

KNOWLEDGE CAN BE MIGHTIER THAN THE GUN

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ABSTRACT

The following work is intended to be a closer look and commentary on the issue of gun violence and mass shootings in the United States of America. An overarching pragmatic lens will be utilized to argue that the time is now to make a change in our current trajectory of normalized gun violence in our schools, and society in general. We currently need to bring the controversial and difficult topic of gun violence and mass shootings into our classrooms, have open dialogue, and begin to purposely educate students about the subject on a real and deeper level than just the reflexive approaches that we currently take after each tragic incident. The topic will be addressed from the perspectives of various significant historical philosophers such as Plato, John Dewey, and Paulo Freire. The major aim of this commentary is to look at the issue of gun violence and gun control from a variety of philosophical lenses and perspectives to attempt to gain a level of understanding that is much deeper than just the surface in hopes of one day curtailing the problem.

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the most recent tragic school shootings in Florida and Texas, one must ask, when will enough be enough? Mass shootings have become an all-too-normal occurrence in contemporary society in our country. Although we are still impacted by every one of them, there is a concern that we are slowly becoming desensitized to the unspeakable actions of violence that are being carried out regularly. After the initial shock, the typical reaction to such actions involves a clichéd response calling for thoughts and prayers, as if thoughts and prayers were enough to prevent the next incident every other time that people have called for them. Next, people engage in heated discussions and arguments over gun violence and gun control over social media platforms that again lead us nowhere. Eventually, and as time passes, we forget and move on, which then leads us to the next mass shooting and the initiation of the cycle once again. Having lived my life to this point in two very different states, I am curious about the role of states and their respective gun

laws and whether or not this has an influence on the prevalence of violent crimes and mass shootings in schools and other public spaces that were always considered safe until this era of our nation's history. In a recent article published about this very issue, the authors point out that "the places change, the numbers change, but the choice of weapon remains the same. In the United States, people who want to kill a lot of other people most often do it with guns."¹ Additionally, another aim of this work is to look at the issue of gun violence and gun control from a variety of philosophical lenses and perspectives to attempt to gain a level of understanding that is much deeper than just the surface. Lastly, I will also propose an alternative idea about how to decrease the problem of violence in our society, not by gun control but rather by soul searching and education.

A TALE OF TWO STATES

I spent roughly the first twenty-five years of my life in the state of California, which is known around the country as an extremely progressive state because of its diversity, higher levels of educational attainment, and Democratic majority in the state legislature. From there, I moved to Arizona, the polar opposite of California in many regards, where I have lived the past fifteen years of my life. In California, there were many people who shared my political and social values. I was comfortable there, and it was the only place I had ever called home. Comfort is nice, but disrupting comfort and challenging yourself to thrive in a different situation and environment is what allows a person to grow and evolve. When I got married and my wife and I were looking for a place to start a family, our decision came down to these two states, and we decided to start a new life in Arizona despite many warnings against it. Most of the warnings were in regard to the political climate, but as a young idealistic person with a passion for social change, my response was always the same. People like me are needed much more in states like Arizona to create change in order to gradually alter the political winds and climate. I was ready for the challenge and embraced it with open arms. When I arrived, one of the first and most glaring differences in these two states involved a different kind of arms that I could not truly comprehend then, and I still have trouble wrapping my brain around now.

In California, a slight majority of the population views guns as dangerous because they could fall into the wrong hands, and there have been many bills and measures passed in the last twenty years to regulate the sale of guns, making it harder for certain people to own them. In contrast, in Arizona, which is one of the biggest proponents of the Second Amendment and the right to bear arms, guns are literally everywhere. In this state, guns are viewed as a legitimate accessory that you should carry at all times in case you are put in a situation where you have to defend yourself or your property from an attack or intruder. I still recall my shock when I first moved to Arizona to be seated at a table in a Village Inn with my family,

adjacent to another family whose patriarch was carrying a gun in a holster. I also recall asking myself why people would feel the need to bring a gun into a restaurant every time I saw the “No Firearms Allowed” sign in an establishment. I have never felt unsafe in either state. However, that feeling has nothing to do with the gun laws in those particular states. Guns or lack of guns do not make me feel safe or unsafe: it is my state of mind that controls those perceptions. Unfortunately, that state of mind is controlled by the prominent rhetoric that people are exposed to.

