Power Under Law

Trace medieval legal practices into modern democratic principles.

MWH.C.2.1 "Describe the impact of medieval English legal and constitutional practices, as established in the Magna Carta, on the rise of modern democratic principles (e.g., common law, limitation of a monarch's power..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three medieval legal practices in the passage, then circle a modern democratic principle connected to each one. Give each practice and its matching principle the same number.

What a Charter Could Change

(1) In 1215, King John faced a rebellion by powerful English barons. They forced him to seal Magna Carta, a written agreement that placed limits on royal power. One provision said the king could not collect certain payments from his barons without the kingdom's common counsel. That rule did not give everyone a vote, and later versions of the charter changed its tax provisions. Still, the 1215 demand challenged the idea that a ruler could simply take money whenever he wished. The later democratic principle of limited government holds that public officials must obey rules rather than act on personal will.

(2) Picture a royal officer who accuses a landholder of disloyalty and wants to seize his property. Magna Carta said that no free man could be imprisoned, dispossessed, or punished except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land. It also declared that justice should not be sold, denied, or delayed. These protections did not cover everyone in medieval England. Over time, however, the idea that government must follow known legal procedures helped shape the rule of law. Under that principle, even officials must answer to the law when they use public power.

(3) Before Magna Carta, English royal courts had begun developing common law: legal rules used across the kingdom, built through court decisions and established customs. A village dispute over a boundary might be heard under rules recognized beyond that one village rather than settled only by a lord's preference. Magna Carta did not invent common law. Its demands for lawful judgment fit a growing expectation that rulers and courts should use established rules. Centuries later, lawmakers and judges drew on these medieval practices when developing broader rights. Modern democracy goes further: legal protection and political participation are not reserved for a small privileged group.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the 1215 rule about certain payments challenge the king's power, and what modern principle does that challenge resemble?

2. How could Magna Carta's rules about taking a free man's property help shape the modern rule of law?

3. Magna Carta did not invent common law. How did its demands connect to common law's influence on later government?

4. Why would it be inaccurate to call Magna Carta an immediate guarantee of equal democracy? How did its influence grow?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A mayor orders a market stall closed because its owner criticized her, without naming any law that allows the closure. Write a four-sentence advisory note connecting two different medieval practices from the passage to two modern principles, and explain one limit of medieval protections.

ANSWER KEY

Power Under Law

HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.C.2.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three medieval legal practices in the passage, then circle a modern democratic principle connected to each one. Give each practice and its matching principle the same number. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the 1215 rule about certain payments challenge the king's power, and what modern principle does that challenge resemble?	**The king needed the kingdom's common counsel for certain payments rather than deciding alone. This resembles limited government.**
2	How could Magna Carta's rules about taking a free man's property help shape the modern rule of law?	**They required lawful judgment or the law of the land before property could be taken, supporting the idea that officials must follow legal procedures.**
3	Magna Carta did not invent common law. How did its demands connect to common law's influence on later government?	**Its demands for lawful judgment reinforced the expectation that rulers and courts use established rules, an expectation also reflected in common law.**
4	Why would it be inaccurate to call Magna Carta an immediate guarantee of equal democracy? How did its influence grow?	**Its protections did not cover everyone, and its consent rule did not give everyone a vote. Later lawmakers and judges drew on medieval legal practices to develop broader rights.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A mayor should not close a stall simply because its owner criticized her, since officials must act within legal limits. Magna Carta's restrictions on King John's power helped shape this principle of limited government. Its rule against taking a free man's property except under the law of the land also points toward the modern rule of law. Medieval protections did not cover everyone, so modern legal protections extend beyond those in the charter.

Accept accurate connections between a distinct medieval practice and each modern principle. Students should recognize that Magna Carta's protections were limited and did not create modern democracy at once.