

Honorable Mention

11th-12th Grade

23rd Annual Student Essay Contest | Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum

The Walls of Justice

America's resilience and ability to overcome any obstacle presented is what makes this nation the leader of the free world. This freedom that we pride ourselves on is what allows us to speak freely, praise each other, grow connected, stand united, and keep this nation number one. America is truly the land of freedom and justice, but with such diverse peoples and ideas, there will always be those who seek to destroy, hurt, and tear at the seams of our patriotism and justice. When April 19, 1995 came, America was not ready for the heartbreak, the overwhelming loss, and the destruction of 168 lives. Jamie Orenstein, who was directly involved with Timothy McVeigh's and Terry Nichols' cases, said that "The defendants were people who tried to destroy our system, who didn't believe in it, but that's where you can take particular pride in respecting the rules of our system." Those fateful two minutes between 9:01 and 9:03 could have been the undoing of freedom, but justice prevailed. These stories that were abruptly ended are what all of us must remember forever, and what we must learn from.

The wall of the Murrah building fell just as fast as the foundations of justice, but before the dust had even settled the people of Oklahoma were there, picking up the rubble. Whether these brave men and women knew it or not, every piece of debris thrown off, every iron beam moved, and every concrete mass shifted to reach the survivors was another brick adding to the foundation. The resilience, teamwork, and perseverance of these volunteers are the metaphorical bricks of justice. The twisted idea of justice Terry Nichols and Timothy McVeigh had tricked themselves into believing is not even a speck of dust compared to the monument that brave Oklahomans began to rebuild. The monsters who believed in leveling a building of innocent people had put aside true justice in order to further their own sick belief. When the time came to "get payback" against these demons, America did not let the same clouded judgment rule over them.

Jamie Orenstein's quote is so important because it highlights the healing process used to reconstruct the building of justice. Violence was not the answer, and the brave judges, lawyers, and witnesses who put aside their heartbreak to restore order and testify with honor are what all strive to be. Hope was inspired with these court cases, and the hope that a tragedy like this can never truly break our spirit and ethics. Today after: 9/11, the Boston bombing, Columbine, multiple mass shootings, a pandemic, and all the other numerous tragedies that would fill page after page (and which I could not begin to do justice) we stand together. Oklahoma, America, and the free world's commitment to unite against evil is an unwavering. We will always rebuild, we will always reconstruct, and we will always stand together. Though we must continue our fight, it fills me with hope to know that this battle is one we are winning. The history of Oklahoma is one that demonstrates the patriotism found in this great state. When the time comes for me to answer the call and rise against injustice and brutality, I hope to have just a fraction of the bravery that my fellow Oklahomans possess, and I am glad to call myself an Okie.