



The Words We Live By: Your Annotated Guide to the Constitution (Stonesong Press Books)

By Linda R. Monk

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UPDATED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 10 YEARS, *The Words We Live By* takes an entertaining and informative look at America's most important historical document, now with discussions about new rulings on hot-button issues such as immigration, gay marriage, the right to bear arms, and affirmative action.

In *The Words We Live By*, award-winning author and journalist Linda R. Monk explores the many interpretations of the Constitution's text in a balanced manner. *The Words We Live By* presents a new way of looking at the Constitution through entertaining and informative annotations--filled with the stories of the people behind the Supreme Court cases and historical perspective, along with enough surprises and fascinating facts and illustrations to prove that the Constitution is every bit as relevant today as it was in 1787.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The U.S. Constitution gets a comprehensive overview in this engaging blend of history and commentary. Monk, author of *The Bill of Rights: A User's Guide*, traces the history and consequences of each part of this vital document in a line-by-line analysis of the original seven articles and the 27 amendments. Drawing on the writings of constitutional scholars, Supreme Court Justices and concerned citizens like Charlton Heston, playwright Arthur Miller and rock star Ted Nugent, she also gives even-handed but lively accounts of the debates over such Constitutional controversies as the right to bear arms, the right to privacy, church-state separation and capital punishment. The portrait of the Constitution that emerges is a mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. Some parts, like the Civil War amendments that defined citizenship and equality in granting them to African-Americans, are terse milestones in our evolving understanding of freedom, while elsewhere the Constitution seems like a scratch-pad for ill-considered ideas like the hastily repealed Prohibition Amendment. Monk avoids comparisons with other countries' charters that might have illuminated the Constitution's idiosyncrasies, and skirts deeper critiques, like Daniel Lazare's argument that the Constitution's overall structure of states' rights, separation of powers and checks and balances hobbles rather than effectuates the will of the people. Still, this is a fine introduction to Constitutional history for a general readership laid out rather like a good social studies textbook. Illus.

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From [Booklist](#)

Marching methodically through the Constitution, Monk partitions the parchment's text and appends brief historical or legal background to each clause. Upon arrival at the Twenty-seventh Amendment, the reader should be able to sling around such phrases as "original intent" and "implied powers" like a law scholar. On the other hand, Monk's analysis does not pretend to profundity: her aim is to be as populist as possible. To this end, photos abound that are symbolic of various rights (actor Charlton Heston with his musket; civil rights demonstrators in Selma), as do sidebars quoting founders, jurists, and individuals significant to constitutional development, such as Clarence Earl Gideon. His petition to the Supreme Court resulted in the guarantee of a lawyer to criminal defendants. Monk's illustrations of the expansion of rights--the original Constitution protected few personal liberties--will remind readers how the document really is a "living" entity. Also showing the constitutional basis for the expansion of government power, Monk readily explains the constitutional phrases that imbue American political discourse. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

"A wonderfully accessible yet deeply insightful guide to our Constitution that should be read and enjoyed by a wide audience of old and young alike." ***Doris Kearns Goodwin, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian***

"I have never before seen so clear an explanation of what's in the Constitution and why. Monk has provided a service to the nation that should earn her a Presidential Medal of Freedom." ***Nat Hentoff, Pulitzer Prize finalist and Senior Fellow, Cato Institute***

"A book for 'We the People' of all ages--wonderfully simple but never simplistic, brimming with profound and provocative ideas." ***Akhil Reed Amar, Sterling Professor of Law and Political Science, Yale University***

"Finally, a book that presents all sides of constitutional issues."

?Linda Chavez, Chairman of the Center for Equal Opportunity and FOX News Channel contributor

"Linda Monk takes us on a lively and learned exploration of the document that underlies not only how we Americans govern ourselves but how we make sense of the world. Anyone reading *The Words We Live By* will finish it with a greater understanding of the Constitution and a new respect for how it has secured freedom and self-government for the last two centuries." **?Steve Chapman, syndicated columnist, Chicago Tribune**

"[Linda Monk] captures just the right blend of history and current events to help us understand why the Constitution is America's cornerstone of freedom." **?Charles Overby, Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper editor and Chairman of the Overby Center of Southern Journalism and Politics**

"When I covered federal courts in Washington at the foot of Capitol Hill, I read *The Words We Live By* all the time. When I stopped covering the courts, I still read it all the time. Smart, informed, witty--just the way everyone wants to sound when discussing the Constitution." **?Neely Tucker, staff writer, Washington Post**

"The U.S. Constitution gets a comprehensive overview in this engaging blend of history and commentary. Monk . . . traces the history and consequences of each part of this vital document in a line-by-line analysis of the original seven articles and the 27 amendments. She also gives even-handed but lively accounts of the debates over such Constitutional controversies as the right to bear arms, the right to privacy, church-state separation, and capital punishment." **?Citation for Chief of Staff of the Air Force 2012 Reading List**

"This volume ought to be required reading for every American young and old." **?Governor William Winter, Chairman Emeritus of the Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation**

"For a fine guide to the full context of today's Constitution, read *The Words We Live By: Your Annotated Guide to the Constitution* by the scholar Linda R. Monk, which labors to provide inclusive context, including materials on "outsiders" to the Constitution such as Native American people." **?The Atlantic**

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Elaine Gold:

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