

Student Example of American Myth Essay

Shooting Holes in the American Dream

The American dream is the allure that brings many people to this country. Through the freedom of individualism is the pathway of opportunity to achieve success. Living the American dream is being able to obtain an education, go to a concert, shop at a store, and even just walk the streets in a progressive, safe environment. Today, many individual's rigid interpretation of the Second Amendment has compromised the safety of all Americans. For individual gun owners, access to guns means personal safety, but for society in general, this means an ever-present threat.

The idea of safety is defined by individual perspective. It's ironic that many in society feel threatened by the very thing that makes others feel safe, guns. The Second Amendment was created by our founding fathers to ensure the safety of citizens, in the case of a tyrannical government, by allowing people to "bear arms". As the original justification for the Second Amendment has diminished, and weaponry has become more advanced, the Second Amendment has become a true threat to the American ideal of safety. Parents no longer feel safe sending their children to school, students must undergo active shooter drills, and metal detectors are at all major sporting events. The peaceful vision of the American dream has been compromised by unrestricted access to automatic weapons in today's society.

The historical context of the Second Amendment, which was ratified in 1791, was necessary for the purpose of allowing individuals to protect themselves against an overbearing government. During this time, it contributed to helping those live their American dream, because it allowed citizens to feel a sense of security and safety within their homes. The right to bear arms has more recently become controversial because it is often argued as the basis to allow anyone access to extremely destructive weapons. Though part of being an American is the ability

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to exercise the rights given to us hundreds of years ago, it is important to modify the interpretation of these rights to fit into the confines of today's society. With the modernization of weapons, and the recognition of how significant mental health issues may result in mental instability, the right to bear arms fails to adequately reflect every citizen's right to live safely, as it pertains to gun violence.

When the American ideal of the right to bear arms and protect oneself was ratified through the United States Constitution, it did not contemplate the idea of automatic weapons capable of mass homicide. Hundreds of Americans are killed by guns every year. According to Giffords Law Center, "Americans are 25 times more likely to die from gun violence than residents of peer nations" ("Gun Violence Statistics"). The appeal behind the American dream is being able to achieve one's aspirations in a safe and secure environment. Having to worry about being shot by a neighbor, co-worker, or stranger on the street was never contemplated by our founding fathers. One must question whether it is fear of legitimate threats, or paranoia that drives individuals to want to own a firearm. After 9/11, gun ownership in this country escalated significantly. The fear of terrorist attacks drove people to take action to protect themselves. Intimidation is the driving force of terrorism, which installs fear within civilians. Rational thought dictates that even if more citizens owned guns before 9/11, the attacks still would have happened. Though buying guns does not directly lead to a decrease in terrorist attacks, the reactions based on fear is often what drives gun purchases. These purchases, however, only give one peace of mind, rather than actual protection. Strict interpretation of the Second Amendment fails to recognize the idea that everyone has the right to live in peace, without the threat of being killed by firearms.

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In recent years, American's have had to adapt to the new, harsh reality that guns pose a real threat to all citizens. An individual's right to bear arms has impacted the idea of safety for all. Last year, my younger brother's high school classes were cancelled in response to a gun threat. The thought of my 15-year-old brother potentially being harmed by a gun during school seems so fictional, and is infuriating. Though gun violence has become more prominent in the media, it's hard to swallow the fact that I, or someone close to me, could be a victim of gun violence. Hearing that my sibling's school was personally targeted makes gun violence seem more real and intimidating than ever before.

There is merit to arguments in favor of the Second Amendment. Today, there are over 350 million firearms in the United States, and the majority are owned by law abiding, responsible gun owners (Ingraham). Many use these weapons legally for hunting, sport, personal safety, and even just to collect. With this said, I question the refusal to compromise when it comes to gun legislation. We all must be willing to reflect on how individuals are able to secure these weapons, and what weapons are truly necessary. What is the justification for not permitting extensive background checks before one is able to purchase a firearm? If the weapon is going to be used for hunting, the only consequence may be a delayed hunting trip. Red flag laws are one possible solution to this national crisis. In theory, protection under these laws would disarm those who "allegedly present a danger to themselves or others around them" (Nino). Petitions can be proposed to confiscate firearms from a person who shows signs of potentially causing danger to others or themselves. Further, when arguing protections for possessing assault weapons, I question the need for these types of guns at all. They are not used in hunting or personal safety, and the impact on individual rights would be minimal if these types of guns were to be banned. I believe that the rights given to Americans through the constitution are fundamental to the

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opportunity of achieving the American dream. It is hard to articulate any reason for someone to justify possessing an automatic weapon capable of killing dozens of individuals in a matter of seconds. Giving up automatic weapons is a fair price to pay when the alternative is losing thousands of innocent lives.

Advocacy groups, such as the National Rifle Association, serve as the main barrier to implementing real change when it comes to gun reform. The NRA is a powerful organization that consistently lobbies against any form of gun control. By providing millions in PAC money, politicians are hesitant to vote, or even speak out against this powerful organization. With guns being a billion-dollar industry, it is money, not safety, that is the driving force behind the NRA. The firearms industry alone accounts for over 300,000 jobs in America and stimulates the economy through taxes (“Firearms and Ammunition Industry Economic Impact”). The slogan “guns don’t kill people, people kill people,” is commonly used by members and supporters of the organization to defend their position. Though it might be true that people are the ones who perform the disturbing acts related to gun violence, without weapons, shootings would not be possible. We are talking about homicide, the mass murder of thousands of innocent people each year. Either society can wait until each individual is personally affected by the misuse of these weapons, or we can act now, before it becomes too late, and the American ideal of feeling safe within this country is gone forever.

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