

0. THE SOURCE OF TROUBLE - Story Preface

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James William Edmund Doyle (1822–1892), a British author and artist, created his artistic impression of what it might have been like on the day English barons met at St Edmundsbury Cathedral where they pledged to limit the control King John held over them. Produced in 1864, Doyle's work was engraved by Edmund Evans (1826–1905) and included in his book *A Chronicle of England* (published in London, during 1864, by Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green). The image, entitled "The Barons Swear to Achieve Their Liberties," appears on page 222 of the [1864 edition of the book](#). Click on the image for a better view.

John was always in trouble with someone. The fourth son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitane, he was ineligible to inherit land (hence his nickname "Lackland"). Because he inherited no land, he was always conniving to gain land by other means.

What he actually accomplished, however, was just the opposite. When he finally became king in his own right, after Richard died, he even lost [English holdings in France](#).

For much of his reign, John was preoccupied with regaining those lost French territories. To pay for his battles, he increased taxes on the landed barons.

Had the king been a winning leader, the nobility may have grudgingly dealt with ever-increasing taxes. But John was no winner. He continued to [lose ground to the French](#).

Finally, the English barons revolted against the high taxes and captured London in May of 1215. They issued their terms of rapprochement: The monarch would be forced to [sign](#) a charter giving legal rights to the barons and creating obligations on the part of the crown.

But why should the king agree to such terms? Didn't John think (as nearly all monarchs did) that he had absolute authority? Didn't John - [the king](#) - believe in the "[divine right of kings](#)?"

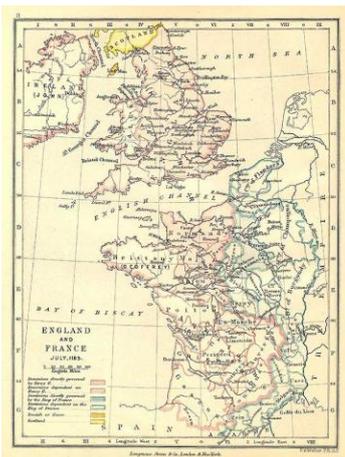
See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-SOURCE-OF-TROUBLE-Magna-Carta>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-SOURCE-OF-TROUBLE-Magna-Carta>

## Media Stream



### [Henry II - Control of Lands in Britain and France, 1185](#)

Map online, courtesy Perry Casteñada Library, University of Texas at Austin.

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Henry-II-Control-of-Lands-in-Britain-and-France-1185>



### Illustration: Signing the Magna Carta

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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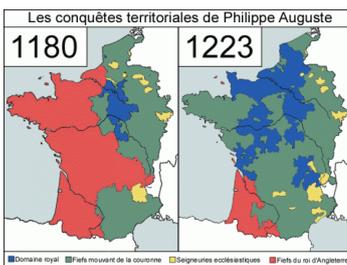


### King John

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### John Lackland - Loss of English Strongholds in France

Image online, courtesy French-language Wikimedia Commons.

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