California has some of the toughest gun laws in the nation, according to a gun safety group.² In fact, the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence gave the state of California an A- in its annual report card for its efforts: The organization notes that California, among other measures, requires gun dealers to obtain a state license, it limits handgun purchases to one per person per month, and bans most assault weapons and .50-caliber rifles.³ While the state’s high grade may lead someone to believe that it has fewer shootings, the reality is that it too, has fallen victim to such heartless actions. However, the question of where the weapons are coming from is a significant one, since many of the neighboring states have much looser laws on guns. This same law center gave the state of Arizona an F on its annual report card and denounced it as one of the easiest places for anyone to get a gun because of its weak or often nonexistent gun laws. Arizona has also had its share of incidents regarding gun violence that have made the headlines in the media. The message I am trying to convey is not that tougher gun laws will eliminate the societal issue of mass shootings, because I am smart enough to know that they will not. In fact, according to a story in the *Washington Post*, California, which has the toughest gun laws, has had the most mass shootings in the past fifty years.⁴ I am also not in favor of “taking people’s guns away,” as is so often the rhetoric on conservative talk radio or blogs. Rather, my message is that tougher gun laws need to be coupled with education and enlightenment regarding the issue for all levels of our population, but young people in particular.

THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS

Whenever a discussion of gun regulation begins, it inevitably leads to a vigorous defense of the Second Amendment and the prevalent belief that “They are trying to take our guns!” The Second Amendment of the Constitution states that Americans should have the right to form a well-regulated militia as necessary to the security of a free state and that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed upon. This language from the eighteenth century is used over and over again to argue against legislation regarding firearms. I understand the love affair of people and their guns. This country was founded on revolution, and there can be no true revolution without gunpowder, according to most people. The relative wealth of this country, when compared to others in the world, makes its citizens insecure and fearful that someone is out there, lurking, trying to take what they have. What

passes for the middle class in this country could easily be considered upper class in most of the rest of the world. This fear and insecurity are diminished or eliminated in the minds of people by owning a gun or several guns. However, it must be pointed out that the very language of the Second Amendment states unequivocally that the militia shall be well regulated, as well as the fact that it should be deemed necessary for the security of a free state.

The intended purpose behind the need for a militia is pertinent to this discussion as well. According to the National Constitution Center,⁵ in the eighteenth century there was a significant fear among citizens that the armed forces might be used to oppress or control the people of this country, leading to the belief that the right to bear arms was necessary in case this were to happen. The armed forces in the eighteenth century were very different in scope and power than they are today. Back then, a militia might have stood a chance if the government turned its armed forces on its citizens. Today, the advanced weaponry of the armed forces is exponentially more powerful than whatever a civilian militia could produce. My point here, again, is that the context in which the Second Amendment was created and that of society today are vastly different. Using the rationale then, to defend the rationale today is extremely shortsighted and does not provide a valid argument. The country back in 1789, when this amendment was created, was immensely different from the one we live in now. Is it possible that the security of our nation, given the realities of today, is better gained through fewer guns rather than more? Lastly, it is important to recognize that gun regulation is not the same as gun elimination, which means that the right to bear arms would not be taken away but merely limited for the safety and security of our society—the exact aim of the Second Amendment in the first place.

Long before the Bill of Rights section of the Constitution there is something known as the Preamble. The text of the preamble, which is the opening statement of the Constitution, asserts, “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity” as the intended purpose of the document. This statement is the framework for the rest of the Constitution, which was enacted as the supreme rule of the land. The Second Amendment, which is part of the Bill of Rights as an addition to the Constitution, exists as part of this framework and does not and should not supersede the true intention of the Constitution as stated in the Preamble. How does our current society entitle its citizens to the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” the key words in the Declaration of Independence, which preceded the Constitution and which the government was created to protect, if they have to worry about falling victim to the all-too-frequent “tragedies” that have become such a shameful part of our reality as a nation?

