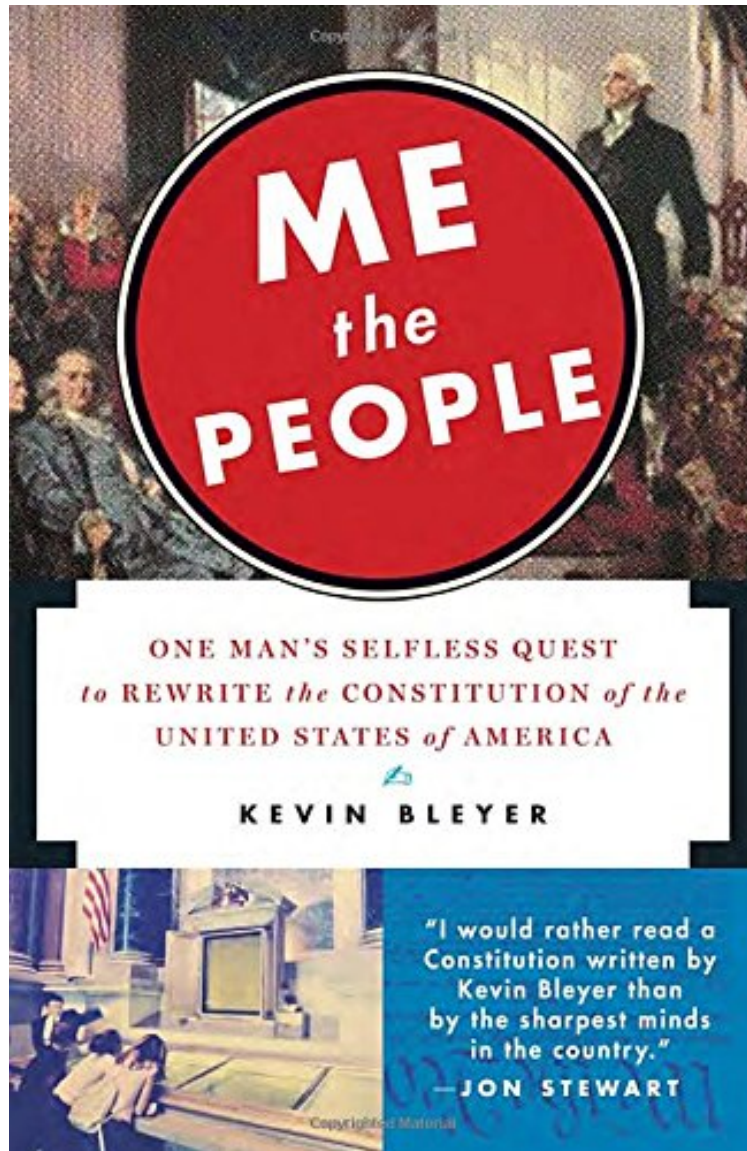


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Me the People: One Man's Selfless Quest to Rewrite the Constitution of the United States of America

Kevin Bleyer

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Kevin Bleyer : Me the People: One Man's Selfless Quest to Rewrite the Constitution of the United States of America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Me the People: One Man's Selfless Quest to Rewrite the Constitution of the United States of America:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. What fascinating fun!By GPFordMe the People is an absolute delight with a surprising amount of historical and constitutional insight. Before reading this book I didn't know that Bleyer was once a writer for Jon Stewart. In hindsight that explains a lot about this terrific book. Much of Stewart's shtick was substance wrapped in sarcastic, satirical humor and so is much of Me the People. I stumbled across this book when it was mentioned in an online article I was reading and what a find it was. I have recommended Me the People to loads of friends who have already begun thanking me and recommending it to their friends. In Me the People Bleyer does something exceedingly difficult, he makes learning about the U.S. Constitution fun. Read Me the People, you'll be glad you did.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. National Treasure?By Dawn Casey RoweKevin Bleyer's "Me the People" fills a serious gap in American Constitutional history--he makes it makes interesting. Now, no longer are we required to wonder, "How many Americans have actually read the Constitution (besides Henry Rollins, to whom Bleyer gives props), but we can actually enjoy reading the document.Bleyer almost convinces me that he wants to be a real historian. His research is nearly complete, and where he skips out on necessary follow through he provides a sufficiently long and incorrectly cited footnote to fully disclose this fact.Bleyer speaks with the movers and shakers in Constitutional politics, including Justice Antonin Scalia and several archivists in buildings that house replicas of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. He never gets his hands on the actual parchment himself, unlike Nicholas Cage, which is probably a good thing.As someone who not only enjoys real scholarship on this stuff and teaches it, I'm going to give Kevin Bleyer's "Me the People" an A+ for effort, content and entertainment. I think the American people have something to learn from Bleyer here--the Founding Fathers were real people in a chaotic time doing their best to write a document that even they were not sure would work. Bleyer writes no hagiography here--he gives an honest assessment of what it might have been like to be in the room with some of the people American textbooks worship most. He deconstructs them individually, and then adds them back to the mix as a whole.Bleyer kept me laughing the entire time. Although I'm not sure he will convince the nation to convene a constitutional convention any time soon, his message underscores the seriousness of the Constitution in the development of the nation, and offers some insight into politics today.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Funny ReadBy CustomerThis book was a hoot. Really enjoyed it. Funny while providing some interesting lesser known historical facts.

