

COMMENTARY *By* DR. DHANPAUL NARINE

Down Liberty Avenue 7



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

They could talk all day about Jagan and Burnham, and Jagdeo and Granger. Don't get them started about Kamla and Rowley. You will hear about corruption in Trinidad and how the man 'thiefing', and how Moonilal was right to cuss them out in Parliament. If you listen long enough you will learn about corruption in India and the pernicious influence of Bollywood.

There are the palm readers that connect you with the afterlife. The Korean shopkeepers make the extra dollar as they call you 'Mamoo' and seem to know the address of the next pooja. You buy the big pumpkin in the corner, or the watermelon that has seen better days, and shake your head in wonderment. As you leave, a small group of old timers say that the people from ICE have made another arrest, and someone else faces deportation.

The Guyanese seller at the street corner swears that you are getting a bargain. But you find that the fruits she sells are cheaper in the supermarket. What is worse, they go bad on you quicker than those in the store. When you complain she says, 'that's because my fruits are organic!' These scenes are played out daily on Liberty Avenue, a strip in America that has come to symbolize the broken, the splendid, and the patched-up dreams of the immigrant. But there is something else.

There is social media. The world has become smaller. It's called globalization. The seniors on Liberty Avenue sport smart phones. They make calls, text, download music and send and receive pictures. Guyana and Trinidad and Surinam, are just a touch away. But America is home and it is here that change is needed to improve things.

Many in the Richmond Hill community, including students, cannot tell you the name of the Vice President of the United States. They

have no clue as to whom the Governor of New York is or what he does; they could not name the Mayor of New York or identify the Senators that represent the State, and have a hard time naming the local Congressman or the City Council representative. But they could tell you in minute detail the latest in Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname and India.

It was the day, before the big day, and we were on Liberty Avenue. Maybe, the community would

One person stated that he was having problems sponsoring his relatives from Guyana to the United States. He did not see how his vote could make a difference. There were five voters that were leaving for either Guyana, or Trinidad, on election-day. They did not care too much about the outcome of the vote as, 'politics is not for them.'

At a street corner, under the 'A' train, there was Savitri, a hard-working woman. She spoke in a voice of

of each month; it is the place to interact with the police and to voice local concerns.

Many of the vendors didn't know where the precinct was and had never heard about the Community Council. But Savitri had an idea. She would take a group to the next Council meeting and make representations. She would go higher up, if necessary, and was even prepared to form a vendor's association.

Savitri's story is not unique to immigrant

meetings. They have no idea as to who the teachers are and what the children are doing in school. A prominent businessman in the community could not say what grade his children were in, or what their report cards looked like.

Reading is an essential aspect of learning. In the old days there was no internet; people had to walk for miles to get to a library. One parent from Trinidad said he treasured all his books, and even to this day, he could quote from Shakespeare,



Members of the Caribbean Equality Project, with NYC Human Rights Commissioner Carmen P. Malalis, (sitting in middle, in photo above), discuss hate and discrimination in New York.



dream big and turn out in large numbers and vote. But first, we had to ask whether people knew that they could make a difference at the polls. A random sample of fifty registered voters revealed some astonishing facts. How many people heard about the elections?

There were ten persons that knew about the elections, while another fifteen said that they had not heard about it. They were busy preparing for Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. The remaining persons said that there was too much politics in everything and that they were staying far from it.

desperation. She and her colleagues were selling their wares on Liberty Avenue for the last ten years. They had the correct paperwork. Why then was the sanitation department giving them tickets? Each ticket was a fine of a hundred dollars. Savitri, and the others, were told that they should call the sanitation department. It turned out that they had no idea how to do this and were prepared to pay the fine.

During our conversation, it was suggested that it might be a good idea for them to call and also to attend the local 106 Precinct meeting. The Community Council of the NYPD meets on the first Wednesday

communities. Many immigrants know more about what is happening 'back home' than in their adopted homelands. If they took a fraction of the time to learn where the local institutions are, and how they work, life would be so much better.

The same principle applies to the local schools in the Richmond Hill neighborhood. A good number of parents are busy with their children. They keep in contact with the schools and the teachers. The children proudly talk about their achievements and their future plans.

But there are parents that are too busy to attend the open school evenings, or the parent

and Chaucer. The many libraries, and the internet, have made reading materials more accessible. Where then is the joy in reading?

If you take the 'A' train from Lefferts Boulevard you would be hard pressed to find anyone reading. There are cords plugged in ears as people shut themselves off from the world; others rest their chins in their palms and go into 'studiation' about their home country. Last week, I took the train at Lefferts; there was only one person with a book. I remarked how refreshing it was to see her reading. She explained that she does not only read but donates books to the local library.

Hate and intolerance play a big role in South Queens, and beyond.

It is hate that has led to some of the recent tragedies on Liberty Avenue. The recent shooting of a young man is just one of the many incidents to occur. There is a population that is experiencing discrimination and hate on a daily basis.

It was most refreshing when Mohamed Q. Amin of the Caribbean Equality Project decided to convene a meeting with the New York City Commission on Human Rights. The meeting was held at the Lefferts Branch of the Richmond Hill Library, a few steps from Liberty Avenue. Commissioner Carmelyn P. Malalis, from the Mayor's Office, was present at the roundtable discussion.

A number of persons spoke of the experiences of discrimination against the LGBTQ community because of their sexual orientation. It was an eye-opener for many and congratulations are in order for Mohamed Amin and the Caribbean Equality Project. Hopefully, we will have more discussions in the future, and that discrimination will be a thing of the past.

Hate comes in several ways. A powerful instrument used to spread hate is speech. One does not have to pull the trigger but the person's words can inflame passions and ratchet up the hate. The recent tragedies in Pittsburgh, and California, show that hate is alive in America, and with deadly consequences. Who in the new Congress will advocate for gun control?

The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of THE WEST INDIAN.