The Middle Ages: 1066-1485
Introduction:

• Battle of Hastings
  • 1066- October
  • Changed the course of history
  • Fought by England and France (Normandy)
  • William the Conqueror (of Normandy) defeated King Harold

• William the Conqueror
  • Ruthless and efficient soldier
  • Fair and organized King
  • His victory impacted English history, English character, and the English Language
William the Conqueror

• Great Administrator
  • Created the Domesday Book
    • This book cataloged all property and allowed taxes based on what people owned

• William and the Normans brought the following to English Culture:
  • Administrative Ability
  • Emphasis on Law and Order
  • Cultural Unity
Feudalism and Knighthood: Pyramid of Power

- The social/caste system introduced by the Normans was called feudalism
  - God
  - King
  - Barons/Lords/Land-Owning Knight
  - Peasants/Serfs
- Only worked if knights were loyal
- Created a sense of form and manners: Chivalry
  - Boys trained early and away from home to become knights
  - He was “dubbed” a knight when training was completed
  - Breaking the code undermined you and knights in general
Women in Medieval Society

- Women had no political rights and were always subservient to men
- Her status depended on that of her father, brothers, or husband
- Peasant women’s lives were a ceaseless cycle of childbearing, housework, and hard fieldwork
- Women of higher station were occupied with childbearing and household supervision
  - They would manage the estates while their husbands were away and relinquish their temporary powers when they returned
Chivalry and Courtly Love: Ideal but Unreal

• Chivalry was a system of ideal and social codes governing the behavior of knights
  • Adhere to one’s oath of loyalty to overlord
  • Rules for warfare and combat (never attack an unarmed opponent)
  • Adoring a particular lady as a means of self-improvement

• Courtly Love
  • Nonsexual adoration
  • Woman “set above” as an example of purity and inspiration

• Chivalry brought about an idealized attitude towards women but her actual rights and status never changed
The New City Classes

• At the beginning of the Middle Ages, the society was centered around the feudal castle
• As the population grew, so did cities. These became the center of medieval life
• Cities and the middle-class they inevitably created rendered feudal systems obsolete
• The merchants became wealthy enough to pay for art and entertainment, so often, the art reflected the “everyday” person, not just royalty and wealthy people
The Crusades

• 1095-1270
• Heathen: term used for anyone who wasn’t a Christian
• Series of wars waged by European Christians against the Muslims
• Jerusalem and the Holy Land were the “prize”
• Europeans ultimately failed, but gained advances in the following:
  • Mathematics
  • Astronomy
  • Architecture
  • Craftsmanship
• These advances changed the English people’s way of life
The Martyrdom of Thomas a Becket: Murder in the Cathedral

• King Henry II appointed his friend Thomas a Becket as Archbishop of Canterbury
  • He wanted an ally against the Pope

• Thomas was independent and combative and often took the Pope’s side, and this angered the king

• Henry complained and several knights took him seriously
  • They murdered Thomas in his own church

• This caused outrage among the people weakening the king, strengthened the power of Rome, and enabled some clergy to take liberties

• The church still had one positive effect: cultural unity
The Magna Carta: Power to the People

• 1215

• King John was forced to sign the Magna Carta at Runnymede

• The document gave greater power to aristocrats but did nothing to improve the rights of the common people
  • Created as an effort to curb the Church’s power

• It became the basis for English constitutional law
  • Trial by jury
  • Legislative taxation
The Hundred Years’ War (1337-1453)

- 1337-1453
- England against France
  - Fought in France
- England was unsuccessful, but the war led to development of a British national consciousness
- Yeoman class emerged: archers using longbows
- Feudalism is becoming more and more obsolete
Modern, democratic England begins to emerge
The Black Death

• 1348-1349
• Black Death or Bubonic Plague
• Highly contagious and spread by fleas from infected rats
• Reduced the population by 1/3 and caused a labor shortage
• Resulted in a shortage of laborers and gave serfs leverage against their overlords
• Led to the end of Feudalism