

0. WHAT IS THE MAGNA CARTA - Story Preface

1. WHAT IS THE MAGNA CARTA

2. THE SOURCE OF TROUBLE

3. CROSS PURPOSES AT RUNNYMEDE

4. THE POPE RESPONDS

5. THE BARONS PREVAIL

6. BRITAIN'S STATUTE NUMBER ONE

7. WHAT HAPPENED TO JOHN?



There are four known surviving copies of the *Magna Carta* which King John signed in 1215. The British Library has two of those early versions, and this image depicts one of them. The original document, according to the British Library, was "written in iron gall ink on parchment in medieval Latin, using standard abbreviations of the period, authenticated with the Great Seal of King John. The original wax seal was lost over the centuries. This document is held at the British Library and is identified as 'British Library Cotton MS Augustus II.106.'" Click on the image for a better view.

The "Great Charter" (English for the Latin *Magna Carta*) was not in King John's best interests. Nor was it his original thought. It was also not the original thought of the barons who forced it on him.

Magna Carta was copied, nearly word for word, from "The Charter of Liberties of Henry I," an earlier charter (1100) from an earlier king (1100-1135) who had granted civil liberties to the English nobility.

Today we also know the *Magna Carta* as a forerunner of American rights and liberties. People refer to it with reverence. But if granting the "Great Charter" was not in the king's best interests, and if the king was all-powerful, why did he agree to it? Or *did* he?

What really happened to bring King John and his nobles together on that June day in 1215?

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/WHAT-IS-THE-MAGNA-CARTA-Magna-Carta)

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Magna Carta

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Archives.

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