

# By Law, Love Wins

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

- *The Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson*

This week, in honor of Independence Day, I am diverting from my focus on Queens-based legislators to highlight the United States Supreme Court’s recent landmark

for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family, in forming a marital union two people become something greater than they once were.”

York City Hall, where Mayor de Blasio conducted three same-sex weddings and had the crowd repeat “Love wins.” That very same afternoon, I attended an event at Brooklyn Borough Hall in honor of the 49th Anniversary of Guyana’s Independence. Among the items on the program were musical renditions, dances, and messages. One guest speaker shared a powerful poem reflecting on his childhood in Guyana.

out there who are seeking to change this deep-seated mindset. Recently, I spoke at length with Mohamed Q. Amin, an activist who founded the Caribbean Equality Project (CEP), an all-volunteer non-profit organization. CEP’s mission is “to promote social change, awareness, and acceptance by empowering and strengthening the voices of LGBTQ people of Caribbean descent in the New York area.”

Mohamed migrated to

fear of becoming homeless and having nowhere to turn if he revealed to his parents that he was gay, Mohamed moved out at the age of 22. Four years later, at one of his family’s weekly Sunday dinners, he decided to tell his parents about the part of his identity that he had kept hidden. He began by saying “Whatever I am going to say to you is no reflection of your parenting skills or my upbringing. It’s just about who I am.” Mohamed believes his mother always knew that he was gay. Full of emotion, he indicated, “My mom’s support gives me the strength to go into the world and stand up for who I am.” Mohamed is also grateful for his father’s support. He said that it has taken education, vulnerability, and



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on the fact that, in spite of beliefs to the contrary, words like “anti-man” do hurt. CEP is also planning to launch “My TRUTH, My STORY,” a multimedia storytelling campaign series which reflects and shares unspoken stories of LGBTQ people of Caribbean heritage at the Queens Museum on Saturday, August 8th. My TRUTH, My STORY will be produced by Sheki Jo of Akehsam Productions.

Through the advocacy of dedicated individuals like Mohamed and the entire team at CEP, there is hope that the sta-



Mayor de Blasio officiates marriages at City Hall at Marriage Equality Pop-Up Party and Celebration. (Photo Credit: Office of the Mayor)

decision in Obergefell v. Hodges and its implications for our community. Marriage equality has been the subject of debate in the American political discourse for at least a decade. Last Friday, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in a historic decision, that the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution requires states to recognize same-sex marriages.

The author of the Court’s opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy, found that “no union is more profound than marriage,

Referring to America’s LGBTQ population, the opinion stated that “it would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage... They respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves... They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right.”

When the news broke, people rejoiced all across the nation. I joined with hundreds of others to celebrate on the steps of New

He proceeded to recite the alphabet, highlighting popular names and items among Guyanese culture. When he got to the letter B, most of the words he described were homophobic slurs. The audience roared with laughter. Even toddlers who knew no better, joined in. This got me thinking about the clash between the progress made by the Supreme Court that morning and the homophobic culture that will perpetuate in many communities across the nation, including our very own.

To date, Guyana is the only country in South America where homosexual acts remain illegal. The notion that homosexuality is unacceptable remains the status quo among many Indo-Caribbeans in New York City. But there are individuals

the U.S. from Guyana at the age of 10 and has not returned after 22 years out of fear that he will be arrested or attacked for being gay. In spite of the laws in Guyana which he says make his identity illegal, Mohamed loves his homeland. He is planning on visiting next year due in part to the advocacy efforts of Joel Simpson from the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD), an organization dedicated to the eradication of homophobia in Guyana and throughout the Caribbean.

Mohamed proudly identifies as a “brown Muslim gay man,” who holds his faith close as he believes all religions, including Islam, promote peace and love for all. Mohamed struggled for years to gain acceptance from his parents. Out of



Mohamed Q. Amin, Founder of the Caribbean Equality Project.

even discomfort to open conversations with him.

It is this type of education and openness that Mohammed seeks to co-create with fellow board members of CEP, Krishna Ramsarran (Program Director) and Andy K. Bishun (Community Outreach Coordinator), as well as Carol Bissoon-dial, a licensed clinical social worker who will be facilitating CEP’s free support groups entitled “Breaking the Rejection Cycle, Building Unity.” Through workshops, Mohamed would like to educate community members

tus quo will be changed to pave the way for a nation that not only embraces LGBTQ individuals by law, but also through mutual respect and love. Here’s to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” for all, regardless of the societal labels that are oft created to divide us.

For more information on the Caribbean Equality Project, visit [www.Facebook.com/CaribbeanEquality](http://www.Facebook.com/CaribbeanEquality).

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

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