



The Second Amendment: A Biography

By Michael Waldman

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Widely acclaimed at the time of its publication, the life story of the most controversial, volatile, misunderstood provision of the Bill of Rights.

At a time of increasing gun violence in America, Waldman's book provoked a wide range of discussion. This book looks at history to provide some surprising, illuminating answers.

The Amendment was written to calm public fear that the new national government would crush the state militias made up of all (white) adult men—who were required to own a gun to serve. Waldman recounts the raucous public debate that has surrounded the amendment from its inception to the present. As the country spread to the Western frontier, violence spread too. But through it all, gun control was abundant. In the twentieth century, with Prohibition and gangsterism, the first federal control laws were passed. In all four separate times the Supreme Court ruled against a constitutional right to own a gun.

The present debate picked up in the 1970s—part of a backlash to the liberal 1960s and a resurgence of libertarianism. A newly radicalized NRA entered the campaign to oppose gun control and elevate the status of an obscure constitutional provision. In 2008, in a case that reached the Court after a focused drive by conservative lawyers, the US Supreme Court ruled for the first time that the Constitution protects an individual right to gun ownership. Famous for his theory of “originalism,” Justice Antonin Scalia twisted it in this instance to base his argument on contemporary conditions.

In *The Second Amendment: A Biography*, Michael Waldman shows that our view of the amendment is set, at each stage, not by a pristine constitutional text, but by the push and pull, the rough and tumble of political advocacy and public agitation.

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The Second Amendment: A Biography By Michael Waldman Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #181895 in Books
- Brand: Simon Schuster
- Published on: 2015-05-26
- Released on: 2015-05-26
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.37" h x .70" w x 5.50" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 272 pages

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Editorial Review

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Given the murkiness of the language of the Second Amendment and worries about armed citizens from the era of the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, from the settling of the western frontier to the gangsterism of the Prohibition era, the U.S. Supreme Court has generally ruled against the constitutional right to own a gun. In 2008 that all changed. Legal scholar Waldman examines the political forces behind that change, including the growing influence of the National Rifle Association and how gun rights play into the culture wars. Waldman offers historical perspective on the fierce debate to decide how much militia the nation should support and then goes on to trace the violent history of gun use in the U.S. and the increasingly contentious debate about crime and safety, all against the backdrop of debates about “originalism” as applied to the Constitution. This is a lively and engaging exploration of the radically different perspectives of the Founding Fathers, worried about the nation’s ability to protect itself yet fearful of a powerful military, and contemporary politicians fretting over culture wars and the role of government and the rights of individuals.

--Vanessa Bush

Review

“Waldman relates this tale in clear, unvarnished prose and it should now be considered the best narrative of its subject.” (*Publishers Weekly*)

“Waldman offers historical perspective on the fierce debate...A lively and engaging exploration.” (*Booklist*)

“Thoughtful, accessible...useful to anyone arguing either side of this endlessly controversial issue.” (*Kirkus Reviews*)

“The ongoing debate about the Second Amendment and the right to bear arms continues to set off multiple explosions in the blogosphere. Waldman's new book will not make the most zealous NRA advocates happy, but for anyone who wants his or her history of the Second Amendment straight-up, this is the most comprehensive, accessible, and compelling version of the story in print.” (Joseph J. Ellis, author of *Founding Brothers*)

“From the founding of the Republic to the Newtown massacre of elementary school children, and beyond, Michael Waldman vividly portrays the evolution of a nation's passionate debate over the right to keep and bear arms. Activist, conservative justices on the U.S. Supreme Court may have thought they ended that debate in 2008, but with rich detail and crisp narrative, Waldman shows how it continues to reverberate across the landscape with important lessons for all Americans.” (Marcia Coyle, author of *The Roberts Court*)

“Through most of American history, the Second Amendment guaranteed the right to be a citizen-soldier, not an individual vigilante. With wit and erudition, Michael Waldman tells the story of how the Amendment’s meaning was turned upside-down and inside-out.” (David Frum, author of *The Right Man: An Inside Account of the Bush White House*)

“Michael Waldman gives us the turbulent life story of the Second Amendment. If one clause of the Constitution better deserved a quiet retirement, it is our right to keep and bear arms, a vestige of the Founding Fathers' concern with the role of the militia in a republican society. Yet today the Second Amendment has become one of the feistiest, most disputed clauses of the Constitution, and Waldman vividly explains why this obscure, minor provision has become so controversial.” (Jack Rakove, author of *Original*)

Meanings)

“Partisan pseudo-histories of gun regulation and the Second Amendment abound. Michael Waldman's excellent book slices through the propaganda with candor as well as scholarship. It advances an authentic and clarifying history that will surprise and enlighten citizens on all sides of the issue. Here is a smart and cogent history that performs a large public service.” (Sean Wilentz, author of *The Rise of American Democracy*)

“Anyone interested in the hot button issue of guns and their place in our society will find this book a helpful tool for ongoing discussion.” (*Decatur Daily (Alabama)*)

“*The Second Amendment* is a smart history of guns and the US . . . his calm tone and habit of taking the long view offers a refreshing tonic in this most loaded of debates.” (*Los Angeles Times*)

“Waldman’s detractors would do well to read the book, which focuses less on taking a position on gun control and more on explaining what the Founding Fathers intended when they approved the amendment and how subsequent decisions from the U.S. Supreme Court and elsewhere have transformed that intent. . . . Seeing the subject discussed and dissected in untypically calm, scholarly tones, then, is a refreshing development.” (*Miami Herald*)

“Rigorous, scholarly, but accessible book.” (*New York Times*)

“Compelling” (*Washington Post*)

“An insightful look at both the historical foundation of the Second Amendment . . . a welcome re-injection of historical context into the present debate over the rightful role of guns in American culture.” (*Chicago Tribune*)

“A welcome addition to the ongoing debate over gun rights and gun control in America.” (*The Buffalo News*)

“Terrific” (Nicholas Kristoff *New York Times*)

About the Author

Michael Waldman is president of the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, a nonpartisan law and policy institute that focuses on improving the systems of democracy and justice. He was director of speechwriting for President Bill Clinton from 1995 to 1999 and is the author of *The Fight to Vote*, *My Fellow Americans*, *POTUS Speaks*, and three other books. Waldman is a graduate of Columbia College and NYU School of Law. He comments widely in the media on law and policy.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

David Stephenson:

What do you think of book? It is just for students because they're still students or it for all people in the world, what best subject for that? Just simply you can be answered for that query above. Every person has various personality and hobby per other. Don't to be compelled someone or something that they don't want do that. You must know how great as well as important the book *The Second Amendment: A Biography*. All type of book can you see on many sources. You can look for the internet sources or other social media.

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People live in this new morning of lifestyle always aim to and must have the time or they will get wide range of stress from both daily life and work. So , if we ask do people have spare time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not really a huge robot. Then we ask again, what kind of activity are you experiencing when the spare time coming to an individual of course your answer can unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading guides. It can be your alternative in spending your spare time, the book you have read will be The Second Amendment: A Biography.

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