no other person or body to challenge his power. That is, until the Magna Carta!

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