LIMITED RESEARCH ON GUN VIOLENCE

Adding to this convoluted debate is the fact that there is very limited research on gun violence in our country. To study things like gun violence and gun laws, there has to be a strong theoretical framework in place, and the study designs have to be capable of untangling the debate regarding the causality concerning increased gun ownership and gun violence.⁶ This is easier said than done. Furthermore, in order to offer significant findings, these studies need to be longitudinal in nature, which would require a lot of time and funding. The good news is that, according to the authors referenced above, a database with information and findings from studies on gun violence in the fifty states over the last twenty-five years is now a reality. This data has been available to researchers at no cost since the end of 2017.⁷ The emerging consensus based on the research available at the moment is that certain gun laws can in fact reduce gun violence, in particular, laws that would require extensive background checks for all gun buyers and those that would bar domestic abusers or people who have had a history of violence from possessing firearms.⁸

Bindu Kalesan, who has done extensive research on gun violence, conducted a study in which he analyzed the trends in gun deaths across the nation between 1999 and 2013. The findings of his research were striking. To summarize, a total of 463,033 gun deaths occurred during those fifteen years.⁹ This means that 10.4 out of every 100,000 people in the country are likely to be killed as a result of gun violence. This figure has been fairly stable over that time period, which means that we have had a problem for many years that has not yet been adequately addressed. Relatively safe gun counties were typically found in the northeast portion of our country. In contrast, states like California, Arizona, and Texas have very few counties that are considered safe according to the research as it relates to the likelihood of experiencing gun violence. Perhaps the most shocking and ironic finding is that leading the way in gun deaths and violence was none other than Washington, DC, the very place that houses our government and the Constitution of this country that is intended to protect us from such threats. Is it possible that we have become our most imminent and dangerous threat?

THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

The National Rifle Association is also an important part of this discussion. Claiming that an “armed society” is a polite society, the NRA lobbies in favor of people having the ability to carry concealed weapons. The laws that they support are those that allow practically anyone to buy and own a gun.¹⁰ The organization typically preys on people’s fears of violent crime while distorting the real meaning of the Second Amendment, as previously discussed. It is the opinion of many, including the authors just mentioned, that the laws the NRA advocates for increase the danger that citizens face rather than reducing it. According to Beard and Hammer, “by

bringing a gun into your home or carrying one on your hip, you greatly increase your risk of becoming a victim of tragedy."¹¹ What the authors found, based on the collection of research, was that states with laws allowing people to carry concealed weapons do not decrease their overall rate of homicide. This flies in the face of the argument that more guns mean less gun violence because people will think twice before threatening someone with a gun. The article claims that concealed weapons laws may actually encourage criminals to behave more violently, since they would then have to anticipate that their victims may be armed and shoot first. Accordingly, the presence of a gun in a violent situation usually causes the escalation of violence against the victim. The overall message of this article is that the NRA and gun lobbyists need to stop hiding behind their limited interpretation of the Second Amendment, as well as a powerful statement claiming that we "cannot solve our society's violence problem by putting a gun on everyone's hip."¹²

Despite my questioning and challenging of the true meaning of the Second Amendment, I do believe that it has its place, since it is important and should be preserved. The question to ask at this juncture is simple: At what cost? Is our right to bear arms more important than our children's privilege to live out their full lives? What I am saying is that to minimize (not eliminate) the problem, we must start with harsher and stricter gun laws that make it tougher for the "wrong" people to obtain weapons that were meant for this kind of destruction. This, however, cannot be the only action taken at the state level. A more significant and consequential action for states to take would be to start looking at the present to attempt to alleviate some of the problems of the future. My contention is that it is now time to bring the controversial and difficult topic of gun violence and mass shootings into our classrooms, engage in open dialogue, and begin to educate students purposefully about the subject on a real and deeper level than mere reactive evacuation drills and videos.

Although public mass shootings account for only a small fraction of gun deaths in this country, they are the most impactful because they typically happen without warning and in places that one would not imagine. Incidents like these also receive a lot of media attention and end up becoming a part of numerous discussions on guns and gun reform on many social platforms. Terms like "going postal" and "active shooter" are now, unfortunately, a very real part of the American lexicon, but we must ask ourselves whether or not we are learning from these incidents and taking the proactive steps to prevent future incidents. There is a common saying that history repeats itself when we don't learn from our previous mistakes. These situations would be prime examples of that phenomenon. Indeed, "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

