



Americans Against Gun Violence
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**2019 National High School Essay Contest
First Place Winner (\$3,000 Award)**

Seo Park

Archbishop Mitty High School
San Jose, California

Redefining America without its Defining Factor — Guns

With so much news coverage on mass shootings and suicides, our society may have become desensitized to gun violence. At a youth advocacy event, the shocking statistics on gun violence provoked me to action. I refuse to believe that America has become too ambivalent to do more about the safety of its people.

Recently, two survivors of the bloody Parkland shooting took their own lives. Suicides account for more than half of all gun deaths. As a female, I am scared for my future because females are very vulnerable to gun violence. Four and a half million American women today have been threatened with a gun by an intimate partner. The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes the female victim five times more likely to be killed (1).

Many Americans believe they have the right to own a gun. People tout the Second Amendment to defend ownership of guns - the "heritage and culture" of America. In fact, the Second Amendment, as it was originally written, does not prohibit the adoption of laws banning most civilian gun ownership today. It explicitly states:

"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 Second Amendment only guarantees gun ownership for maintaining a militia to preserve a free state. As we see in the case of *Lewis v. United States*, Lewis, a convicted felon, attempted to validate his ownership of a gun, claiming that his felony was unfounded. Supreme Court Justice Harry

Blackmun's statement restricting Lewis's ownership draws on the Second Amendment, which does not guarantee a right to a firearm whose possession is not related to a well-regulated militia.

However, the landmark case of *District of Columbia v. Heller* in 2008 imposed a huge barrier to gun control when it ruled in favor of individuals' right to guns for self-defense, leading to a mass misinterpretation. Contrary to what gun lobbyists claim, having a gun in the home doesn't increase safety. Gun owners are 41% more likely to be a victim of homicide and 244% more likely to commit suicide (2). Furthermore, 67% of gun owners cite "self defense" as the main reason for owning a firearm (3), but people use a gun for self-defense in only 0.9% of crimes against them (4).

It's time for a serious change. The data is clear: our high rate of civilian gun ownership makes our society more dangerous. America has a lot to learn from other economically advanced democratic countries that have much lower rates of gun deaths as a result of their stringent restrictions on civilian gun ownership (5).

The voice of my generation can write our future. We will not stop fighting back against such a deadly, disastrous weapon. Our lives are not a gun's to take, and we will ensure that future generations are protected. We are equipped with everything we need to educate others that guns should be banned – the truth about the Second Amendment, the facts about gun violence, the tragic stories, and most importantly, the passion and care we possess. Change starts now and with us.

References

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