



Americans Against Gun Violence
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2018 National High School Essay Contest \$1,000 Winner

(Name withheld at student's request)

More of the Same Until We Change

According to a 2016 study published in the American Journal of Medicine, the United States gun homicide rate is 25 times higher than any other high-income country, which is not surprising given that America has the least stringent gun laws in the developed world. The age requirement for the purchase of rifles, shotguns, and ammunition in the United States is 18. (The Guardian). To put the age standard in perspective, I am 18. I can't legally drink or rent a car, but I can legally purchase a gun, which is a sign that there is a problem with American gun laws. When Senator Thomas Dodd said, "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," he pointed out an obvious and very dangerous flaw in our legal system.

Gun violence disproportionately affects the most vulnerable members of our societies, especially minorities, the poor, and children. According to the most recent data available from the Centers for Disease Control, in 2016 the rate of gun related homicide for persons categorized as "Black" was 18.6 per 100,000 per year while the rate for persons categorized as "White" was 2.2 per 100,000, a more than 8-fold difference. In addition, African Americans, particularly males, are shot in disproportionate numbers by police. While officer involved shootings account for less than 3% of all gun related homicides of individuals categorized as "Black," given the history of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and other institutionalized racism in our society, killings of young Black men by police have an enormous adverse psychological impact on the African American community. There are also higher instances of gun violence among the poor, a demographic which, unfortunately, often includes minorities as well, putting certain groups at an exponentially higher risk.

Most instances of gun violence among children are not the result of mass shootings like the Parkland Massacre in Florida, but are tragic accidents that receive very little media coverage. One of my best friends lost a childhood friend to a gun accident when he and his friend were ten. His friend was playing with a gun that everyone thought wasn't loaded. It was.

And an innocent, ten year old boy was shot to death. My friend's parents had to tell him that his best friend was dead, and his friend's parents had to bury their child. Accidents like the one my friend experienced and tragedies like school shootings would be much less frequent if legislators heeded the advice of Senator Dodd.

Stricter gun laws in countries like Japan have demonstrated the benefits of restrictions on gun ownership. Japan has the most stringent gun laws in the world. It takes over a year of background checks, safety tests, and training before a person can get a gun license. In America, it can take a couple of minutes. As a result, Japan has the lowest gun homicide rate in the world.

America needs to join the modern world and follow the advice of Senator Dodd. "We must adopt stringent gun control legislation," and we must do it now.