

Gavin Jackson

SAN MARCOS, CALIFORNIA

2ND PLACE

Gavin Jackson, 18, graduated in June from Mission Hills High School in San Marcos, California. He will be attending the University of California, Los Angeles, in the fall as a Regents Scholar, majoring in political science and history. He plans to attend law school and pursue a career as a district attorney.

THE AMERICAN DREAM FULFILLED

When people say that the American Dream is dead, they do so for a multitude of reasons: conservatives believe that government interference has destroyed free enterprise and the rugged individualism of the American Dream; liberals argue that laissez-faire capitalism and elitism have decimated the middle class' ability to forge ahead without government assistance. Both sides make valid points-this nation is not the nation it once was. But to claim that a dream has been lost, that two hundred years of struggle and perseverance have been for naught, is an insult to our ancestors and to the people living the American Dream today. I refuse to believe that something as powerful as a dream could be killed by the actions of men and thus trust that the American Dream lives on in today's youth.

The American Dream holds a special place in my heart. I am the child of an immigrant: my mother and her family left the Republic of Korea to forge a new path in the United States. During the 1970s, South Korea was led by a series of dictators and corrupt military juntas-the United States represented freedom, safety and opportunity. My grandparents arrived in California with nothing more than the clothes on their back, ready to make a new life from scratch. They left behind a successful pharmacy business and centuries of traditions in Korea for the sake of the American Dream, the chance to create a better life for themselves and their children. In the end, they succeeded-all of their children were able to attend college and pursue successful careers, and my grandparents ran a successful restaurant business for over 30 years.

It is my opinion that such success is only possible in a country like the United States. Many have argued in the past that "the freer the market, the freer the people." I prefer to think in the opposite frame of mind; the freer the people, the freer the market. The Bill of Rights protects all American from a tyrannical government and guarantees important civil liberties, such as the right to free speech and free exercise of religion. Without these freedoms, economic success would be impossible. If you are not protected from random imprisonment, how can you feel safe enough to invest in a business? If you cannot speak your mind, how can you hope to protect your assets from arbitrary government seizure?

While these rights listed in the Bill of Rights are indeed important, the Fourteenth Amendment holds a special place in my heart. It is the only place in which equality under the laws is guaranteed to all people, regardless of race or place of origin. It protects all people from discriminatory laws and government actions.

In the past, however, the Fourteenth Amendment-and many others-have remained ambiguous. Different states chose to apply each one differently, or chose to disregard them entirely. It is thus the role of the federal courts to interpret and apply these amendments to the nation.

For this reason, I perhaps owe my very existence to the federal court system. I am one of millions of biracial Americans living in the United States today. I am proud of both sides of my heritage and I do my best to embrace both. I have never experienced discrimination based on my race, and for that I am grateful. But less than 60 years ago, I would have been relegated to a position below that of most white Americans. My parents could have been denied a marriage license in the name of "racial purity."

The federal courts helped to remove these barriers for myself and people like me. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, segregation was struck down as inherently unequal; *Loving v. Virginia* banned anti-miscegenation laws as violating the Equal Protection Clause. The courts acted to protect the rights of the minority, the downtrodden and the powerless. They acted to protect the rights of millions of unborn Americans, like myself, from unwarranted discrimination.

But the work is not done. While certain citizens of the United States still remain unable to marry whomever they love, I consider the American Dream unfulfilled. While the women of this nation make less than equally competent men, I consider the American Dream unfulfilled. But the American Dream still exists. In the coming years, the American Dream will come closer to fulfillment. For in the end, we are all Americans, and we will all strive for liberty and success, at all costs.