

NATIONAL CENTER FOR STATE COURTS'

2022 CIVICS EDUCATION ESSAY CONTEST



SANTANA SPEARMAN
FIRST-PLACE HIGH SCHOOL WINNER
CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

My Grandparent's 2007 white SUV doesn't make it out of the driveway often. However, when it is able to seek freedom and venture out onto the paved roads of rural South Carolina, it's for three things: grocery store runs, family trips, and elections. Speaking of elections, my Grandparents haven't missed a single one. Even at eighty years old, when standing in long lines aren't quite suitable for their old age, you will see Mr. and Mrs. Hampton at the polls. On election morning, their SUV escapes the driveway to send my Grandparents to cast their votes and participate in the American democracy. But it's not just their SUV that's required for me Grandparents to participate in the elections... it's also the fifteenth amendment.

Without the fifteenth amendment, my Grandpa wouldn't be making his election day breakfast potatoes, my Grandmother wouldn't be packing up the car on election mornings, and most importantly, my Grandparents wouldn't be included in the United States' political process...all because of their race.

This amendment has implemented the most change amongst the American public by incorporating the views of all Americans into politics. People of all backgrounds can shape the United States' democracy and policy. America needs electors that represent its values in its entirety, which means securing the votes for all people, no matter their race. The more diverse voters are, the better elected representatives serve the United States. Afterall, how can political candidates advocate for the views of people that cannot elect them?

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SUMAYYAH ABUELMAATTI
SECOND-PLACE HIGH SCHOOL WINNER
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Backs broken. Cheeks hollow. Skin coating only bones. Calloused fingers.
Blistered hands. Just objects in circulation.

For 400 years, a people, a walking, talking, thriving people were snatched by the hand of greed and thrown into a sullen endless pit. Sat amongst black tar sinking in its depths while watching through the tiny slits above the Garden of Eden, blue skies, green grass, wheat fields and sliced bread. So close yet so far.

Where you were not born to be alive but born to be a slave.

The 13th Amendment was a hand, a warm hand which extended to the bones of the oppressed and pulled them out of their oppression, out of the black tar and up to the thin slits in the roof. A hand that let four million slaves feel their blood rush through them, their mind ruminate and their eyes fall upon that blue blue sky, the thin blades of grass whistling in the cool breeze. A hand that let the dead or alive breathe finally, a smooth, deep breath.

That hand, that ink on paper was the foundation. The foundation to African Americans being free, to the 14th and 15th Amendment that gave them citizenship and the right to vote, to the Civil Rights movement which ended segregation to the Black Lives Matter movement which fights against oppression.

The 13th Amendment brought the lives of African Americans within reach of justice and that's the biggest difference that can be made.

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ESHAL WARSI

**THIRD-PLACE HIGH SCHOOL WINNER
CYPRESS, TEXAS**

On April 29, 1999, waitress Jessica Lall refused to serve Manu Sharma, the son of a powerful politician, another drink. Those were the last moments of her life. He pulled out a gun and fatally shot her point-blank.

Despite multiple witnesses, Sharma was acquitted in his first trial. Indians were shocked but not surprised: Sharma was well-connected and therefore above the law. The rule of law is the most fundamental principle of any democracy. Without it, constituents have no respect for the law, and anarchy and chaos reign supreme.

The Founding Fathers were acutely aware of this fact. Many of their fellow patriots were sent off to have unfair trials in Britain instead of unbiased judges and a jury of one's peers at home. The Sixth Amendment was incorporated in the Bill of Rights to fight such tyranny. It assures an impartial jury, speedy and public trial, and informs one of the charges against them.

The Sixth Amendment is the most important because it holds everyone to an equal standard. Politicians, veterans, teachers, and students are all given the same treatment. This simple fact is what sets America apart from other nations. Vigilantism and corruption is not an aberrant blip in Jessica's story, but a common thread among undemocratic justice systems.

The Sixth Amendment impacts Americans every single day. It empowers sexual assault victims to name their powerful violators. It forces politicians to resign in disgrace. It embodies the uniquely American ideal that "all men are created equal."

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KELSEY RADDE MANN
BROOKFIELD, WISCONSIN

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." I believe that the first Amendment to the U.S Constitution made the biggest difference in people's lives because change requires conversations, conversation requires open communication, open communication requires free speech. Therefore, I think free speech drives change. For example, over the years it has allowed women to vote and play the same sports as boys. My parents always say there is never a bad idea or question because it creates conversation and conversation creates change and change leads to progress.



ANOUSHKA PANDEY
SECOND-PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL WINNER
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

The 14th Amendment guarantees equality under the law for all citizens. As someone with parents who immigrated to the United States and became citizens, this amendment is very important. As citizens, my parents have just as many rights and privileges as people with families that have lived in America for hundreds of years. For former slaves, this Amendment was the next step after gaining freedom in the 13th Amendment. Having an Amendment where it is said that every American is equal under the law fulfills the promises of the Declaration of Independence.

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MYRA GUPTA

**THIRD-PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL WINNER
WHARTON, NEW JERSEY**

The 19th amendment ratified in 1920, has had the greatest impact on people's lives because it gave women more than just the right to vote. Suffrage gave women a voice and greater ammunition with which to advocate for higher education, family-planning, and professional occupations. Women made progress towards equality, and related social reforms such as inheritance and economic security. Political engagement led to greater involvement of women in local, state, and national issues. Much work remains in the fight against systemic discrimination and for equal pay and reproductive autonomy, but the 19th Amendment marked a monumental milestone along the journey.



SABINA PEREZ

**FIRST-PLACE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WINNER
FREDERICKSBURG, TEXAS**

The Greek statue of justice wearing a blindfold perfectly represents the 14th amendment. She is strong and timeless. She applies the law fairly and equally. Although the Bill of Rights promised life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the 14th amendment makes it possible for all citizens to live out those promises no matter which state they live in, their age, religion, gender, or race. The 14th amendment makes the biggest difference in people's lives because when everyone is equal, unity is possible. Equality granted in the 14th amendment makes America a place of pride, justice, freedom, opportunity, and success.

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ISHA GUPTA

**SECOND-PLACE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WINNER
CUMMING, GEORGIA**

Along with listing out specific rights of the people, the Bill of Rights includes a Ninth Amendment which acknowledges that people have many rights besides the ones listed. Such rights include the right to travel, have a job, drink clean water, and marry the person you choose. For example, in *Loving V. Virginia* (1967), the Supreme Court overturned Virginia's anti-miscegenation law based on the Ninth Amendment. The court found that although the right to privacy and to marry is not specified in the Constitution, they are protected inalienable rights. Ultimately, the Ninth Amendment protects rights we take for granted.



RIO DUNCAN

**THIRD-PLACE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WINNER
WEST LAKE HILL, TEXAS**

The 17th Amendment, which states that the citizens have the power to directly elect the 100 U.S. Senators, is what I believe to be the most important amendment. One reason that supports my choice is the fact that the Senators have a lot of power, such as making laws and deciding how they want the country to be run. Therefore, they could change some of the amendments of the constitution itself, which means the citizen's vote is that much more important. So, if the citizens couldn't vote for the Senators they want, our country could be very different.