THE ISSUE THROUGH VARIOUS LENSES

Looking at this issue from the lens of critical pedagogy espoused by Paulo Freire, a controversial and sensitive matter like this one, which has such a profound impact

on society and the psyche of our youth, can no longer be avoided in school curriculum. In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Freire proudly states that he is “a teacher filled with the spirit of hope despite all signs to the contrary.”¹³ He also speaks of the importance of a safe space for students to learn and engage with the world and explore and expand their innate curiosity to be more epistemological, to actively seek and even crave new knowledge and understanding. These types of safe spaces are quickly vanishing if students have to think about whether or not they will finish the school day alive, given our current reality and the ever-present threat of violence. Student voices can no longer be silenced or go unheard. The recent shooting in Florida has sparked real strategic action on the part of the surviving victims to hold our local, state, and federal governments accountable for the inaction that has allowed for countless shootings in the last twenty years. We need more of these initiatives to change the narrative of our country when it comes to guns and gun violence. To connect our current dilemma with another controversial topic, there was a time, not long ago, when the important issue of sex was taboo in the school setting. Over the past fifty years, states have recognized the value of sex education, not to eliminate the problem of teen pregnancy, which is not realistic, but to minimize it by educating and providing students with information to help them make better and wiser decisions. A curriculum focused on guns and gun violence could serve a similar purpose today in this country, where this issue has finally become one that can no longer be ignored.

Looking at the issue from a different lens, the academic discipline of philosophy focuses on attempting to define, or debating the accepted definitions of, complex and abstract concepts like justice. In *The Republic*, Plato offers a perspective on justice that can be applied to this issue. From his process of deductive reasoning he states that because it has been agreed that justice is a virtue of the soul, and “virtue of the soul” essentially means health of the soul, justice is then desirable because it would mean health of the soul.¹⁴ The argument I would make here is the opposite. I do not believe that justice leads to a healthy soul, but rather that health of the soul leads to justice. The state can make a significant contribution in helping to guide souls along a positive path, while molding and shaping both the hearts and minds of the youth who will inevitably be the future of our nation and the determinants of our collective trajectory. Investing in teaching our children to become the types of citizens that we need them to become is of paramount importance, and if that requires bringing controversial subject matter into the classroom, then that is exactly what we should do.

In an article entitled “Teaching in a Moment of Crisis,” Maxine Greene starts off with an idea that is extremely relevant to our circumstances in society today. When describing incidents like the one that recently took place in Florida, she writes that “On one side, pure horror at catastrophe, the work of human beings or nature alone; on the other side, speechlessness and apathy of powerlessness. Lured by the

media we become spectators of multiple tragedies, distanced and unable to grasp other people's pain."¹⁵ I believe it is time to move to another side and begin to learn from our mistakes, as well as acknowledge that we always have the power to create change and impact policy if we are moving together and unifying our collective voices to create a stronger and louder message. I believe it is time to make an honest attempt to feel "other people's pain" as if it were our own. This genuine empathy would be necessary in the paradigm shift that is required regarding this matter. Greene goes on to explain that we need to help youth develop "critical intelligence," among other abilities, to be truly effective teachers in today's world. Critical Intelligence involves concepts like constructivism, which views the learner as an information and knowledge constructor; the centrality of meaning, which focuses on the meaning behind learning; and emotional intelligence, which challenges students to be introspective and allows them to explore and learn through their emotions.

Looking at this issue from a pragmatic lens or Deweyan perspective, "My Pedagogic Creed," perhaps his most famous work, is divided into five sections. Articles 1 and 2 deal with the nature of education and the school. Article 3 tackles the subject matter of education, while the fourth one deals with the nature of its methods. Lastly, article 5 deals with the impact of schools and education on social progress. Dewey's philosophy applies clearly to this discussion in many important ways. First, he believes that true education comes from full stimulation of children's powers or potential. This education cannot take place in isolation from the social conditions in which children find themselves. We should provide children with knowledge of these social conditions and of the present state of civilization in order to understand and engage those powers and that potential. Next, according to Dewey, schools and education should simplify social life and reduce it to its embryonic form.¹⁶ In the case of gun violence, you cannot study gun violence without paying close attention to its root causes or the societal conditions that lead to it. Lastly, as is clearly stated in article 5, Dewey believes, as I do, that education is the fundamental means of social progress and reform. Reforms that are enacted outside of the educational process and independent of true education are, in his own words, "transitory and futile."¹⁷ In order to transform societies and the people within them, we must always use the power of education as a primary vehicle toward achieving that end.

