

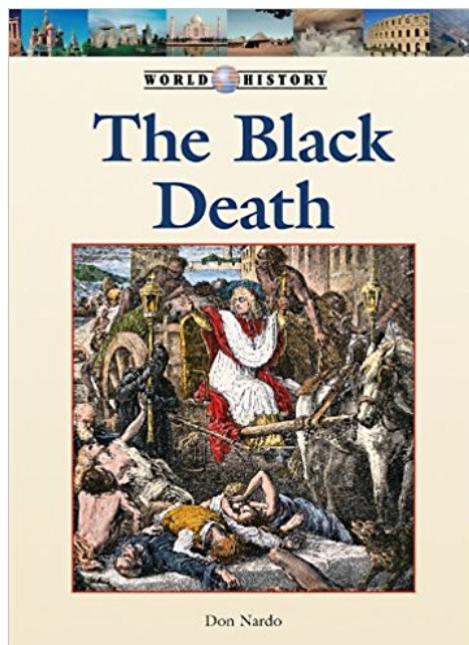
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Nardo, D. (2011). *The Black Death*. Detroit: Lucent.



Oppressive rules lead to trouble

In desperation, some national rulers and town governments tried to keep various social groups in their place by more blatant and forceful means. Some rulers forbade peasants from leaving manors on which they had been raised. Others kept commoners who worked in shops from switching jobs. Still others placed caps (limits) on how much commoners could earn in various jobs and professions.

Those citizens who ignored these oppressive rules were taxed or fined, and some who failed to pay the fines were arrested. Such extreme measures often ended up affecting all but society's wealthiest members and were very unpopular.

Such attempts to regulate wages and maintain the old social order through strong-arm tactics only further inflamed peasants and other commoners who already resented being held down. The result was a series of uprisings of workers.

A large peasant revolt occurred in England in 1381. There, the reigning king, Richard II, felt so threatened that he gave the peasants a charter, or legal agreement, granting them a number of rights and freedoms they had never possessed. Later that year, however, the king and his nobles cancelled this agreement.

Still, England's lower classes made some considerable gains in the course of the negotiations. The government had to reduce taxes and in the years to come it did not try to pass any laws designed to keep the wages of ordinary labourers low. As a result of these developments, by 1400 England's traditional manorial system had vanished from most parts of the kingdom.