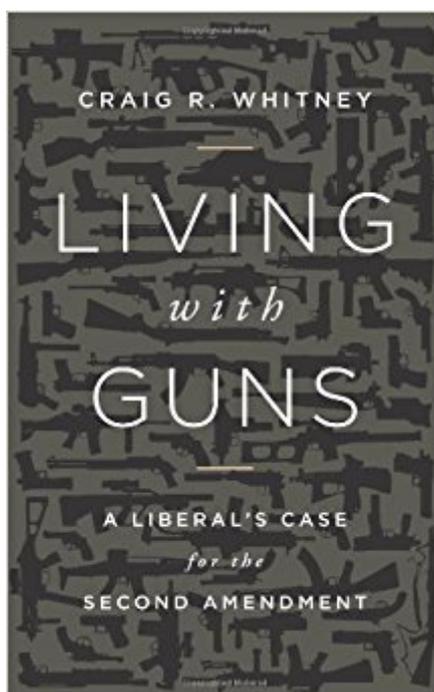


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# Living With Guns: A Liberal's Case For The Second Amendment



## Synopsis

Newtown. Columbine. Virginia Tech. Tucson. Aurora. Gun violence on a massive scale has become a plague in our society, yet politicians seem more afraid of having a serious conversation about guns than they are of the next horrific shooting. Any attempt to change the status quo, whether to strengthen gun regulations or weaken them, is sure to degenerate into a hysteria that changes nothing. Our attitudes toward guns are utterly polarized, leaving basic questions unasked: How can we reconcile the individual right to own and use firearms with the right to be safe from gun violence? Is keeping guns out of the hands of as many law-abiding Americans as possible really the best way to keep them out of the hands of criminals? And do 30,000 of us really have to die by gunfire every year as the price of a freedom protected by the Constitution? In *Living with Guns*, Craig R. Whitney, former foreign correspondent and editor at the *New York Times*, seeks out answers. He re-examines why the right to bear arms was enshrined in the Bill of Rights, and how it came to be misunderstood. He looks to colonial times, surveying the degree to which guns were a part of everyday life. Finally, blending history and reportage, Whitney explores how twentieth-century turmoil and culture war led to today's climate of activism, partisanship, and stalemate, in a nation that contains an estimated 300 million guns—and probably at least 60 million gun owners. In the end, Whitney proposes a new way forward through our gun rights stalemate, showing how we can live with guns—and why, with so many of them around, we have no other choice.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an excellent book about guns in America that searches for the middle ground between the NRA, "standing its ground," and those that would wish away the 300 million firearms that are in American hands. A former foreign correspondent and assistant managing editor of the New York Times, Craig Whitney makes the point that gun ownership is a basic individual right, not dependent on militia service, but that with it comes a social responsibility for how weapons are bought, sold, and handled around the nation. In the early chapters he traces the constitutional right of gun ownership from English law to the Second Amendment, dwelling on the origins of the text that now allows both for unfettered gun ownership but at the same time the rights of the the federal and state governments to legislate guidelines for the ways that weapons are acquired, carried, and deployed. He agrees with the Supreme Court's Heller decision, although scoffs at how they reached the conclusion that "the right to bear arms" is an individual right. At the same time he sees no constitutional rationale for recent laws that condone Wild West "stand your ground" practices. Among his suggestions for ways to keep guns out of the hands of those that would open fire in malls and schools are: tighter background checks for all those, even at gun shows, who want to buy and sell guns; nationwide standards to teach responsible gun handling and thus the issuance of permits for owners; better data bases to trace missing or stolen guns; harsher penalties for illegal gun use; and easier methods to trace bullets and handguns discharged in a criminal way.

X Living with Guns: A Liberal's Case for the Second Amendment by Craig Whitney By Bill Marsano. This is a useful guide to the Second Amendment and the history of the many attempts to limit or nullify it, and it's short, too. Just as well: Whitney's tour is brisk but his writing is merely workmanlike at best. He makes a couple of important points. For example, the desirable attempt to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, crackpots and other obviously unfit folk is seriously undermined by the many states that simply don't take the trouble to provide information to the FBI's national database. If you seek an argument supporting the gun-owners' claim that we have plenty of gun laws but just don't enforce them, that alone is sufficient. He makes the important point that a gun license can no longer be denied solely on the discretion of, say, the local sheriff. That is, the license can't be refused to a person who satisfies all legal requirement just because the sheriff thinks he 'doesn't need one' or 'doesn't really need that kind of protection.' He makes two points about the NRA--one right and one wrong. First, he points out that the NRA needs the continuing controversy over gun control to generate funds. Although I'm an NRA member myself, I agree. Then he says that the NRA's and gun-owners' fear of registration as a device enabling government confiscation is some

kind of paranoid delusion, a hysterical fear of something just isn't going to happen and never will. Here Whitney is dead wrong. Among the many outcries immediately after the December 2012 school shootings in Connecticut there were in fact several by legislators calling for just such a confiscation.

Living with Guns Craig R. Whitney spent his entire professional career as a reporter, foreign correspondent, and editor at the 'New York Times'. This 284-page book is subtitled "A Liberal's Case for the Second Amendment". Whitney retired in 2009 as assistant managing editor in charge of standards and ethics, and lives in New York City. The phrase "Second Amendment" often results in an emotional reaction, this book is an attempt to provide a rational discussion ('Introduction'). Americans have an individual constitutional right to own and use guns. Most states say the same and allow carrying handguns in most places. This does not mean they can use them illegally (as the Trayvon Martin shooting). An individual can own and use firearms for self-defense, hunting, or any lawful purpose (p.xii). Should people have to demonstrate a need to carry a handgun? They don't have to do that to exercise the First Amendment (or the Fifth or Sixth, for example). Banning a complete class of guns is unconstitutional (the Heller decision). Should the rules against private gun sales be increased (p.xvi)? Whitney says 'yes' but he is wrong. Banning the re-sale of privately owned guns reduces their value to scrap metal and allows their confiscation on the cheap (the Fifth Amendment). Registering firearms leads to confiscation (as in other places), and allows a regressive tax on the owners. The example of that theater shooting in Aurora Colorado is a poor one; I read that the shooter passed his or her background tests. Perhaps people should ask why there are "mass shootings" since they appear to have only occurred after WW II. That's about the time politicians began restricting gun ownership and use.

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