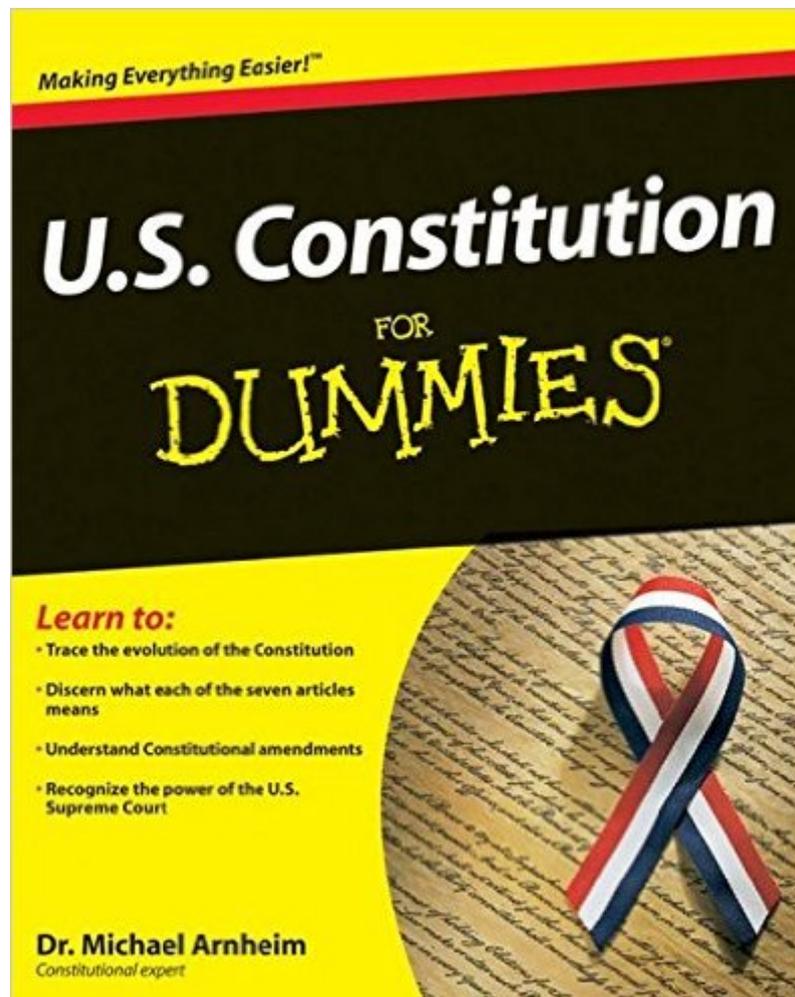


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U.S. Constitution For Dummies



Synopsis

An in-depth look at the defining document of America Want to make sense of the U.S. Constitution? This plain-English guide walks you through this revered document, explaining how the articles and amendments came to be and how they have guided legislators, judges, and presidents and sparked ongoing debates. You'll understand all the big issues — from separation of church and state to impeachment to civil rights — that continue to affect Americans' daily lives. Get started with Constitution basics — explore the main concepts and their origins, the different approaches to interpretation, and how the document has changed over the past 200+ years Know who has the power — see how the public, the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court share in the ruling of America Balance the branches of government — discover what it means to be Commander in Chief, the functions of the House and Senate, and how Supreme Court justices are appointed Break down the Bill of Rights — from freedom of religion to the prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishments," understand what the first ten amendments mean Make sense of the modifications — see how amendments have reformed presidential elections, abolished slavery, given voting rights to women, and more Open the book and find: The text of the Constitution and its amendments Discussion of controversial issues including the death penalty, abortion, and gay marriage Why the word "democracy" doesn't appear in the Constitution What the Electoral College is and how it elects a President Details on recent Supreme Court decisions The Founding Fathers' intentions for balancing power in Washington

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Customer Reviews

The author covers every article and amendment, and he makes every attempt at explaining concepts like judicial review and enumerated powers in layman's terms. While the book contains sections marked "In My Opinion," which the author gives the reader permission to skip, the reader finds the author's take on various Supreme Court decisions throughout the text. In fact, the book is as much an argument for strict constructionism as it is a comprehensive review of the Constitution. (Justice Antonin Scalia is quoted many times throughout this book. And Ted Cruz wrote the foreward.) The author too often brushes off Living Constitution arguments, calling various 5-4 conservative court decisions "imminently sensible," as though anyone would have reached the same decision, even though four justices took the other side. As other reviewers have noted, the structure of the book is not as straightforward as one might expect. The author is constantly referring the reader to other sections of the book, and some topics and cases are mentioned several times. At first, I found this frustrating, and I still wonder if another structure might have been more effective. However, the author wants to show how different parts of the Constitution work in tandem to produce the government we've got. For instance, he explains the philosophy of incorporation very well (even though he clearly hates it), but explaining it involves taking amendments out of order and analyzing them side by side. So while he takes the amendments in order, in his discussion of each amendment he includes relevant portions of other amendments.

I bought this as an easy and quick reference book, thinking that it would be at least somewhat fair since it's supposed to be an instructive overview, not a thesis. I did find the book to be extremely thorough, but it was immediately obvious to me that this wasn't an honest guide to the US Constitution and the schools of thought regarding it. Rather, it is a poorly concealed literary soapbox for a particularly nasty man who, believe it or not, isn't even a legal scholar or an American lawyer! He is openly hostile toward the Supreme Court of the United States, presenting them as unprincipled power grabbers who somehow managed to get appointed and confirmed to the court without understanding anything about the constitution. It's fine to disagree with them, but in a book presenting itself as educational and without an agenda, you must present all strains of thought so the reader can understand and eventually decide. It's pure intellectual laziness to assume that any justice who disagrees with you is just stupid or acting out of malice; they are each informed by well established traditions of jurisprudence and their frameworks for interpreting the constitution are widely recognized as valid. But instead of discussing these other viewpoints, Dr. Arnheim writes the entire book operating from the assumption that the justices are all useless and disingenuous manipulators of the constitution. Also, he often makes cheap, sometimes mean-spirited jokes at the

justices expense. He has a fixation with the "incorporation" doctrine as applied to the Bill of Rights, making the argument throughout the entire book that the Bill of Rights really shouldn't apply to the states.

THE AUTHOR IS NOT A CONSTITUTIONAL SCHOLAR! He has a degree in history, not law of any kind. Don't be fooled when he refers to himself as a lawyer. He works in law in the United Kingdom, and never has in the United States as he is not credited to. This book is very biased. Anyone who is familiar with the "For Dummies" books know of the side icons used such as "Warning", "Remember", "Try This" etc. This man puts in an icon "In My Opinion". Of course everyone has an opinion and is entitled to that, but this man should NOT place it in this book. If he wants to express his opinion as an educated expert, write about it in a different book. Even with that, he writes on issues in a biased and opinion based way. It's not hard to tell what this man thinks of politics even if he doesn't spell it out completely. He goes as far to criticize Brown v. Board of Education (the Supreme Court case that ended segregation) as it led to "decline in the standards" of schools. He also says the constitution is silent on this issue (meaning he thinks segregation should be allowed). "None of these laws[14th Amendment] says anything about segregation in schools." Wow.... He also accuses Marbury v. Madison to be incorrect. If anyone knows the basics of constitutional law, that is an absurd statement. No constitutional scholar, liberal or conservative, would say that. When he addresses same-sex marriage in Massachusetts (only state it was legal in as he wrote this book) he says, "The court[Massachusetts state supreme court] made a mockery of the English language. Since time immemorial, the English word marriage has referred to the union between a man and a woman.

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