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For the People: What the Constitution Really Says About Your Rights

Akhil Reed Amar, Alan R. Hirsch

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When serving on a jury, can you ever interpret the Constitution yourself? When threatened by your city's taking of your property, do you have any recourse aside from lobbying or voting the bums out in the next election? If you disagree with a Supreme Court decision, is there anything you can do? In this bold and groundbreaking book, Akhil Reed Amar and Alan Hirsch answer "yes" to these questions and invite you to rediscover your Constitution. Over time, our rich constitutional rights have been obscured, along with this essential truth: We own our government, and government officials operate at our discretion. To preserve that ownership, the Framers of the Constitution gave the People crucial rights and responsibilities-- which, regrettably, have faded from view. At the ballot box, in the jury room, and on the battlefield, the People wield far more rights than we generally realize. For example, through a kind of national referendum, we may amend the Constitution. This right, though rarely acknowledged by the lawyers and government officials who today dominate conversation about the Constitution, was at the very heart of the country's founding and was recognized as fundamental by the Framers. By majority vote we could, for example, pass term limits or affirm gay rights. The Framers also gave great power to juries as representatives of the People, expected to act as checks on the power of unelected judges. Although it is another right that has fallen into disuse, in some cases jurors may interpret the Constitution themselves. And the Framers placed primary responsibility for national security in the hands of a citizen body (the militia), as opposed to a professional army, in part so the People would have recourse if the government ever turned tyrannical. How many of us are aware of these rights? How many of us might work for new referenda or view jury service differently if we became aware of them? We-- all of us, black and white, male and female, straight and gay-- are sovereign in our own nation. We are the rulers; government officials are our servants. It is high time to rediscover the true meaning of our Constitution.

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