



In Our Defense: The Bill of Rights in Action

By Ellen Alderman, Caroline Kennedy

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We The People

The Bill of Rights defines and defends the freedoms we enjoy as Americans -- from the right to bear arms to the right to a civil jury. Using the dramatic true stories of people whose lives have been deeply affected by such issues as the death penalty and the right to privacy, attorneys Ellen Alderman and Caroline Kennedy reveal how the majestic principles of the Bill of Rights have taken shape in the lives of ordinary people, as well as the historic and legal significance of each amendment. In doing so, they shed brilliant new light on this visionary document, which remains as vital and as controversial today as it was when a great nation was newly born.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

YA-- Alderman and Kennedy have taken the Bill of Rights and made it breathe. Their book considers 20 or so Supreme Court cases, the verdicts of which pivot on one of the first Ten Amendments to the U. S. Constitution. The cases chosen are not the landmark, precedent-setting ones with which most people are familiar. Instead, readers will find normal people who, because of circumstance, victimization, or character flaws, end up having their stories studied by the highest court in the land. As the authors acknowledge, "It is a fair summary of history to say that the safeguards of liberty have frequently been forged in controversies involving not very nice people." Several life histories read more like soap operas and B-movies than a law text. The writing is clear, direct, and often poignant. There are photographs of some of the protagonists that add to the down-to-earth character of this study. Finally, it is entertaining.

- *Vicki Fox, R. E. Lee High School, Springfield, VA*

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From Library Journal

The authors use fascinating accounts of real-life controversies to introduce the general reader to the Bill of Rights. Nineteen vignettes illuminate virtually all rights guarantees and demonstrate their contemporary relevance. Of particular interest are the stories about the development of public land held sacred by Native Americans (First Amendment) and the attempt to protect minors testifying in molestation cases (Sixth Amendment). Although the authors emphasize the human side of the Bill of Rights rather than its judicial interpretation, their legal analysis is sound, and the extensive notes and bibliography provide direction for further research. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 9/15/90.

- *G. Alan Tarr, Rutgers Univ., Camden, N.J.*

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