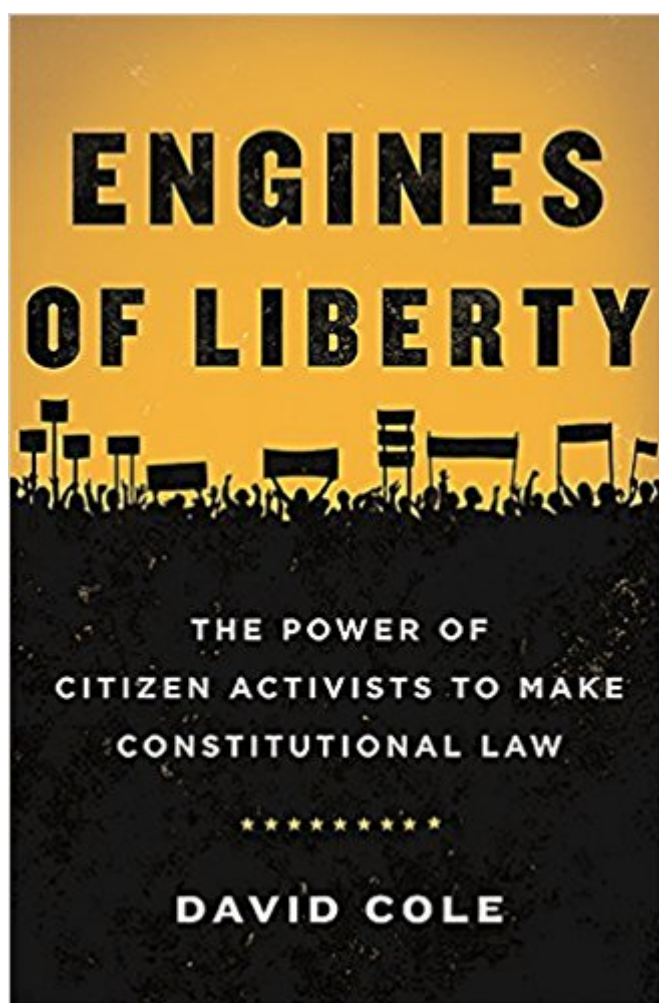


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# Engines Of Liberty: The Power Of Citizen Activists To Make Constitutional Law



## Synopsis

One of Washington Post's Notable Nonfiction Books of 2016 How did gay and lesbian couples' right to marry go from unthinkable to inevitable? How did the individual right to bear arms, dismissed as fraudulent by Chief Justice Warren Burger in 1990, become a constitutional right in 2008? And what compelled President George W. Bush to rein in many of his initiatives in the war on terror before leaving office, even though past presidents have had a free hand in wartime? We are likely to answer that, in each case, the Supreme Court remade our nation's most fundamental law. Yet as the award-winning legal scholar David Cole argues in *Engines of Liberty*, citizen activists are the true drivers of constitutional change. Drawing on interviews with participants in the most successful rights movements of the last 30 years, he shows that time and again, associations of ordinary Americans confronting long odds have managed to transform the nation's highest law. And they have done so largely through advocacy outside the federal courts altogether. We witness marriage equality advocates in the 1980s and 1990s uniting behind a strategy of state-based incrementalism that paved the way for their historic Supreme Court victory. We see the NRA building a loyal and active membership base that can swing elections and influence state and federal law, thereby shaping the debate about guns at the Supreme Court. And we watch as civil liberties and human rights groups encourage foreign populations and governments to challenge the president when few domestic institutions would. Offering a new vision of the role we all play in shaping our Constitution and illuminating the tactics successful reform campaigns have employed, *Engines of Liberty* restores faith in the power of citizen activists to help shape our nation's future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of Washington Post's Notable Nonfiction Books of 2016  
PRAISE FOR ENGINES OF LIBERTY: "I don't expect to read a better account of [constitutional change] than David Cole's new book, *Engines of Liberty: The Power of Citizen Activists to Make Constitutional Law*." New York Review of Books; [Cole's] narratives weave a compelling portrait of advocacy-driven constitutional change; the collection certainly stands apart from dense and dry legal texts in being readable, accessible and at times even gripping; a deeply hopeful book about an institution in which our hope may be dwindling. — Washington Post; [An] illuminating piece of opinion journalism — American Scholar

David Cole is the the Hon. George J. Mitchell Professor in Law and Public Policy at Georgetown University Law Center. A leading civil liberties lawyer, he is the author of *No Equal Justice and Enemy Aliens*. He has written for the *New York Review of Books*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The Nation*, and *Wall Street Journal*, among others. Cole lives in Washington, DC.

This short book gave me a new, deeper understanding of human rights and constitutional change and provided some real insight into the similar processes that have impacted gun rights, gay marriage, and human rights of non-nationals. Highly recommended. It does not make you change your moralistic of these rights issues; rather, it focuses on the process of change.

Great book - highly recommended for anyone who wants to learn about the process of citizens organizing to change constitutional law. It's very helpful that the author explores this process through both a "liberal" cause (same-sex marriage) as well as a "conservative" cause (gun rights) and it greatly enhances the credibility of the thesis of the book. The book itself reads quickly and is not overly dense.

I learned a good deal of things about the issues, the law process and the impact of civil society. I will use this knowledge a lot in my future work, I hope.

Good read

This was an interesting read for my 17 year old son, and he doesn't like reading in general

An interesting book with a different perspective; well worth the read.

I ordered this book, after hearing Mr. Cole in a radio interview. We have a lesbian married daughter, and I'm a Life Patron member of the NRA, so the juxtaposition of the first two sections intrigued me. When I received my copy, I worried that it would read like a text ( has page after page of footnotes). However, it was so well written, I got involved from the first, and finished it quickly. Every American, regardless of politics, should read this book. You learn so much about how groups of citizens can indeed make constitutional law.

Very interesting read of three contentious issues--and how their advocates fought for change constitutionally and socially. He interjects anecdotes and personal stories to make it very readable.

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