



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

2021 National High School Essay Contest
Third Place (\$2,000 Award) Winner

(Student's name and High School withheld per student's request)
Bayside, New York

Untitled

It was a frightening day unlike any other, for the world watched as American democracy was held at gunpoint – figuratively at least - by its own citizens.

On January 6th, 2021, a mob stormed down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol as the Electoral College vote count was underway in Congress. Many in the mob carried flags with images of assault rifles and the taunt, "Come and take it." This was no peaceful, lawful, or constitutionally-protected protest. As rioters clashed violently with police and broke into the building, members of Congress were evacuated from their chambers. Many congressional staff members, though, legitimately fearing for their lives, had to seek shelter on their own.

In a cruel twist of irony, the young staffers knew exactly what had to be done, as they had been preparing for school shootings during their time as students. Their preparedness was a testament to how broken America's relationship with gun violence really is. Rather than enacting stringent gun control laws to address the longstanding gun violence epidemic wrecking the country, the staffers' bosses - our elected members of Congress - had opted instead to subject students to routine "lockdown drills," instilling fear in students of getting shot in a place where they should feel most safe and secure; leaving children and youth to hope that a mass shooting would never actually happen in their school, but to realize that if it did, it was up to them to protect themselves from becoming one of the victims when it should have been the responsibility of older generations to prevent such horrific events from ever occurring in the first place.

The violent insurrection that occurred at the Capitol that day is merely one of many instances that prove the critical need for stringent gun control. For instance, when Covid-19-related lockdowns began last spring, it is disconcerting to know that the first instinct for many people was to rush to buy a firearm. From March to May of 2020, 5.9 million guns were sold - an 80% increase over the same time the year prior.

But perhaps the more frightening reality stems from the fact that nearly half of the gun sales were from first-time buyers. It is alarmingly easy to obtain a weapon of such lethal capability in the U.S.A., an ease reflected in our sickeningly high gun homicide rates. And even as rates of gun related deaths and injuries are increasing, some lawmakers are

trying to make it easier to acquire and carry a loaded firearm. For instance, the lower chamber of Indiana's state legislature voted in February of this year to eliminate the requirement for gun owners to obtain a permit to openly carry a loaded handgun in public places, including parks and restaurants. The bill was defeated in the Indiana Senate, but at the same time, the Senate approved a bill to eliminate the monetary fee that had previously been charged for acquiring a handgun permit. As of the date of my writing this essay, Indianapolis has had three mass shootings in the past six months, including the shooting at the FedEx warehouse in Indianapolis just yesterday.

Today, the nation mourns the eight who were murdered in this latest mass shooting. Three weeks ago, we mourned the nine murdered in the Boulder shooting, and the week prior we mourned the eight murdered in the Atlanta shootings.

America fails us every day as it dangerously enables individuals to become murderers of all scales. Stringent gun control laws must be adopted to save America. While gun control opponents tout the "right to bear arms" that is included in the second half of the Second Amendment, they ignore the first half of the Amendment which clearly indicates that this right is inextricably linked to service in a "well regulated militia." They also ignore the first sentence of the Constitution that reminds us of its primary purpose: to "insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, [and] promote the general Welfare."

When we allow individuals with no relation whatsoever to a "well regulated militia" to use guns to wage a reign of terror in our nation today, we are not only failing to abide by the Constitution, but more importantly, we are failing in our basic duty to protect the lives of innocent Americans, including the lives of the most vulnerable members of our society - our children and our youth