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***We're All Militiamen Now:  
How the Gun Lobby Rewrote the Constitution***

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

Americans own a lot of guns. 393 million, to be exact [1]. That's equivalent to 120 for every 100 residents, a per capita rate more than double that of the next highest country [2].

But are we any safer because of it? Does an overabundance of powerful weapons somehow cancel out, instilling peace? Of course not. The result of mass gun ownership is just as one would expect: senseless gun violence. In 2021, there were more than 20,000 murders perpetrated with a gun, and over 24,000 suicides [3]. That results in a homicide rate seven times greater than in other developed countries [4]. For 15- to 24-year-olds like me, the gun homicide rate in the United States is 49 times higher than in other advanced nations [4]. The connection is not difficult to recognize. Although Americans aren't more violent in general than people in other high income democratic countries, a wealth of scientific literature has established that high accessibility to guns, which are far more deadly than fists, clubs, or even knives, is associated with high rates of lethal violence. [5]. Further, studies have found a strong correlation between gun ownership and suicide [6]. Despite this, firearms remain almost entirely unregulated in the United States [7, 8].

What is wrong with our country? How could we allow these atrocities to continue unchecked? Are we just too heartless?

In actuality, we aren't. Americans have consistently favored more stringent gun regulations [9, 10]. Yet, whenever common-sense measures are proposed, special interest groups such as the NRA spend millions lobbying against them [11]. In fact, the gun lobby spends seven times more than gun-control advocates to impose their viewpoint [12]. This results in a regulatory scheme that defies common sense and public opinion.

The gun lobby's influence has even helped rewrite our Constitution. Until recently, the Supreme Court had rightly interpreted the Second Amendment as a limited provision inextricably linked to preserving a militia [13]. In the 1970s, however, the NRA and its ilk launched a vigorous campaign to uncouple the right to "keep and bear Arms" from the necessity of a "well-regulated Militia" [13, 14]. This argument effectively severed the Second Amendment's function from its purpose. Yet, it quickly caught on. In the 2008 Supreme Court case of *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the political investment of pro-gun groups paid off as the Second Amendment was extended to protect a general right to possess a firearm [15]. This right previously didn't exist [16]. In short, the gun lobby was able to turn centuries of legal precedent - and the English language - on its head. Worse still, in a case argued last November, it is attempting to extend the Second Amendment even further from the Founders' intent [17].

It is well past time to restore the Second Amendment to its original meaning and adopt gun control laws in the United States comparable to those in other advanced democratic countries. We cannot delay, for tens of thousands of lives are at stake every year. With persistence, dedication, and unity, we must fight against the coffers of the gun lobby in an attempt to uphold the voice of democracy and common sense. I know I will, and I hope you'll join me.

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