The year 2016 marked the 100th anniversary of another one of Dewey's master works, *Democracy and Education*, in which he posits that these two concepts are, and will forever be linked. Dewey believed that learning is a social, communal process requiring students to construct their own understandings based on personal experience: "No thought, no idea, can possibly be conveyed as an idea from one person to another. . . . only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem first hand, seeking and finding his own way out, does he think."¹⁸ This is an important idea given the fact that the people who are most impacted by mass shootings in

schools rarely seem to be involved in the discussions that take place about how to solve the problem. Dewey emphasized the importance of inquiry or questioning, as well as championing the move toward more child-centered and progressive teaching approaches.¹⁹

Moreover, Dewey believed that one absolutely critical function of education was to develop the intellect, motivation, and wisdom of young people so that they could become mature and effective citizens, able to transmit culture from one generation to the next and transform it in the face of change. He argued that, what nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life. He believed that democracy is not just a political system, but instead an ethical ideal with actively informed participation by citizens. Established beliefs and theories should be looked at critically and revised as a result of contemporary developments, pragmatically evolving to meet the needs of changing times. Education has a significant moral purpose from his point of view because if democracy is to work, it requires informed, knowledgeable, and wise citizens. Classroom teachers and schools have a responsibility to nurture character as well as teach knowledge and skills. Deep learning and the molding of children into civic-minded individuals, which were the basis of democracy from the outset, and most importantly, the basis of democracy moving forward, are of critical importance. According to Dewey, democracy and education can never be separated.

The past inaction in our country regarding the issues of gun violence and mass shootings is striking and has proven to be both dangerous and tragic. Our students need actively to learn that the lives of others and their own are not to be played with. Life is not a video game that you can turn on and off. In life, choices have real consequences, and some of those consequences can change a life or extinguish it forever. As early as junior or high school, or sometime during the adolescent years, students need to be exposed to these stories and tragedies, not to glorify them or make the shooters infamous, but to try to understand their root causes and attempt to learn from them. Our youth needs to understand the consequences of such actions and be engaged in classroom discussions and dialogue that promote empathy for the victims and an understanding that these types of “choices” cannot be made in the future regardless of their present situation. Identifying some of the root causes can also lead to discussions about eliminating those problems and exposure to agencies or programs that attempt to mitigate them. We need to teach our children more about the victims of these tragedies and put real faces to the names. The victims are numerous, and they are not restricted to the people who lose their lives: the victims left behind are just as significant and need to be validated through this process. Again, such activities will not eliminate the problem, but creating and molding youth who are empathetic and who understand the consequences of their choices and actions is a major step in the right direction. Any step, even a seemingly insignificant one, is worth taking if it means saving the lives of any of our children.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

There is curriculum addressing violence on many fronts in this country, once a specific type of violence is recognized as a serious issue that requires addressing. This includes issues like bullying, domestic violence, and violence against women. For example, the National Urban Technology Center has created a curriculum against bullying entitled *Dignity for All*.²⁰ This curriculum includes opportunities for professional development, lesson plans that are comprehensive and come with a curriculum guide, and plenty of both interactive and digital tools to engage learners. The goal of the curriculum is to help learners understand that dignity is something of which all people are worthy, and that, as human beings, we should never do anything that can strip the dignity of anyone. We should also be aware of situations where this is happening so that we can put an end to it ourselves, instead of passively watching and accepting the situation. The curriculum is divided into three parts. The first is Knowledge Acquisition, where students are introduced to the problem with the aim of understanding it. The second is Attitude Shift, where learners are challenged to reflect and recognize that perhaps they are contributing to the problem in some way based on their attitudes or lack of introspection. Lastly, the Behavior Transformation piece is where you put knowledge and theory into action and convert it to changed behaviors and a different paradigm regarding the issue. *Dignity for All* uses storytelling, role playing, and popular culture to inspire collaborative discussion, critical thinking, and reflection, as well as to create a goal of becoming a more compassionate society. The ultimate goal of the curriculum is for students to feel safe in telling their stories, and to help shape a generation of children who are kinder, more empathetic, and more civic minded.

Similarly, *Voices Against Violence* is a curriculum designed by UN Women along with the Girl Scouts with inputs from young people.²¹ This curriculum was developed for various age groups ranging from age five to twenty-five, and its aim is to provide young people with knowledge and information so that they can better understand the root causes of violence in our communities and how it shapes and impacts the people living in them. The ultimate goal is an understanding that violence affects us all in some way, and that the issue needs to be addressed collectively and systematically in order to curtail its prevalence in our society. Like the previously mentioned curriculum, it includes interactive tools and activities, as well as a handbook for what is termed “peer educators.” Education on any issue should not come merely from the “top down.” The teacher is instead a facilitator of learning who encourages and empowers students to be facilitators of learning as well, and in their own contexts. The curriculum is complete with age-appropriate lessons that challenge students to think critically about issues like gender bias and stereotypes using various mediums for learning, ranging from creating poster boards or telling stories to connecting and engaging with community agencies. In short, *Voices Against Violence* is a tool for young people that can be adapted and molded to a specific national context and translated into various languages.

