

# Guns in America

**T**here is an unhealthy obsession with guns in America. How else can one explain an increase in gun sales after 32 people were killed at Virginia Tech?

The statistics show that after mass executions the sales of guns would spiral. According to the FBI, 'the day after the Tucson shootings gun sales in Arizona increased by 60 per cent. There were increases in California, Illinois, and New York as well. One of the biggest increases occurred in Ohio where handgun sales went up by 65 percent.' In the presidential elections of 2008 the sales of firearms went up by 15 per cent because there were fears that the Obama administration might enact gun control laws. No such laws have been passed despite the mountain of debates and newsprint.

It is estimated that there are roughly 88 guns per 100 persons in America. This makes the US one of the most armed nations on the planet. The annual estimate of murders based on shootings is 9, 263 which is about 25 murders per day. According to one report, 'No other developed country on earth has as lax gun laws or more weapons than the United States. The easy access to weapons and the ineffective method of tracking weapons to make sure that they don't fall in the wrong hands facilitate violent and unstable people in the United States getting weapons with which to kill people.'

The unkindest blows are the ones closest to home. When NYPD Officer Detective Randolph Holder was killed in the prime of his life it opened up once more the debate on guns in America. Officer Holder's death was not a mass murder that makes the headlines with sickening regularity. However, it hurts every bit as the ones we read about in the various places in the United States. Officer Holder was an immigrant from Guyana who chose to go into a profession to protect his community. As a housing cop he saw the violence in the projects and the easy access to guns. He told his family how unsafe it was to work in the midst of the gangs as criminals could purchase guns at will and create mayhem. But that did not stop him from being a cop.

Officer Holder's de-

mise led to a predictable outcry by politicians about the easy access to guns and the need for gun control. Governor Cuomo of New York said that Officer Holder's death was 'another episode of what has become all too familiar and too frequent, a loss of life needlessly by gun violence that is out of control in this city and this nation.' The New York Police Department has lost four officers in ten months as a result of

and to move on with their business.

Why are there so many guns in the streets? The obvious answer is that there are no effective laws to control its use. But when one asks why the States do not pass laws to limit their widespread use a web of difficulties present themselves. The right to bear arms is enshrined in the Constitution but the writers could have hardly envisaged the day in which people would turn up at schools and randomly kill children. When these tragedies occur there is the usual explanation that they are caused by those that are mentally

cent people died because of Pinckney's position on a political issue.'

The National Rifle Association was founded in 1871 and was relatively silent on gun rights in the initial years. But by 1960 the Association became vocal and evolved into a political body that attracted some famous names. One such celebrity was Charlton Heston who for many years was the face of the NRA. In fact he served for five terms as president of the NRA. Many observers argue that the NRA is so politically connected that legislation to enact gun control may never be passed.

don't kill people; people kill people.' But what needs to be considered here is that when a society is flooded with guns easy access to them make killings possible. Another favorite argument of the gun lobby is that 'mass shootings only occur in places where there are no guns allowed.' The evidence does not support this conclusion. There were guards at Columbine High School. At Fort Hood, a military base, thirteen people died and another 43 were injured. If someone wants to cause mayhem guards are hardly likely to stop the person.

Another slogan of the



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

According to reports the gun that was used to shoot Officer Randolph Holder originated in North Carolina. The task of the political establishment is to plug the loopholes that facilitate gun-running. This brings into question background checks. Can they work? Background checks are important for two main reasons. The first is that it prevents those who are not allowed to buy guns from legally getting them. Secondly, if they risk buying illegal guns it becomes a crime and persons can be arrested as a result.

A popular argument of the NRA is that one cannot rely too much on the police since they are unable to get to a crime on time. This implies that more guns should be given to the public so it can arm itself. It is true that the police cannot get to all crimes on time but does one really want to promote vigilantism and a wild-west society? A sensible strategy would be to advocate for more resources to be made available to the police to better enable them to carry out their responsibilities.

In October 2015 President Barack Obama addressed the rising attacks on police officers. He paid tribute to Officer Randolph Holder of New York and said that, 'poor education, unemployment, inadequate drug treatment and lax gun laws are not the responsibility of police officers.' In other words it is the structure of society that needs to be addressed. Obama called for a more effective criminal justice system. There is no question that background checks are essential but here's another idea: why don't the presidential candidates run their campaigns with gun control policy as the number one issue? Now this will begin to shake up America!

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



Members of the NYPD in line to pay their respects to the late Detective Randolph Holder, who was a victim of gun violence.

gun violence. According to the Governor this could be among the highest rate in the country in such a short time.

There were also comments from Mayor Bill de Blasio and Commissioner William Bratton that echoed the statements of the Governor. In recent months the conscience of the United States has been jolted by gun violence and right-thinking persons have had to take stock as to where they stand on gun policy. If the nation needs a reminder guns have wreaked havoc in Omaha, at Virginia Tech, Fort Hood, Tucson, Manchester, Newton, Santa Monica, Washington DC, and Charleston, among other places.

In each instance guns were used to leave a trail of suffering from which those affected may never recover. But Americans, numbed by this mindless violence, appear to accept it as part of the ritual

disturbed.

There is no doubt that mental problems have played a part in shootings. But should we continue to place the blame on the mental state of shooters or should we devise policies to stop them from getting access to guns?

America is sharply divided as far as policies for gun control are concerned. Those who oppose gun control make the argument that more people should be armed to prevent gun violence. When Charles Pinckney and eight of his church members were killed in Charleston a leading member of the National Rifle Association (NRA), Charles Cotton, said that if Rev. Pinckney and his members had carried guns the tragedy would have been prevented. The NRA says that Rev. Pinckney is to be blamed for the shootings because of his stand on gun control. According to Cotton, 'Inno-

There are a number of arguments that the NRA has advanced to oppose gun control. The first and perhaps the strongest argument against gun control is constitutional. The Second Amendment speaks of the right to bear arms but Chief Justice Warren Burger who was a Republican said that 'the real purpose of the amendment was to ensure that state armies-the militias- would be maintained for the defense of the state.'

What has happened is that big money conservatives and the lobbyists have shifted the meaning 'so that it can be used to justify letting anybody own any weapon that they choose.' In 2008 in a case United States v Emerson the US Supreme Court ruled that the Second Amendment was a 'protection for individuals to own and operate guns.'

A favorite slogan of the gun lobby is that 'guns

gun lobby is, 'the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.' There are already good guys with guns. They are the police officers, soldiers and other members of the armed forces whose job is to provide security to the public. They have received training but if everyone decides to be trigger-happy because they are the good guys the community will be in a state of crisis. Here is another problem: there are several laws on the books concerning gun use but this has not stopped the proliferation of guns on the streets. Why is this the case?

The answer to this question has to do with the ease with which one can buy guns out of state. According to a report in 2000, 'the southern states are the major sources of out-of-state guns in crimes in the Northeast.' Guns are bought in the South where they are readily available.