The United States Constitution promised a More Perfect Union. It's a shame no one bothered to write a more perfect Constitution—one that didn't trigger more than two centuries of arguments about what the darn thing actually says. Until now. Perfection is at hand. A new, improved Constitution is here. And you are holding it. But first, some historical context: In the eighteenth century, a lawyer named James Madison gathered his friends in Philadelphia and, over four long months, wrote four short pages: the Constitution of the United States of America. Not bad. In the nineteenth century, a president named Abraham Lincoln freed an entire people from the flaws in that Constitution by signing the Emancipation Proclamation. Pretty impressive. And in the twentieth century, a doctor at the Bethesda Naval Hospital delivered a baby—but not just any baby. Because in the twenty-first century, that baby would become a man, that man would become a patriot, and that patriot would rescue a country . . . by single-handedly rewriting that Constitution. Why? We think of our Constitution as the painstakingly designed blueprint drawn up by, in Thomas Jefferson's words, an "assembly of demigods" who laid the foundation for the sturdiest republic ever created. The truth is, it was no blueprint at all but an Etch A Sketch, a haphazard series of blunders, shaken clean and redrawn countless times during a summer of petty debates, drunken ramblings, and desperate compromise—as much the product of an "assembly of demigods" as a confederacy of dunces. No wonder George Washington wished it "had been made more perfect." No wonder Benjamin Franklin stomached it only "with all its faults." The Constitution they wrote is a hot mess. For starters, it doesn't mention slavery, or democracy, or even Facebook; it plays favorites among the states; it has typos, smudges, and misspellings; and its Preamble, its most famous passage, was written by a man with a peg leg. Which, if you think about it, gives our Constitution hardly a leg to stand on. [Pause for laughter.] Now stop laughing. Because you hold in your hands no mere book, but the most important document of our time. Its creator, Daily Show writer Kevin Bleyer, paid every price, bore every burden, and saved every receipt in his quest to assure the salvation of our nation's founding charter. He flew to Greece, the birthplace of democracy. He bused to Philly, the home of independence. He went toe-to-toe (face-to-face) with Scalia. He added nightly confabs with James Madison to his daily consultations with Jon Stewart. He tracked down not one but two John Hancocks—to make his version twice as official. He even read the Constitution of the United States. So prepare yourselves, fellow patriots, for the most significant literary event of the twenty-first, twentieth, nineteenth, and latter part of the eighteenth centuries. Me the People won't just form a More Perfect Union. It will save America.Praise for Me the People "I would rather read a constitution written by Kevin Bleyer than by the sharpest minds in the country."—Jon Stewart"Bleyer takes a red pencil to democracy's most hallowed laundry list. . . . Uproarious and fascinating."—Reader's Digest"I knew James Madison. James Madison was a friend of mine. Mr. Bleyer, you are no James Madison. But you sure are a heck of a lot more fun."—Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, author of the #1 New York Times bestseller Team of RivalsFrom the Hardcover edition.

