

## **VI. Medieval England (1066- )**

### A. A Story of Two Threads

1. The key to the story of medieval England is that it contains two threads:
  - a) The rise of *constitutional monarchy*, which is an important step towards American freedom.
  - b) The connection with France and the many challenges involved in that.
2. Both stories have the same origin: the Norman Conquest of **1066** by William “the Conqueror.”

### B. The “Problem of the King”

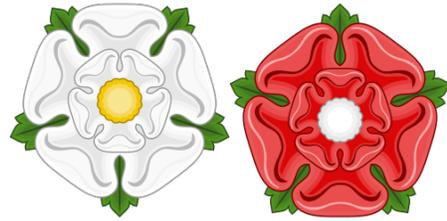
1. When William conquered England, he was all too familiar with the “problem of the dukes.” He *was* the problem, at least in France. As a king he wanted to address the problem right away.
2. William divided up the land of his own Norman lords and the English lords into small chunks so that they could not possess too much power individually, and they would be surrounded by one another and thus have difficulty plotting against the king. This did not make rebellion impossible, but it gave the king an advantage.
3. The outcome of William’s unique organization was a strong kingship in England much earlier than elsewhere.
4. Strong kings become tyrants, as every society eventually learns, and England was fortunate to learn early.
5. When John I lost the Battle of Bouvines to Philip II of France (above, page 33), he insisted on raising more taxes to fund his continuing war. Seeing this as unjust the lords rebelled against John in a “Baron’s War” and forced him to agree to limits on taxation and on his power in general which were embodied in a “great charter” (a.k.a. “Magna Carta”) in **1215**.
6. Of course, John tried to overturn the arrangement, as did later kings, so more “Baron’s wars” were needed to keep them in line, and after one of these, a rebellious lord named *Simon of Monfort* held the first “parliament” (assembly of representatives) to discuss the problem of how to manage the kingdom.

### C. The War of the Roses (1455-85)

1. We have already looked at the Hundred Years’ War (1337-1453) repeatedly, and we know that England eventually lost and was disconnected from France.
2. The outcome for England was ironic, because so many of the royal princes died during the war that the descendants of Isabel and Edward II ended up in an argument over who was the rightful king *of England*.
3. One branch of the royal family were the descendants of the Duke of York, and one branch were descendants of the Duke of Lancaster, and their argument over the

English throne resulted in a war in England not unlike the one the English had just fought against France.

4. This civil war is known as the “War of the Roses” (1455-85) because the symbol of the Lancastrians was a red rose, and the symbol of the Yorkist was a white rose.
5. At the end of the war, the two houses were combined by Henry VII, who was the father of the later, and much more famous Henry VIII.
6. Although this sounds like the kind of thing that couldn’t possibly matter any more, the experience of this dynastic war deeply shaped Henry VIII, and we shall see that he initiated the English Reformation (in our next segment) in large part because of it.



The “War of the Roses” (1455-85) made the English kings just as desperate to avoid the end of their dynastic line as the French.