



Americans Against Gun Violence
P.O. Box 661252
Sacramento, CA 95866
(916) 668-4160
www.aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

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

Yasmine Mabene

Rancho Bernardo High School
San Diego, California

The Light Upon the Trees

I have always wondered why we have allowed the gun violence epidemic in our nation to persist. I imagine two people staring out of a window unable to see the same image. How could this be? Where one person can view a clear path, another cannot discern the outlines of trees, and I have come to realize that the answer to both questions are one and the same.

It appears to me that there is quite a bit of variation in the lenses in which we understand the world. Where gun advocates see lack of regulations as preservation of their "freedom," I see chaos as bullets fly through buildings and children lie on the floor. They see themselves as their forefathers fighting against tyranny, but I see people purchasing war-grade ammunition on a whim, inflicting senseless violence. They see their right to recreational sport, which I too see, but wonder when humans became game. They see their constitution protecting their right to bear arms, but I see The Declaration of Independence declaring our right to life, liberty, and happiness. I see that we have long left behind the place where both coincide. They see thoughts and prayers, but I see apathy. I see water extinguishing fire but nothing extinguishing the air, or their indifference that kindles pain and sets tragedies aflame.

In his 1980 statement, Justice Harry Blackmun wrote that the Second Amendment guaranteed the right to bear arms to those who have "some reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a well regulated militia." "A well-regulated militia" is a common defense from anti-gun reformists. "A well-regulated militia." I wonder why I cannot see. But how can such a thing exist when guns in this nation are less regulated than cars? Where is this so-called militia? Where are its regulations? And what part of it is well? Where was this militia as bullets took the lives of children at school? Was it there when mothers fled with loved ones after prayer? Must I step

back to see? Was it at the concert hidden among the screams? Beneath the bloodied footprints of people it once knew? I hold deep concern for a nation whose lens is so misconstrued that it is no longer able to distinguish a well-regulated militia from an unstable teenager with an assault rifle.

America's gun violence issue stems not merely from fatal errors in action but in perception, the former nearly impossible to fix without the latter. Perhaps it is time for America to abandon its 18th century glasses in favor for a magnifying glass. Perhaps if we hold our perceptions of the law to the light of truth, it will reveal our sense of security burning asunder. Perhaps if we unveil the blinds before our eyes, peer a little closer outside the window, and allow the light to shine upon the trees, we can rid the world of this senseless violence and bring ourselves along a path of change.