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“The Constitution has served us well for centuries. Thanks to Kevin Bleyer, those days are over.”—Stephen Colbert
“Sharp and intensely witty . . . an endlessly enjoyable . . . experience.”—Publishers Weekly (starred review)
“Two centuries from now, the finest robot documentarians from around the world will climb over one another to make the definitive film on the genesis of Kevin Bleyer’s brilliant constitution. Which makes me glad I’m alive today.”—Ken Burns, human director of *The Civil War*, *The Congress*, and *Prohibition*
“As far as I know, Kevin Bleyer is an American citizen. So why shouldn’t he rewrite the Constitution? What do we want? A government controlled by elite, well educated wig-wearers who we all have to bow down to just because they are dead? So I say we give Bleyer a shot.”—John Hodgman, New York Times bestselling author and expert on all world knowledge
“In *Me the People*, Kevin Bleyer makes a number of good points. And an even larger number of terrible ones. For the safety of the republic, we should all read this, to know what we’re up against if a guy like Bleyer ever finds himself in a position of real influence.”—Dave Eggers
From the Hardcover edition.
About the Author
Emmy Award winner Kevin Bleyer is an Emmy Award–winning writer for *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart, for which he has won multiple Emmy Awards. Before rewriting the Constitution, Bleyer co-authored the #1 New York Times bestseller *Earth: The Book*, and negotiated bipartisan consensus as a writer and producer for *Politically Incorrect* with Bill Maher and Dennis Miller. And he is a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations, so he secretly runs the government already. He lives in New York, where he regularly poses for portraits.
From the Hardcover edition.
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Me the People
An Order to Form a More Perfect Union
We have made a terrible mistake. And by we, I mean you. You have made a terrible mistake. As a citizen of the United States of America, you have put your faith in a four-page document written by farmers, scrawled on animal skin, disseminated more than two centuries ago, conceived in desperation in the aftermath of war, composed in the language of the country it was intended to spurn, and, not for nothing, scribbled by hand with the quill of a goose. And because you have made a terrible mistake, and because—lamentably—you and I together count as we, “we” have made a terrible mistake. *We the People*. But really, I blame you. When Alexander Hamilton said, “The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right,” he wasn’t talking about himself. He wasn’t talking about we. And certainly not me. He was talking about you. You the persons. You have been told, promised, and guaranteed—and since you seldom judge or determine right, you have foolishly chosen to believe—that the Constitution is your great protector, as flawless in its foresight as it is eloquent in its expression, equal parts holy water, force field, security blanket, instruction manual, and swiss army knife—delivering a more perfect union, establishing justice, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for the common defence, promoting the general welfare, and securing the Blessings of Liberty. *The Killer App* of governance. But ask yourself, if the Constitution is such an astonishing document, such a landmark piece of literature, why no Pulitzer? Why no Nobel Prize? If this supposed “American masterpiece” is so darn revolutionary, why was it never declared one of the “Ten Best Reads” of 1787? And did you even notice that “defence” is misspelled? How embarrassing. For all the Constitution’s vaunted glories, it hasn’t even been spell-checked. This is our Founding Document? (Quick, someone put that in a display case. It belongs in a muzeum.) It is emblazoned on signs at political rallies, where it is as often quoted as it is misquoted. It is cited on the floor of Congress, by lawmakers who only defend the parts they like. It has been fetishized and refashioned as the pristine blueprint of a bygone era, a better era, an era we should long to return to, or at least mimic as closely as possible. In October 2010, *The Wall Street Journal* reported not just a growing obsession with the Constitution, but a spike in the sales of powdered wigs. On a particularly historic election night in 2009, no less than Speaker of the House John Boehner insisted that all the American people want is “a government that honors the Constitution” and, when he held up his pocket-sized version at a Tea Party rally in his home state, said: “I’m going to stand here with the Founding Fathers, who wrote in the preamble, ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’” It was a pitch-perfect recitation, and the assembled crowd ate it up. Never mind that it was not the preamble to the Constitution or anything else. It was the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence. John Boehner needn’t be ashamed. In his ignorance, he is truly a representative of the people. According to a 1987 study, eight out of ten Americans believed, as he did that day, that the phrase “all men are created equal” is in the Constitution. Almost nine in ten swore that “of the people, by the people, for the people” is in the Constitution, too, even though it is of the Gettysburg Address, by President Abraham Lincoln, and for-crying-out-loud-didn’t-anyone-ever-teach-them-that? Most egregious: Nearly half thought that “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need” was written by James Madison, not Karl Marx. (Although they couldn’t have fingered constitutional author Madison in a lineup of the Framers and would no doubt have guessed Karl Marx was Groucho’s brother.) Same as it ever was. Way back in 1847, only sixty years after the Constitution was adopted, the governor of New York, Silas

