

Magna Carta Day

Bob Bauman (June 15, 2011)

Today is Magna Carta Day, the anniversary of that June day in the year 1215 when, at Runnymede meadow beside the River Thames in Surrey, English barons presented King John with a written list of rights they demanded that he recognize...and he did.



Never heard of the Magna Carta?

Well you should have. Magna Carta is the historic document that inspired our American Founding Fathers to limit governmental power through the fundamental written document that became our U.S. Constitution.

Dumb Teachers

One of the greatest tragedies of modern America is that our youth has been robbed of any real sense of our nation's history by a bureaucratic "education" system that downplays our glorious national past.

The *New York Times* [reports today](#) that "American students are less proficient in their nation's history than in any other subject" based on an extensive test of thousands of students. It found that most fourth graders were unable to say why Abraham Lincoln was an important figure." Overall, only 20% of fourth graders, 17% of eighth graders and 12% of high school seniors demonstrated adequate knowledge about American history.

Ronald Reagan used to say that when youth is ignorant of its country's history that country is robbed of its future. Where does that leave the United States of America?

The Meaning of Magna Carta

We are indebted to **Roger Pilon** of the **Cato Institute** [for reminding us](#) of this 796th anniversary of the Magna Carta, the Great Charter that helped to inspire not only the U.S.

Constitution, but also our Bill of Rights and the basic concept embodied in the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.



One of the basic concepts of the Magna Carta also was that government officials must be subject to the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, I Object

With that in mind, in March of 1976, the year of our American Bicentennial, when I served as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Maryland's First District, I objected to a unanimous consent request to authorize no less than 25 House members, their spouses and staff members to go to England and "escort" one of the four surviving original copies of the Magna Carta back to the U.S. Capitol for display.

I believed, then and now, that the hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars cost of this fancy congressional junket was unjustified. I suggested that this Great Charter could just as easily be sent by diplomatic courier or FedEx at far less expense. And I pointed out the obvious – this was just another unjustified House junket for fun and frolic at the taxpayers' expense.

On to the Party

On an initial roll call vote a majority of the House agreed with me, but within days the Democrat House leaders including [Speaker Carl Albert](#) of Oklahoma, twisted arms and rammed the junket authorization through. Then 25 of my peripatetic House colleagues, their spouses, staff and baggage flew off to London for a week long, tax-funded party.

I must say that the original copy of the Magna Carta my colleagues brought back, which I inspected closely, was most impressive.

That venerable document rested in all its glory a bulletproof glass case in the Capitol Rotunda throughout 1976, reminding visitors of from whence our basic rights came —

and where our hard earned money paid in taxes goes.

Bob Bauman