Section Summary
ROYAL POWER GROWS

During the early Middle Ages, European monarchs had limited power. However, from 1000 to 1300, increases in royal power and control gradually established the foundations of modern government.

In 1066, William the Conqueror took over England. By 1086, he had completed a census and property survey called the Domesday Book. It helped establish an effective taxation system and treasury. In 1154, Henry II ascended the English throne. He expanded the justice system. Royal court decisions became the foundation of English common law, a system based on custom and prior rulings. Henry II also set up a jury system that was the forerunner of today’s grand jury.

Henry’s son, King John, abused his power and was forced to sign the Magna Carta, or Great Charter. It required the king to obey the laws. It also established two important principles: due process of law, or protection from arrest without proper legal procedures, and habeas corpus, or protection from imprisonment without being charged with a crime. John also agreed not to raise taxes before consulting his Great Council of lords and clergy. Under later rulers, this council evolved into Parliament, England’s legislature. Parliament eventually controlled the “power of the purse,” meaning it would not approve new taxes unless the monarch met certain demands.

Unlike the English, early French monarchs did not rule a united kingdom. Then in 987, Hugh Capet became king and began expanding royal power. The Capetians stabilized the kingdom over the next 300 years. In 1179, Philip II took the throne. He gained control of English lands in Normandy and expanded territories in southern France, adding vast areas to his domain, and becoming Europe’s most powerful ruler.

Louis IX came to power in 1226. Although he persecuted heretics and Jews and led crusades against Muslims, he also outlawed private wars, ended serfdom, and expanded royal courts. By the time of his death in 1270, France was a centralized monarchy ruling over a unified state. In 1302, the Estates General was set up, but this council of clergy, nobility, and townspeople never gained the “power of the purse” over French royalty.

Review Questions
1. What did the Domesday Book help establish in England?

2. What important English document limited the absolute power of the king?