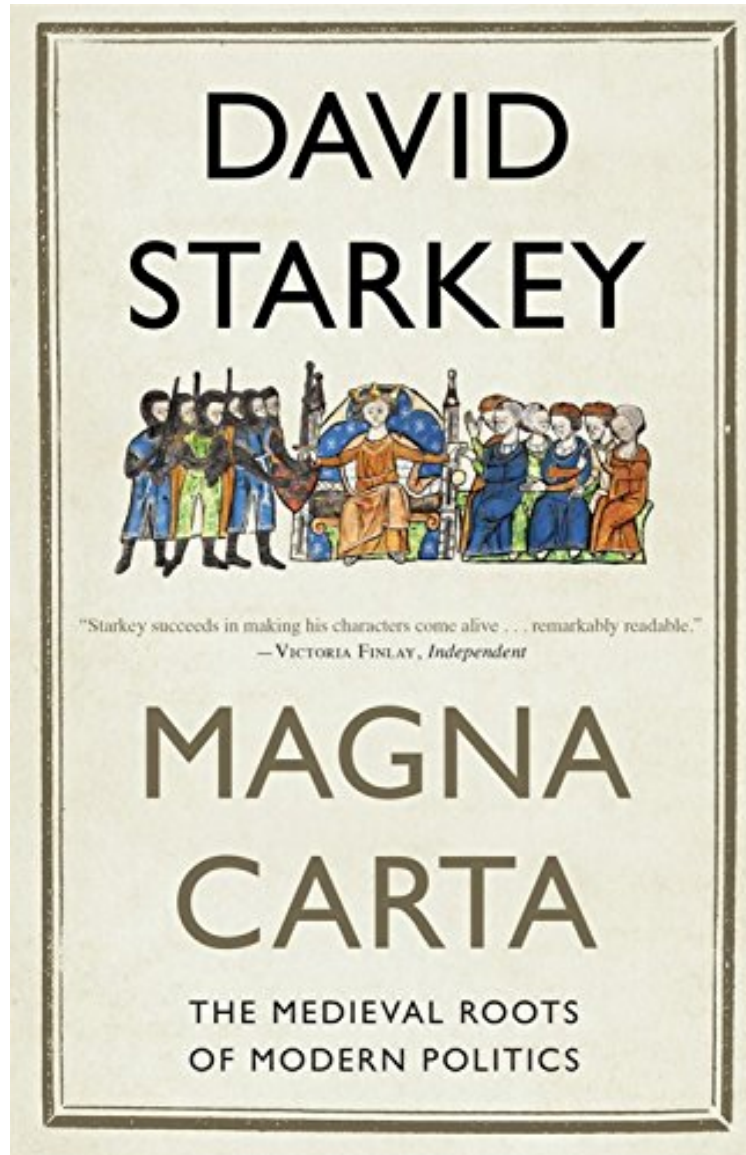


Magna Carta: The Medieval Roots of Modern Politics

David Starkey

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David Starkey : Magna Carta: The Medieval Roots of Modern Politics before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Magna Carta: The Medieval Roots of Modern Politics:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well written fascinating history of Magna Carta. Buy the book not the Kindle version. By albionphoto The Magna Carta (or Great Charter) is a complex document. First issued in 1215 after yet another English civil war the aim of the document was to force King John to abide by a set of rules and not interfere to much with the English barons. It came very close to establishing England as a republic some five or six

hundred years before republics became popular. The rest of the history of the Magna Carta is complicated as it was re-issued in 1216, 1217 and 1225 (at least). David Starkey writes a magnificent history of the charter and fills in the details of the power politics surrounding it. His writing is clear and he adds colour and life to this period in English history. He also makes clear that the Magna Carta did not establish habeus corpus - that was established as part of the Assize of Clarendon in 1166. I really enjoyed this book as it helped me understand the charter itself in more detail and to understand the reasons for its inception and modifications over a ten year period. This is one of the most informative, interesting and well written history books I've read in a while. Just one note on the kindle version the latter part of the book shows different versions of the charter side by side. This doesn't work on the Kindle and so this is one occasion where I'd say buy the book. Still it's a great book though.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

