



Americans Against Gun Violence  
921 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 700  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 668-4160  
aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

**2020 National High School Essay Contest  
Second Place Winner (\$2,500 Award)**

(Student's name withheld at student's request)

Aragon High School  
San Mateo, California

*Untitled*

The coronavirus pandemic has prompted panic in the United States. The pandemic has triggered hoarding: many store shelves are bare of tissues, hand sanitizers, and other items. Our response to COVID-19 has spawned economic uncertainty and roiled financial markets. The threat has disrupted travel plans for millions of Americans, produced quarantines, and generated almost non-stop news coverage. But as deadly as the coronavirus pandemic has been for older adults and people with other serious underlying medical illnesses, data from U.S. public health agencies show that infection with COVID-19 causes little or no symptoms in most children and youth and relatively few deaths in young people.

Meanwhile, another epidemic that kills an estimated 40,000 Americans every year and that disproportionately affects children and youth rages unabated and with far less public alarm. It strikes without warning and -- unlike the coronavirus -- dispatches its victims quickly. On Feb. 14, 2018, a lone gunman entered Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, toting an AR-15. In the span of only six minutes, 17 people were dead. Building 12, with its blood-splattered walls and dashed dreams, was quickly slated for demolition, as if that could assuage the heartache.

America has grown inured to deadly gun violence.

The notion that stringent gun control laws are inconsistent with the Second Amendment is a myth promoted by the gun lobby. The late Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger called this myth "one of the greatest pieces of fraud -- I repeat the word, 'fraud' -- on the American people by special interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime."

Gun control laws in the United States are as old as the founding history of the nation, predating the adoption of the Second Amendment in 1791. Public safety has traditionally reigned as an overarching concern when the risks versus benefits of private gun ownership are weighed.

Laws governing dangerous weapons, carry restrictions, the brandishing of firearms, hunting, gun manufacturing, gun registration, and dueling date to colonial times. New Jersey banned the carrying of guns as early as 1686 because it precipitated “great Fear and Quarrels.” By the 1800s, 38 other states had followed suit. Today, in stark contrast, anyone who can legally purchase a handgun can carry a concealed weapon without a permit in 15 states, and 27 other states issue concealed weapons permits with little or no discretion.

The idea that settlers tamed the West with guns is a romanticized version of history. Gunfights were rare. Historian Ray Allen Billington points out that towns quickly incorporated so they could establish police forces and pass ordinances to restrict firearms.

In the early 1900s, states moved swiftly to outlaw machine guns, sawed-off shotguns, and silencers. Texas defined a machine gun in 1933 as a weapon capable of automatically shooting more than five bullets - little firepower by today’s standards. History shows that as firearm technology evolved, new gun regulations soon followed.

Assault weapons and high-capacity magazines would never have been countenanced 90 years ago. Pistols were viewed as precursors to violence and subject to even stricter rules. The trend today, however, is a relaxation of handgun regulations: internet sales, the concealed carry movement, and “stand your ground” laws.

There was no “Second Amendment right” for anyone in the United States to own or carry a gun outside of service in a “well regulated militia,” which our founders deemed “necessary to the security of a free state,” prior to the rogue 2008 *Heller* decision in which a narrow 5-4 majority of the Court reversed 217 years of legal precedent, including four prior Supreme Court decisions, in ruling that Washington DC’s partial handgun ban was unconstitutional.

Our forefathers would be appalled by the mass shootings and the more than 100 gun-related deaths on an average day that are tolerated under the guise of “the right to bear arms.” To stem the carnage, America should embrace its past, not rewrite history.

#### References

“Provisional COVID-19 Death Counts by Sex, Age, and State,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: <https://data.cdc.gov/NCHS/Provisional-COVID-19-Death-Counts-by-Sex-Age-and-S/9bhg-hcku>.

Billington, Ray Allen; *Westward Expansion*, 6th ed., 1974.

Chuck, Elizabeth; Johnson, Alex; Siemaszko, Corky; “17 killed in mass shooting at high school in Parkland, Florida, NBC News, Feb. 14, 2018.

Warren Burger, PBS News Hour, December 16, 1991, Available At: <https://vimeo.com/157433062>.

Gray, Sarah; “Timeline of Major Gun Control Laws in America,” TIME, April 30, 2019.

Sarah Mervosh, "Nearly 40,000 People Died From Guns in U.S. Last Year, Highest in 50 Years," The New York Times, Dec. 18, 2018.

Spitzer, Robert J., "Stand Your Ground Makes No Sense," The New York Times, May 4, 2015.

Spitzer, Robert J., "Gun Law History in the United States and Second Amendment Rights," 2017, <http://lep.la.duke.edu/>.

Quinn, Melissa; "Coronavirus fear batters nerves and economy as deaths mount," CBS News, March 8, 2020.

"Facts and FAQ's About Gun Violence," Americans Against Gun Violence, "Does the Second Amendment guarantee an individual right to own a gun? Available at: <https://aagunv.org/faqs-about-guns-gun-violence/>.