

# RADICAL WORDS

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FROM MAGNA CARTA  
TO THE CONSTITUTION

September 6–November 2, 2014

*PEOPLE* of the United States  
do hereby provide for the common defence, promote the  
welfare, and establish this Constitution for the United States.  
*ARTICLE I*  
All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a  
Congress of the United States, which shall be composed of  
Senators and Representatives, and Electors in the most  
manner which shall not have attained to the age of  
thirty years, seven years, and seven years, respectively, when  
they shall be chosen, and when they next assemble, after  
the first Meeting of the United States under this  
Constitution.

*Magna Carta, Lincoln Cathedral Exemplar*  
Ink on parchment, 1215  
Lincoln Cathedral,  
England  
Image © Lincolnshire  
County Council



# Magna Carta

Throughout history, documents have been issued to claim or establish rights and to check abuses of power. To many people, the document known as Magna Carta, or the Great Charter, written in thirteenth-century England, has become a potent symbol of political liberty and justice. In particular, the political leaders of the British colonies in America looked to Magna Carta as a precedent for the development of charters and laws in their new territories. Over the centuries, the demands that government provide fair and just treatment to citizens have expanded far beyond the narrow slice of society protected by Magna Carta. Great strides have been made toward ensuring justice for all people and equality under the law, but the quest continues to this day, both in the United States and around the globe.

“The democratic aspiration is no mere recent phase in human history. . . . It was written in Magna Carta.”

– Franklin Delano Roosevelt,  
1941 Inaugural  
Address

*Radical Words: From Magna Carta to the Constitution* has been organized by the Clark Art Institute, in partnership with Lincoln Cathedral—Bringing Magna Carta to the USA. It is generously supported by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the officers and employees of Allen & Company, Inc., the Gilder Foundation, and an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities

# Objects in the Clark Collection Related to Themes of Liberty and Human Rights



Luca Signorelli  
*The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine of Alexandria*  
c. 1498  
Oil, tempera, and gold on panel

## The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine of Alexandria

The freedom to express one's religious beliefs has often been a cause of heated—and sometimes violent—controversy. The first clause of Magna Carta deals with the relationship between the monarch and the medieval church in England, acknowledging the church's freedom and its rights. Signorelli's painting depicts a legendary story of a ruler attempting to suppress freedom of worship in early Christian times. When a pagan emperor ordered the inhabitants of Alexandria to give sacrifice to his pagan gods, Catherine—a devout Christian—refused. The emperor, who can be seen on the left, tried to persuade Catherine to give up her faith, and had her beheaded when she resisted.

*This painting can be found in Gallery 9*



Jules Dalou  
*Wisdom Supporting Liberty*  
c. 1889  
Bronze  
Gift of Asbjorn R. Lunde,  
2006

## Wisdom Supporting Liberty

Like Magna Carta, the motto “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” espoused in France during the revolution of 1789, has become a symbol of the ongoing struggle for human rights. Dalou's sculpture shows Minerva, the ancient Roman goddess of Wisdom, holding up a naked figure representing Liberty—the implication being that supporting freedom is a wise act. The arrangement of the figures in the small bronze was reused as part of the design for a monument to the French politician Léon Gambetta, a republican and a staunch critic of the Emperor Napoleon III.

*This sculpture can be found in Gallery 6*

“We must never cease to proclaim in fearless tones the great principles of freedom and the rights of man which are the joint inheritance of the English-speaking world and which through Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the Habeas Corpus, trial by jury, and the English common law find their most famous expression in the American Declaration of Independence.”

— Winston Churchill, March 1946 address at Westminster College, Fulton, MO



Daniel Smith and Robert Sharp  
*Milk Jug*  
London, 1765/66  
Silver

## Milk Jug

As the names and the decoration on this milk jug suggest, it was given initially to Benjamin Franklin by Dr. John Fothergill, Franklin's London physician. The motto "Keep bright the chain" was one of Franklin's favorite sayings, and the chain engraved on the lid and body of the jug probably refers to the bonds of friendship that unite human beings. In this context, the chain and the motto may also relate to Fothergill and Franklin's joint efforts to prevent the dispute between the British government and its colonies in North America from escalating into revolution. When resolution could not be found between the colonies and the British government, Franklin played a crucial role in shaping America's founding documents, which were influenced by Magna Carta.

