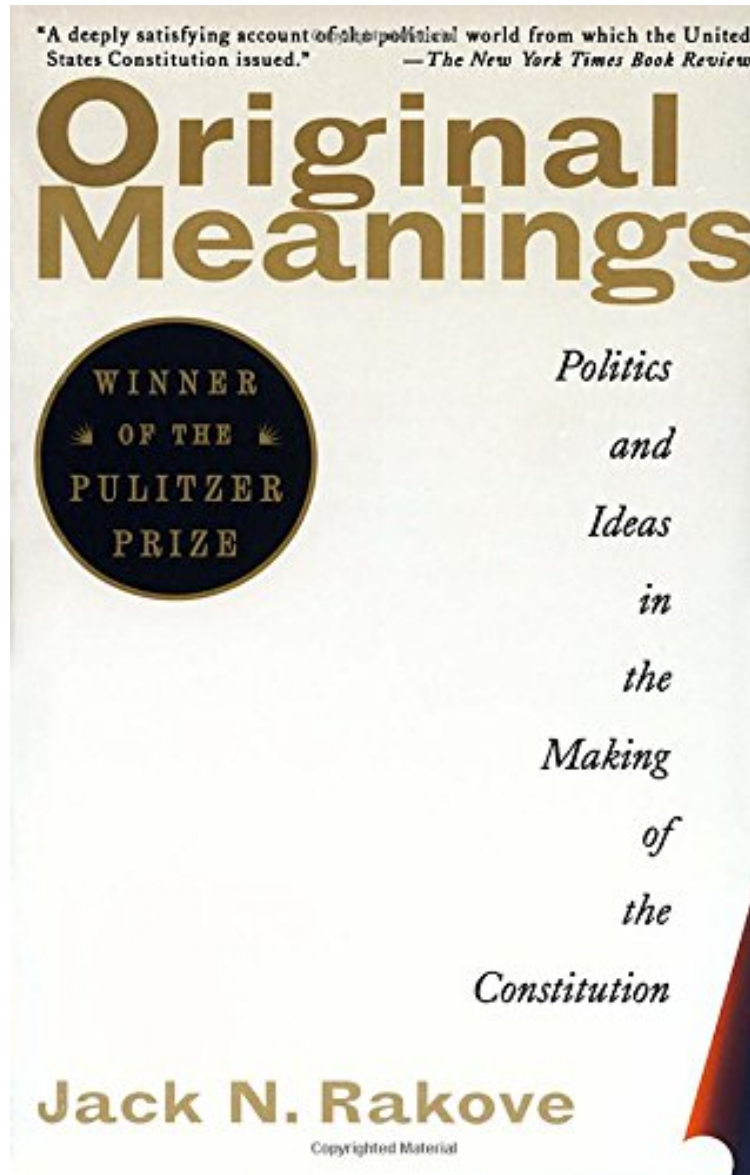


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# Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution

Jack N. Rakove

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**Jack N. Rakove : Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent ComprehensiveBy MDCRABGUYBest discussion and review of debates, discussions of the Constitutional Convention that lead to the U.S. Constitution. This is a detailed work that requires careful reading.5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Original Meanings by Jack RakoveBy scott89119Rakove's immensely detailed diorama of the climate of ideas and issues during the creation of the Constitution is necessary reading for scholars and those with an interest in American history alike. But, as other reviews have stated, the book ain't no costume romp; rather, it is a collection of the most specific ideas that were affecting the political life of the nation/colonies, written in a tone that manages to be both passionate and dry. Rakove himself is clearly a brilliant man, and the book's complexity is fascinating when it is not simply overwhelming. Those familiar with the Constitution will find so very much to enjoy; each aspect and amendment of the Constitution is dissected, with due time given to its inception, how it was debated, how the leaders and working man alike felt about it, and about all the ramifications of its being included and what would be taken from the American people if excluded. This goes on for a few hundred pages, and can be an overtly challenging read if you don't take your time with it. Those who devote themselves to it, who pause and reflect and digest Rakove's words, will look at American government and place in the world in new and inspiring ways. A must for the patient historian.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. but well the effort for an appreciation of just how experimental this new republic and constitution were and how the framers expBy jbrwNot a light read and one that requires some understanding of late 18th century language and thought, but well the effort for an appreciation of just how experimental this new republic and constitution were and how the framers expected later generations to use their good sense, experience and changing circumstance not only to interpret it but also to improve it.

From abortion to same-sex marriage, today's most urgent political debates will hinge on this two-part question: What did the United States Constitution originally mean and who now understands its meaning best? Rakove chronicles the Constitution from inception to ratification and, in doing so, traces its complex weave of ideology and interest, showing how this document has meant different things at different times to different groups of Americans.

.com Imagine, for a preposterous moment, that 55 national leaders convened to write a document to guide the country for hundreds of years. It seems unlikely--given that our current contingent of so-called leaders can't agree on how to balance a checkbook--that they could reach consensus on such issues as the allotment of congressional seats. The political and ideological issues that faced the creators of the Constitution were similar in some ways to those at play today. And in some ways they were vastly different ones. Jack Rakove, a history professor at Stanford University, has in this book framed the process that led to the drafting of the constitution in its historical and political context to offer insight into the difficulty of interpreting that most influential of documents.From Publishers WeeklyLegal conservatives periodically call for judicial decisions based on an interpretation of the Constitution that accords with the "original intent" of those who wrote and ratified it. That's a vexed matter, as Stanford University historian Rakove (The Beginnings of National Politics) shows in this nuanced reconstruction of constitutional debates. First, he explores the difficulty of even divining the understanding of the framers. He goes on to explore James Madison's vital theorizing about federalism, the compromises involved in granting states equal Senate seats and counting slaves in the population, the concept of the Presidency and the adoption of the Bill of Rights. Rakove suggests that the country's political future?whether oriented toward the statehouses or the national capital?depends less on the framers and their constitutional language than on the actions of the American people in the framework that has been created. Moreover, he warns that even Madison's contemporary appeal to originalism was hardly a posture of neutrality. This detailed book will appeal most to students and scholars. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalSurveys of Americans consistently reveal the troubling irony that we know very little about the document we profess to revere so highly: the U.S. Constitution. If more books like this nuanced, lucid work were written and read, perhaps this long-standing trend would begin to reverse itself. Rakove, editor of *Interpreting the Constitution: The Debate over Original Intent* (Northeastern Univ., 1990), has made a significant and lasting contribution to the scholarship surrounding the adoption of the Constitution. While this persuasive treatment of the ideological and political background of the Constitution will appeal primarily to scholars in the field, the public would be well served by reading this book, particularly since so many appeals and debates are conducted on the meaning of the Constitution. Rakove convincingly shows that while the Constitution's meaning is not always self-evident and that simple and simple-minded appeals to "original intent" should be rejected, neither is the meaning of our foundational political and legal instrument beyond our understanding. Of especial note is Rakove's scrutiny of James Madison. This work ranks with well-known works by Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, Bruce Ackerman, and others. Its focus on the importance of language is reason enough for placing it on one's shelf. Highly recommended for all libraries.?Stephen Kent Shaw, Northwest Nazarene Coll., Nampa, Id.Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.