The purpose of these two examples is to point out that it is time for us to create a similar curriculum around the issue of violence in schools and mass shootings. It is my firm belief that we can take tenets from these two curriculums, and many others that exist for other forms of violence, and use them to create one that is specific to this particular issue. I understand the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential risk that we take by openly discussing topics like this with children in school, but that is what schools and education should be about: discussing difficult issues and helping to mold children's minds and hearts by guiding them toward becoming good and positive people. Is the risk of engaging in discussions of controversial subjects more than the risk of not doing so? For anyone who might question the need for it, I simply ask a few modest questions. How much are the lives of our youth worth? Is the issue not pressing enough to address it systematically and with children of appropriate ages? Are any of our current strategies working or resulting in outcomes seemingly leading us in the right direction? Are our children and young people not worth our effort in attempting to solve this issue proactively instead of reactively? Lastly, can we make things any worse than they are now?

CONCLUSION

Recently, large crowds of adults, teenagers and children took to the streets to protest in favor of stricter gun laws. Close to two million people attended "Marches for Our Lives" across the nation, forming one unified and powerful voice speaking to the politicians we elect, in part to make decisions that will keep us safe. Teenage survivors of the Parkland, Florida, shooting were largely responsible for organizing these marches and peaceful protests. That same week, Congress voted to lift the ban on federal research on gun violence, which had been in effect for the last two decades. It is no longer the time to wait for a solution to magically appear, and I would argue that it never was. Inaction and silence are actions nonetheless. I am encouraged by the fact that our youth are standing up and fighting back in order to preserve their present dreams and have a chance to make them a reality in the future.

I would like to end by sharing a work that was created in the immediate aftermath of the Sandy Hook tragedy in 2012, when twenty elementary school children between the ages of six and seven lost their lives on a cold winter morning in Newtown, Connecticut. For some reason, and even though it was not the first or the last mass shooting, this one really struck a chord in my heart. After the tears, I took the time to think about and contemplate the incident on many levels. I thought of the desperation of those kids in the final moments. I thought of the feeling of helplessness and anguish that would have overtaken me as a parent if I were to get "that call." I thought about why our society has continued to allow these types of incidents to take place. I also thought about why people cannot find the necessary lens to step out of their own perspective and attempt to see the world or an issue from someone else's. I thought and I thought, asking myself a lot of questions that had no real answers, and then I sat down

and wrote. At that moment, I truly felt myself leave my body and enter into a different space—a space that was foreign to me but felt all too real. I fully immersed myself in that moment, stopped thinking with my brain, and began writing with a heavy heart.

Let Me Introduce You to My Pain

Let me introduce you to my pain, most of you have never met her;
 When times were tough she was my reminder, that surely one day things would be better.
 She was that special kid with the huge smile, and she wore it with such innocence;
 Her future erased forever from this world, her fire extinguished for no reason.
 The pain and sorrow of losing a child are feelings I hope you never know;
 It's a knife pierced deep within you, deep enough to penetrate your soul.
 Last week my angel was so proud of a simple grade on a weekly test;
 This life and world is full of surprises, in tears, today, we lay her body to rest.
 I can't imagine what she must have felt in that last and desperate moment;
 I wish I could look into her eyes, unanswered questions will be my torment.
 My biggest regret is knowing that we collectively share the blame;
 We have always ignored the problem, knowingly giving it a different name.
 The choice to sit back and do nothing is inevitably still a choice;
 Our inaction has led to numerous tragedies and our cause still lacks a voice.
 We are appalled after they happen, but pretty soon return to our normality;
 For me, "normal" will never be the same again; we can't ignore our own mortality.
 So in the last goodbye I fought them, but could not hold back all the tears;
 I came to a stark and haunting realization that will stay with me through the years.
 Our society has made another choice, and we don't care about who it harms;
 To sacrifice countless innocent victims for our precious right to bear our arms.
 I will leave you with a question, please answer honestly with a clear mind:
 What makes your precious right more important than my child's privilege to be alive?

NOTES

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