AMERICANS
AGAINST
GUN VIOLENCE

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2019 National High School Essay Contest
$1,000 Award Winner

(Student's name and high school affiliation withheld at student's request)

When they laid the cornerstone of our democracy, the Bill of Rights, the Founding Fathers exhibited astonishing foresight, but when they crafted the Second Amendment, they could not have envisioned AR-15's, bumpstocks, or even semi-automatic handguns, and many of them were opposed to forming a standing army.

The Second Amendment, often misrepresented as simply "the right to bear arms," was ratified by Congress in 1791. It reads:

> A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

The degree to which guns were an important aspect of daily life in colonial America and later westward expansion is a matter of some debate, but it's undeniable that laws that regulated firearms were enacted by the colonists prior to the adoption of the Second Amendment, and there was no serious discussion of repealing any of these laws after the Second Amendment was ratified.

The National Rifle Association (NRA), founded in 1871, has long interpreted the Second Amendment as guaranteeing a largely unfettered individual right to own guns. In the 1980 case of *Lewis v. United States*, however, the high Court directly linked any right to bear arms to service in a state militia. Justice Harry Blackmun, writing for the majority, concluded:

> The Second Amendment guarantees no right to keep and bear a firearm that does not have "some reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a well-regulated militia."

The National Guard is the current equivalent of a well regulated state militia, and the notion that the country as a whole can defend itself against foreign enemies with a volunteer militia is obsolete.

The Lewis case considered whether a defendant's prior conviction, flawed because he was not afforded legal counsel, could serve as the basis for a subsequent weapons violation. George Calvin Lewis Jr. was convicted of a crime in Florida in 1961 and was arrested again in 1977 for being a felon in possession of a firearm.

The NRA's sanctimonious misrepresentation of the Second Amendment continues to aid and abet mass shootings and impede solutions to the carnage. Meanwhile, the death toll mounts as new chapters are written in the bloody saga of the “right to bear arms.” Last year, for instance, 17 people were killed and an equal number injured at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Building 12, site of the massacre, was quickly slated for demolition, as if that could assuage the heartache.

It took the nation's young people to be the voice of reason. Amid the adult posturing and finger-pointing, students at Stoneman Douglas took charge of the national conversation, launching the Never Again movement to demand long-overdue action on gun violence. While statisticians argue about what constitutes a school shooting, the Washington Post estimates that more than 187,000 students have been directly exposed to gun violence since the 1999 Columbine massacre shattered the country's illusions about school safety.

The whispered hopes of America's youth have risen to a crescendo, demanding change. How many bodies must litter the corridors of history before all sensible Americans take to the streets, exercising their First Amendment right to demand an end to the misrepresentation of the Second Amendment and an end to wanton gun violence in the United States of America?