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**2018 National High School Essay Contest
First Place Winner (\$3,000 Award)**

(Name withheld at student's request)

*Gun Control Lessons from Around the World: The Need for Reform in US
Policy and Perspective*

In April 1996, an Australian man opened fire in the tourist resort of Port Arthur, Tasmania. Wielding a semiautomatic rifle, he killed 35 people and left 23 wounded in Australia's worst mass shooting in history. (1)

Less than two weeks later, all six Australian states enacted sweeping gun laws banning all semi-automatic rifles and self-loading and pump action shotguns. The new legislation also included stringent background checks, 28-day waiting periods, and requirements for "justifiable reasons" to own a gun. (2) In the following years, gun-related homicides and suicides dropped by over 50%. Australia has had no mass shootings since. (1)

In December 2012, 20 children and 6 adults were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Four years later, 49 people were killed inside Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. In October 2017, another year later, 58 concertgoers were killed outside the Mandalay Bay Resort in Las Vegas, Nevada. (3)

Over 1,600 mass shootings since Sandy Hook, (4) the United States has still been unable to pass significant gun control laws.

Fifty years ago, Senator Dodd explained, "The time has now come that we must adopt stringent gun control legislation comparable to the legislation in force in virtually every civilized country in the world." Now, it is more pressing than ever for the US to learn from its peers to preserve the safety of its citizens and the sanctity of our values.

First, the US needs to recognize that guns themselves lie at the heart of violent shootings. As the New York Times reports, the only factor that explains the high number of US mass shootings is our "astronomical" number of guns. The US comprises 4.4% of the world's population, but owns 42% of the world's guns. (5) Though important, issues of mental

health and media violence do not correlate directly with rates of gun violence and must not detract from the core issue. The US can learn from Japan, which has the lowest gun-homicide rate in the world because hardly anyone there owns a gun. (6) Highly restrictive firearm regulations require that owners undergo extensive instruction, interviews, and inspections to access shotguns and air guns. Japan has rid itself of rifles and handguns and has successfully ensured that the weapons it does allow are not used for violence.

Yet even with convincing evidence, the greatest hurdle facing the US may be myths concerning its own culture and Constitution. We need to move forward with knowledge of our society's dangers and circumstances, and not cling to the past. Former Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens even urged today's activists to "demand a repeal of the Second Amendment", calling the notion that a volunteer "well regulated militia" could substitute for a professional standing army "a relic of the 18th century". (7) Modernized gun reform laws are long overdue in our nation, and it is time for the US to catch up to the contemporary laws of Canada, Britain, Norway, and countless other countries.

On February 14, 2018, a former student shot and killed 14 students and 3 teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The wave of youth activism that has followed has reinvigorated the gun violence prevention movement and provided hope that the United States will finally adopt the kind of stringent gun control legislation that Senator Dodd called for 50 years ago.

References

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