

Name _____

Date _____

Feudalism

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

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The Black Death and Feudalism

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In the mid-1300s, a plague swept across Asia, North Africa, and Europe. It had particularly devastating effects in Western Europe. This plague was so deadly that it earned the name \xe2\x80\x9cThe Black Death.\xe2\x80\x9d The Black Death killed almost one-third of Europe\xe2\x80\x99s population at the time and caused significant societal changes. The decrease in population led to labor shortages, and services provided by people became valuable. This meant that laborers were able to negotiate better working conditions and wages. As peasants rose in economic and social status, the feudal system started to decline.

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Notes

The Peasants' Revolt of 1381

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After the Black Death swept through Europe, peasants started to realize the value of their labor. They demanded increased wages and better working conditions. However, lawmakers, who were mostly landowners and nobles, felt threatened by the peasants' new position of power. So in 1380, they passed laws to limit wage increases and introduced a poll tax. This meant that everyone over the age of 15, despite their economic status, had to pay taxes. Already struggling to make ends meet, peasants found these new laws unfair. As a result, they organized a revolt.

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Starting in Essex in 1381, the violent rebellion spread to different parts of England. Thousands of peasants gathered and made their way to London to ask the king to meet their demands of ending serfdom and feudalism. King Richard II met with the peasants and agreed to meet their demands. Trusting his words, the peasants returned home. But King Richard II did not keep his promises and used military force to put down any more uprisings.

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Although the revolt was defeated, it was still significant because it marked the beginning of the end of feudalism, and society began to recognize the power of the working class. Eventually, poll taxes were eliminated and peasants were able to increase their wages and gain more freedom.

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The Church and Feudalism

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Religion was deeply embedded in medieval society, and the Church played a central role in feudalism. The Church held a lot of economic and social power, sometimes even more than the kings. The Church was the largest landowner in medieval Europe, and feudalism financially fueled the Church. Most of the land granted to the Church was through donations by kings and nobles, usually to secure their way to heaven. Many church leaders were feudal lords and part of the noble class. They were often heavily involved in politics as advisors to kings and nobles.

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