

# Akhil Reed Amar: How Hillary Clinton Is Like Alexander Hamilton

**How well do you think the average American understands the Constitution?**

Not at all, alas. It's a shame because it was designed to be read. Here's an analogy: I like baseball, but baseball's a little boring unless you're into it. The Constitution is no more forbidding than baseball, but we have to get into it.

**You wrote in 2008 that Hillary Clinton is to Bill Clinton as Hamilton was to Washington. Do you still think she's like him?**

She's like Alexander Hamilton and, believe it or not, Martin Van Buren. Both New Yorkers, both in effect handpicked successors of very popular two-term Presidents, both lowborn.

**So who's Trump?**

I don't think we've ever seen someone like Trump.

**You're asking people to look to a document written by dead men for answers to today's hard questions. Why?**

Because they began a story that's still unfolding. There is in the world B.C. and A.D.: before the Constitution, after the document. And the rest of the world is watching. My parents were born in undivided India, ruled by a monarch and by the Parliament that no one in India ever voted for, just like the American revolutionaries. Today, India is a billion people governing themselves democratically with a written constitution.

## **As a professor at Yale, you got a close look at campus unrest this year. What did you think of the protests?**

The discussions that occur in college can be difficult because for many people this is the first time they're encountering folks from different neighborhoods. A huge proportion of Americans live around like-minded folks and are choosing information only from people who agree with them.

## **You mean on Facebook?**

Yes, social media. But you go to college, and we're forcing you to encounter people who might have a different point of view. When you see a little slice of that encounter, it can look scary, but it's part of the process by which we start to talk to each other rather than past each other.

## **How did you feel about Ruth Bader Ginsburg's airing her views on Trump?**

Here's the best defense of what she did: It's a version of civil disobedience. If you believe that Trump is an existential threat to the rule of law and the American constitutional process, then the question isn't "Why did you speak up?" but "Why didn't others?"

## **A movie about Loving v. Virginia, which ended antimiscegenation laws, is coming out soon. Which other Supreme Court cases would make good movies?**

The modern Loving v. Virginia is called Obergefell [the marriage-equality case]. Those cases about the right to marry are great because they humanize the abstract principles of equality.

## **Are you saying the McCulloch v. Maryland movie would be boring?**

The national bank is more abstract. I actually have written a Hollywood treatment of some of the complexities of presidential succession. I do think that could make a constitutional thriller in the tradition of *Advise & Consent* and *Air Force One*.

**When you emptied your pockets so we could take your picture, you pulled out three copies of the Constitution. One wasn't enough?**

People died for these words, so we should have the words literally close to our hearts. You should have more than one copy because if someone asks you a question about the Constitution, I think it's wonderful and democratic if you can give them a copy and you can read it together.

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