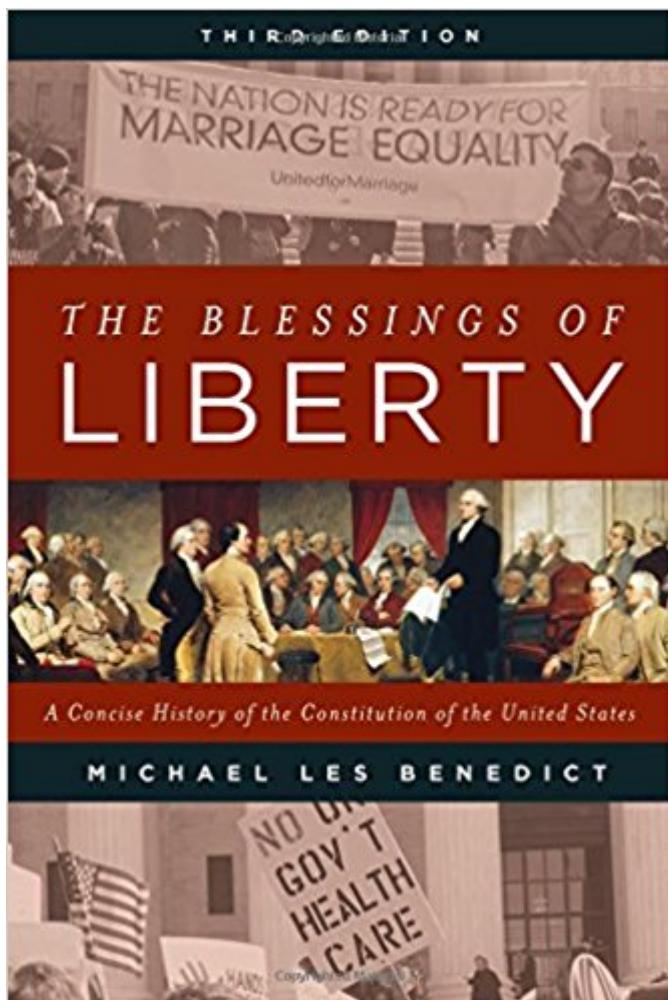


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# The Blessings Of Liberty: A Concise History Of The Constitution Of The United States



## Synopsis

This concise, accessible text provides students with a history of American constitutional development in the context of political, economic, and social change. Constitutional historian Michael Benedict stresses the role that the American people have played over time in defining the powers of government and the rights of individuals and minorities. He covers important trends and events in U.S. constitutional history, encompassing key Supreme Court and lower-court cases. The volume begins by discussing the English and colonial origins of American constitutionalism. Following an analysis of the American Revolution's meaning to constitutional history, the text traces the Constitution's evolution from the Early Republic to the present day. This third edition is updated to include the election of 2000, the Tea Party and the rise of popular constitutionalism, and the rise of judicial supremacy as seen in cases such as Citizens United, the Affordable Care Act, and gay marriage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The third edition of Michael Les Benedict's *The Blessings of Liberty* is a treasure. Clearly written and easy to understand, the text takes us from the English roots of American constitutionalism to 2016. Taking the approach of the modern constitutional historian, Benedict plunges us into the controversies relevant to the formation and implementation of the Constitution of 1787 and its amendments, providing the necessary political, social, and economic context that accompanied the development of American constitutional law. I wish there were more undergraduate courses in constitutional history, so that more students could read this book. But we

could all benefit by reading it." (Maeva Marcus, Director, Institute for Constitutional History, The New-York Historical Society and The George Washington University Law School)"There is no better introduction to constitutional history than *The Blessings of Liberty*. Learned, clearly written, up to date on recent scholarship, the book is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand this crucial subject." (Eric Foner, Columbia University)"I am astounded by Les Benedict's ability to compress the story of American constitutional development—which he rightly treats as requiring far more than simply knowledge of Supreme Court decisions—into a relatively short and readable volume (that, in addition, contains extremely helpful bibliographies). I will certainly strongly recommend it to any of my own law students in need of the kind of overview that he so well provides." (Sanford Levinson, author of *An Argument Open to All: Reading the Federalist in the 21st Century*)

Michael Les Benedict is a prominent American historian who taught at Ohio State University from 1970 until his retirement in 2005.

I am a lawyer who has argued in the Supreme Court, and in my view this book provides a solid introduction to constitutional history. The book seems to have been intended primarily as a textbook for undergraduate courses, but despite its textbook feel I think it can be of interest to a wider audience. Though not written with a great deal of flair, it offers clear descriptions of many important Supreme Court cases, and provides a coherent overview of the broader developments in the Court's jurisprudence regarding the Bill of Rights, the Fourteenth Amendment, and other provisions of the Constitution. Unlike most constitutional histories, Benedict's book has the added benefit of attempting to relate the Court's decisions to the historical context in which they were made. The author strikes me as scholarly, but at the same time he does have a point of view about a number of the Court's decisions which he makes little effort to conceal. For example, Benedict leaves no doubt that he is generally supportive of the Warren Court revolution, and disfavors some of the retrenchment that has taken place in the Rehnquist Court. That said, he seems to have gone to great pains in the excellent bibliographic essays that appear at the conclusion of each of his chapters to include historical or legal literature that offers different assessments than his own. I regard this book as a very good resource, and a stimulus to further reading (including more detailed studies by Benedict himself).

This book offers a solid introduction to various aspects of the history of the U.S. Constitution

--including its origins, its formation, and its interpretation by the Supreme Court over the past 200-plus years. While it has the feel of a college textbook, I think the book deserves a broader audience. In very clear, if unadorned writing, Benedict covers important cases decided by the Supreme Court, and describes the evolution of judicial doctrine regarding the Bill of Rights, the Fourteenth Amendment, and other provisions of the Constitution. Unlike most books about constitutional history, this one has the added virtue of attempting to relate jurisprudential developments to the broader historical context in which they occurred. Benedict does not try too hard to conceal his own preferences regarding certain decisions of the Court. For example, it is apparent that he is generally supportive of the Warren Court revolution in criminal procedure and other areas of constitutional law, and is opposed to some of the retrenchment that has occurred in the Rehnquist Court. At the same time, Benedict seems to take pains to include citations to legal or historical scholars with whom he disagrees in the excellent bibliographic essays that appear at the end of each chapter of the book. I view this book as a very good reference and as a stimulus to further reading (including Benedict's own book about the Johnson impeachment, which Judge Richard Posner cited in his book regarding the Clinton impeachment).

Michael Benedict does an adequate job of providing a complete and concise history of Constitutional history in the United States. Many books on this subject lose their effectiveness because they are filled with legalese. However, Benedict has assembled a book that allows the collegiate reader or anyone interested in history to understand the complex principles that have developed Constitutional principles. He covers topics from Revolutionary Crises, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Trust Busting, The Depression, and many more. This is a book for people interested in the Constitutional Crises and Legislation that has effected the development of the United States we know today.

As other reviewers have mentioned, this book gave a nice overview of the history of the Constitution, but it was a very simple description. I am familiar with our government, so this book was too simple. For anyone who is looking for a more book with more depth, this is not the one. Frankly, I was bored.

Be forewarned. Well written and comprehensive, but unfortunately with a decided leftwing bias. On virtually every page, the author's political bent is predicted and observed. Indeed, Mr. Bennett will not challenge this assessment because he knows it's accurate.

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