Wright, was already grumbling, appropriately, that “no one familiar with the affairs of our government, can have failed to notice how large a proportion of our statesmen appear never to have read the Constitution of the United States with a careful reference to its precise language and exact provisions, but rather, as occasion presents, seem to exercise their ingenuity . . . to stretch both to the line of what they, at the moment, consider expedient.” Which is a fancy way of saying what Senator Robert Byrd echoed in 2005: “People revere the Constitution yet know so little about it—and that goes for some of my fellow senators.” For two centuries, we have been expected to abide by it, live by it, swear by it—some of us, officially—yet we have no idea what it says. So is it any wonder, I ask you, that President George W. Bush once called it, and I quote, a goddamned piece of paper? Not to me. Because unlike you, I googled that quote just now. Apparently it is “apocryphal”—which I also googled, and learned is another way of saying “not true.” Never happened. Bogus. Evidently, a few years ago a left-wing muckraker spread the rumor that when one of the president’s aides advised him not to renew the PATRIOT Act—on account of it being unconstitutional—the president said, “Stop throwing the Constitution in my face. It’s just a goddamned piece of paper!” Oh sure, there is some truthiness to it—but it is, nonetheless, a lie. The forty-third president of the United States never said that the Constitution he swore an oath to uphold “to the best of his ability, through rain, or sleet, or gloom of night” (note to self: google “presidential oath of office”) was just “a goddamned piece of paper.” After all, it couldn’t possibly be a goddamned piece of paper—not when our third president had already, and long ago, declared it “a mere thing of wax.” Thomas Jefferson, not long after the Constitution was in force, lamented aloud that the justices of the Supreme Court had already usurped the right of “exclusively explaining the Constitution” and therefore could, as the nation’s first judicial activists, “twist and shape [it] into any form they please,” like so much revolutionary Play-Doh. By calling dibs on the first constitutional metaphor, Jefferson has beaten Bush to the punch by two hundred years. It is no goddamned piece of paper, Mr. President; it is a mere thing of wax. Fine. But even if the Constitution isn’t a goddamned piece of paper, could the case be made that President Bush treated it like one? Sure it could. Most presidents do. That President Bush, and other presidents, have regarded the Constitution as a goddamned piece of paper is impossible to deny. The moment they take their hands off the inaugural Bible, having publicly sworn undying fealty to the Constitution, they secretly resent its existence. For a head of state, the Constitution is a pain in the ass. It limits their powers and dampens their ambitions. There is an entire section—Article II—devoted to restricting what the president can, and dictating what the president must, do with his day. (Imagine if there were an entire section in our country’s founding document insisting that you “shall receive Ambassadors” at your home.) It’s no surprise that presidents try to cut constitutional corners, and it’s no wonder that American history is riddled with egregious examples. Minor infractions, such as: The Alien and Sedition acts of 1798—courtesy of President Adams The suspension of habeas corpus—compliments of President Lincoln The Palmer Raids and the suppression of free speech after World War I—thoughtful gifts from President Wilson The internment of Japanese Americans during World War II—a considerate contribution care of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt Trumped-up trials for treason during McCarthyism—bons mots from Presidents Truman and Eisenhower The wiretapping of dissenters during Vietnam—delicious truffles served up by Presidents Johnson and Nixon So when President Bush ultimately decided to renew the possibly unconstitutional PATRIOT Act, it may have been, historically speaking, the most presidential thing he ever did. He turned a goddamned piece of paper into a mere thing of wax. As he often said, September 11th changed everything.?????? To suggest that violating the Constitution is somehow uncommon, or un-presidential, or, worse, un-American overlooks an inconvenient truth: namely, that if not for a flagrant violation of the Constitution—known more charitably as the Louisiana Purchase—by none other than Thomas Jefferson, we’d hardly recognize the country we see on so many elementary school maps. America wouldn’t be America. If the third president of the United States hadn’t shrugged off the document he had sworn to protect “by hook or by crook” (note to self: seriously man, google the presidential oath of office already) and doubled the size of the nation with the stroke of a pen—even though the Constitution gave him no such authority—the western coast of America would be the eastern bank of the Mississippi. We would be crowning thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining St. Louis. Jefferson knew it, too. In embarking on the most aggressive executive action in history, he was quite aware he was sticking