

Seeds of Freedom: David Boaz's Enduring Legacy

By Brian Mullis

David Boaz made liberty his life's mission—and with a transformational legacy gift to the Cato Institute, he is making it possible for future generations to do the same.

David Boaz devoted his life to the timeless principles of liberty—and with one final act of generosity, he ensured that future generations would continue the fight.

Upon his passing in June 2024, after a hard-fought battle with cancer, David left a transformational \$5 million legacy gift to the Cato Institute. It was the ultimate expression of his lifelong commitment to individual freedom, limited government, free markets, and peace. More than just a generous bequest, the gift is a

reaffirmation of the principles that guided David's work for more than four decades—and a powerful investment in Cato's future.

To honor this extraordinary contribution, Cato has established the David Boaz Chair, which will be held by his longtime friend and colleague Ian Vásquez, vice president for international studies.

"David was the soul of the modern libertarian movement," Ian reflected. "His clarity, courage, and commitment to principle influenced generations of thinkers, activists, and scholars—including me."





David Boaz (left), former distinguished senior fellow, speaks on a panel with Ian Vásquez (right), vice president for international studies, at an event celebrating the Cato Institute's 40th anniversary in 2017.

To hold a chair bearing his name is both a deep honor and a profound responsibility.”

David's career at Cato began in 1981, when the Institute was still a small operation in San Francisco. Over the next four decades, he played an essential role in transforming Cato into one of the most respected policy organizations in the world. As vice president for public policy, and later as executive vice president, David shaped nearly every aspect of Cato's work—from research and publications to communications and strategic direction.

But David's influence extended far beyond Cato's walls. His 1997 book *Libertarianism: A Primer*—later updated and reissued as *The Libertarian Mind*—became a cornerstone text for a generation of liberty-minded readers. He helped popularize core libertarian ideas without ever diluting their meaning. Through essays, books, interviews, and speeches, David gave voice to a worldview rooted in dignity, reason, and individual rights.

When he died on June 7, tributes poured in from across the political spectrum. The *Washington Post* called him “a fierce and consistent advocate for personal freedom,” while the *New York Times* noted that David

“sought to bring libertarianism from the fringes into the mainstream.” He succeeded in that quest, leaving liberty's next champions a strong foundation to build on.

David believed ideas mattered. That's why he spent his life defending them—and why his final act of support for Cato was so fitting. His legacy now lives on, not only in his writing and in the countless lives he touched but also in the ongoing work of the organization he helped build.

With the David Boaz Chair, Cato will continue advancing the ideals that David championed with intelligence, integrity, and passion. And as old and new challenges to liberty emerge around the world, his legacy will continue to be a lodestar for those who work to defend and advance freedom around the world. ✦

For information on Cato's Legacy Society, please contact Brian Mullis at bmullis@cato.org. To learn more about planned giving, please visit Cato.org/plannedgiving.



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