

# Roots of American Democracy

## One American's Story

In 1688, the minister Increase Mather sailed from Massachusetts to England with a complaint. The colonists believed that the new royal governor had trampled their rights as English subjects.

Eventually, Mather came home with a new charter that restored colonists' rights.

### PRIMARY SOURCE

“For all *English* liberties are restored to them: No Persons shall have a Penny of their Estates taken from them; nor any Laws imposed on them, without their own Consent by Representatives chosen by themselves.”

—Increase Mather, quoted in *The Last American Puritan*

The English rights guaranteed by the Magna Carta and later documents are the basis for the rights that we enjoy today.

## The Rights of Englishmen

**KEY QUESTION** How were English rights strengthened over the centuries?

Throughout the colonies, free Americans enjoyed the rights and liberties of English subjects. England had one of the most advanced political democracies in Europe, and English freedoms were envied throughout the world. The American colonists were fiercely protective of these freedoms, which they called the “rights of Englishmen.” The shared belief in certain legal and political principles helped tie the colonies together.

**Justice and Self-Government** English rights had been developing for centuries. The first step toward guaranteeing these rights came in 1215. That year, English nobles forced King John to sign the **Magna Carta** (Great Charter). By signing this document, the king agreed that he was not above the law. Like everyone else, the king had to obey the laws of the land.



Increase Mather