his neck out too far. The Constitution might not approve. “The Executive,” he wrote, referring to himself, “in seizing the fugitive occurrence which so much advances the good of the country, have done an act beyond the Constitution.” Jefferson rationalized his decision, telling himself that his act of subversion was a vote of confidence in his fledgling nation—“I did this for your good,” he wrote, plainly. His guilty conscience even spurred him to devise an excuse if the pitchfork-wielding guardians of the Constitution came knocking at his door. “I thought it my duty to risk myself for you.” It is a startling admission for any president of the United States: His sworn assignment was (thank you, Google) to “preserve, protect and defend” the Constitution; his higher duty was to thwart it. Like presidents to follow, Jefferson bargained with himself that this was a one-time deal. No precedent was likely to be set, since we the people would never allow it. “The good sense of our country,” he insisted, “will correct the evil of construction when it shall produce evil effects.” Spoken like a man who has never watched reality television. (One gets the sense that Jefferson, whose America was filled with citizens of “good sense,” and Hamilton, who believed that people “seldom judge or determine right,” didn’t exactly hang with the same crowd.) Still, as Jefferson saw it, only by violating the Constitution—by no means a presidential act—could he double the size

of our Republic as it struggled to spark to life—a very presidential act. If expanding the size of America is wrong, he didn't want to be right; it was his duty to risk himself for us. So as tempting as it may be, We the People shouldn't point the finger at our presidents as they drive by in their bulletproof Suburbans on the way to their affairs of state and/or impeachment proceedings. They're not the problem. Rather, at this defining moment in history, we must point the finger at history and admit an unalienable fact that has become all too self-evident: It's the Constitution's fault. It's flawed. Broken. Practically begging to be violated. One might even call it "radically defective"—especially if one were, say, the noted constitutional historian Sanford Levinson of the University of Texas Law School. In his estimation, "a substantial responsibility for the defects in our polity lies in the Constitution itself." See? Even constitutional scholars agree: It's the Constitution's fault. It has utterly failed in its simplest of duties: to solve all our problems, secure all our freedoms, and answer every single question put to it. Is that too much to ask? So let me dispel some myths. No, President Bush, the Constitution is not a goddamned piece of paper, no matter what you didn't say; if anything, God would praise a document that gave Him so much credit. And sorry, Thomas Jefferson, the Constitution is not a "mere thing of wax"; you're thinking of a "candle." And James Madison—don't think you're off the hook, sir—when you called your Constitution "a dead letter, until life and validity had been breathed into it by the voice of the people," your feigned humility was self-evident; spare us your hot air. Goddamned piece of paper, mere thing of wax, dead letter—it is none of these things. Rather, the Constitution of the United States of America, which supposedly guarantees everything from the Blessings of Liberty to an unabridged right to free speech, is in my expert humble opinion, a God-sanctioned, fully realized, blessed, immutable, rock-solid, entirely glorified, and purely calcified . . . piece of [censored]. And I say that with all due [redacted].?????? Now, before you string me up for treason—as provided, conveniently, by Article III, section 3—keep in mind that I am not saying anything George Washington didn't say first. Just a day after he put his name to the Constitution, the Father of Our Country admitted his own contempt for the Framers' handiwork, decrying the final draft as a wishy-washy document that invited too many interpretations, a "child of fortune, to be fostered by some and buffeted by others." Naturally, one might expect that the man who presided over the Convention that designed the Constitution, and who would become the first president in charge of defending it "come hell or high water" (note to self: I thought you googled this), and who was the very first to sign on its dotted line, would extol its many virtues. Not so. All he could offer was a punt: "What will be the General opinion, or the reception of it, is not for me to decide; nor shall I say anything for or against it." (Which is Founder-speak for if you don't have anything nice to sayeth, don't sayeth anything at all.) What was the General's most glowing review of the document on that day? And I quote: "It is the result of four months' deliberation." Ouch. He might as well have complimented the penmanship. A week later, in a letter to the Anti-Federalist leader Patrick Henry—the same Patrick Henry who had famously demanded "liberty or death!" and who was now demanding one darn good reason to support this Constitution in the upcoming ratification debates—Washington still couldn't muster anything resembling a rave. "I wish the Constitution, which is offered, had been more perfect," he wrote. "But I sincerely believe it is the best that could be obtained at this time." Mr. Soon-to-be-President, could you find nothing to applaud? If not the penmanship, then the margins? The tautness of the vellum? Something. Anything. Perhaps I could suggest the Unique and surprising, albeit Indiscriminate, use Of capitalization? nO?