The More Things Change the More They Stay the Same By James E. Ego

David Starkey's book titled MAGNA CARTA: THE MEDIEVAL ROOTS OF MODERN POLITICS is a well written account Medieval English political and legal history. Starkey clarified the complex issues and identified the "players" who were involved during the reign of King John (1199-1216) who was eventually forced to put his seal on Magna Carta. The early sections of the book dealt with John's loss of Henry II's (1154-1189) Angevin Empire at the Battle of Bovines in 1214. This basically ended English hopes for any control in France until the Hundred Years War (1346-1453). So, as Starkey so clearly showed, King John focused on solidifying his control over the English nobility as well as the Welsh and the Irish. John had 28 Welsh hanged for alleged treason and tried to intimidate other English nobility via treachery, broken promises, and betrayal of loyal supporters. Such actions alienated the English nobles who FINALLY decided to act to protect their interests and their rights. As Starkey noted, the English nobility and Bishop Langton were not idealists but practical men whose "heads were not in the clouds but their feet were firmly planted on the ground." In other words, the English nobility were aware of what they wanted and knew how to get it. John did not understand his opposition and how practical and determined they were. When John agreed to the terms of Magna Carta, the romantic historians got their history wrong. Artists depicted John signing the Magna Carta, but John was illiterate. Also English documents were sealed and not signed. The myth that John signed the entire Magna Carta document was exploded. John only sealed the outlines of Magna Carta. The entire Magna Carta is about 4,000 words long, and scribes need time to complete the document which took considerable time given the fact that Magna Carta was written well before the invention of the printing press. Starkey mentioned that the English nobility formed an alliance with Henry III (1216-1272) who made a radical movement and a "weak" monarch a conservative tendency. Edward I agreed with the terms of Magna Carta which both enshrined the document and gave Edward credibility. When King John died in the midst political turmoil, his short will showed a congenial side to the nefarious monarch. John apologized to the families of people whom he harmed, apologized to those who survived John's persecutions, and he left considerable sums to help the poor and needy. This may fit that there is something good in the worst of us, or John's conscience bothered him. After John's death, English monarchs and nobility both pledged to uphold Magna Carta. While the English turned a radical document into a conservative political establishment, but the English were smart enough to make a conservative political arrangement into a practical political system that worked for centuries. Starkey made a depressing assessment re the Magna Carta and history. As Starkey noted, British and American citizens do not know or care about Magna Carta, the US Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. One minor weakness of Starkey's book is that he could have mentioned the influence of the Catholic Church's Canon Law. The Catholic Canon Law jurists introduced *par legum* (due process) into legal practice. Starkey should have mentioned that the Catholic Church's Fourth Lateran Council introduced trial by jury which was not part of English Constitutional History until the reign of Edward I (1272-1307) which obviously was later than the Fourth Lateran Council. Starkey concluded the book with interesting photo plates and careful outlines of the paragraphs of Magna Carta. The outlines are easy to follow and some have a "familiar ring" re the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights. One could argue that the US Constitution and Bill of Rights have the British Constitution written all over it. Starkey clearly made this connection. Those interested in English History will like this book which is well written and well organized.

James E. Ego

October 20, 2015

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Very interesting history and an engaging writing style

By ARG

In honor of the 800th anniversary of the First Magna Carta, Starkey wrote this book focusing on the 10 years after the 1215 sealing of the first document. As an American, I agree with Starkey that the Magna Carta is very much a part of our story, but I had no idea how little I really knew about it. Basic story, king is being nasty, barons revolt and get some assurances of basic rights and fairness in law. But no there is so much more like two documents more, an extra king, and some serious papal involvement. Very interesting history and an engaging writing style. All the years on television have certainly removed the dryness from his historical presentation

In this erudite, entertaining book, award-winning historian and television presenter David Starkey untangles historical and modern misconceptions about one of the founding documents of democracy. Along the way, he shows how the Magna Carta laid the foundation for the British constitution, influenced the American Revolution and the U.S. constitution, and continues to shape jurisprudential thinking about individual rights around the world today. In 1215, King John I of England faced a domestic crisis. He had just lost an expensive campaign to retake his ancestral lands in

France, an unfortunate adventure that he had funded by heavily taxing the baronial lords of England. Sick of the unpopular king's heavy-handed rule, and unimpressed by the king's unsuccessful attempt to seize Normandy, the feudal barons united to make demands of their sovereign for certain protections. These demands, the "Articles of the Barons," were submitted to the king in rough draft after the rebels occupied three cities, most significantly London. A few years later, after being edited and amplified by the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, the Articles would come to be known as the Magna Carta. The self-interested barons couldn't have known it at the time, but those demands would one day become the bedrock of democratic political development around the globe--even though that influence was largely due to mythologizing by later scholars who warped the symbolism of the document to support their arguments in favor of the rights of all citizens. Although the Magna Carta itself made no requests on behalf of the peasantry, in its structure the outlines of modern democratic reform are plainly visible. Among other things, it demanded limits on the ability of the crown to levy taxes; protection of the rights of the church; the guarantee of swift justice; and a ban on unjust imprisonment. Those protections and guarantees were strictly intended for benefit of feudal barons, but the free citizens of today's democratic nations owe an enormous debt to this history-changing document.