*This jug can be found in Gallery 20, northeast wall*

# Checklist of the Exhibition

## *Magna Carta, Lincoln Cathedral Exemplar*

Ink on parchment, 1215

Loaned by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln Cathedral, England

## *Declaration of Independence*

First printing, broadsheet printed by John Dunlap, Philadelphia, July 4, 1776

Lent by Chapin Library of Rare Books, Williams College

## *Committee of Style Report of the United States Constitution*

Printed by Dunlap and Claypoole, Philadelphia, 1787, with ink annotations by George Mason

Lent by Chapin Library of Rare Books, Williams College

## *Emancipation Proclamation*

Printed in Washington, DC, c. Jan. 3, 1863

Lent by Chapin Library of Rare Books, Williams College

## *Declaration of the Rights of the Women of the United States*

Published by the National Woman Suffrage Association, Philadelphia, July 4, 1876

Lent by Chapin Library of Rare Books, Williams College

## *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

United Nations Department of Public Information, printed in the USA, 1949

Lent by Sawyer Library, Williams College

## *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

Department of State Publication, Washington, DC, January 1949

Lent by Sawyer Library, Williams College

The Lincoln Cathedral Magna Carta is one of only four surviving handwritten copies of the original charter issued in 1215, and was probably brought back to Lincoln from Runnymede by Hugh of Wells, the Bishop of Lincoln. In 2015, the 800th anniversary of this historic document, Magna Carta will go back on display in Lincoln within a new interpretation center.

The other documents in the exhibition come from the Williams College Libraries. The Chapin Library of Rare Books has an extraordinary collection of rare books, manuscripts, and other primary source materials. The Founding Documents of the United States, including the Declaration of Independence and draft Constitution featured in this exhibition, have a permanent display area in Stetson Hall. Sawyer and Chapin Libraries have recently reopened in renovated and expanded facilities.

# Ten Facts about Magna Carta

- 1.** Magna Carta, which means “the Great Charter” in Latin, was designed to limit the power of King John of England by guaranteeing in writing the basic rights of the upper class. Before Magna Carta, King John had stated that “the law is my mouth”—in other words, whatever he said became the law of the land. The charter is considered a cornerstone of democracy in part because it established the principle that no man is above the law.
- 2.** Although Magna Carta is often regarded as a symbol of the protection of individual rights, the document only applied to nobles and “free men.” English society at the time was hierarchical, with the king at the top, the barons and knights below him, and the free and unfree peasantry at the bottom. Unfree peasants formed the vast majority of the population in thirteenth-century England.
- 3.** King John did not actually sign Magna Carta (some historians believe that he did not know how to read and write). Instead, he attached the royal seal to the document. The seal, now missing from the Lincoln Magna Carta, would have been attached to the document by the three holes at the bottom of the parchment.
- 4.** Drawn up by a group of rebelling nobles in 1215, Magna Carta was annulled by the pope only a few weeks after it was approved by King John. It was reissued, with some changes, several times in the thirteenth century.
- 5.** King John agreed to the terms of Magna Carta at Runnymede, a meadow about twenty miles west of London. In 1957, the American Bar Association built a monument at Runnymede in honor of the influence Magna Carta had on the founding documents and laws of the United States.
- 6.** Before the development of the printing press, all documents had to be written by hand. This copy of Magna Carta was written on parchment (carefully prepared sheepskin). Because parchment was expensive, abbreviations were used whenever possible to save space.
- 7.** The Magna Carta on view at the Clark, on loan from Lincoln Cathedral, is one of only four existing copies of the original 1215 document.
- 8.** Lincoln Cathedral is one of the most impressive medieval cathedrals in Europe. Stephen Langton, who served as Archbishop of Canterbury from 1207 to 1228 and played a significant role in the development of Magna Carta, studied at the cathedral school in his youth. Learn more at [lincolncathedral.com](http://lincolncathedral.com) and [visitlincoln.com](http://visitlincoln.com).
- 9.** Over time, Magna Carta came to symbolize the rights of all, not just the rights of the few. The document and its later interpretation influenced the drafting of the American Constitution and Bill of Rights—due process, trial by jury, and protection against cruel and unusual punishment can all be traced back to Magna Carta.
- 10.** In 2015, England will celebrate the 800th anniversary of the document. Visit [magnacarta800th.com](http://magnacarta800th.com) to find out more.

For more information about *Radical Words: From Magna Carta to the Constitution* and downloadable versions of all the documents in the exhibition, visit [clarkart.edu/Exhibition/Magna-Carta](http://clarkart.edu/Exhibition/Magna-Carta).

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*We who  
insure domestic Tranquility,  
and our Posterity, do*