

A Picture of a Sign

Benjamin Zephaniah

I saw a picture of a sign
It was a sign of de time
Saying,
*'No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs,
No Children, No Cats, No Wogs.'*
Sey what,
Dat greeted me Mudder
In de Mudder country?
Nowadays
Dem couldn't leave dat message fe me.

I saw a picture of a Policeman
Beating a Bredda,
As a lesson on progress
Me show it to me Mudder.
Me Mudder sey 'What
Is PC Dixon dat'
Me sey,
'Mum dat is dat
Dats de Mudder country
Plenty a shout tit fi tat
An try raise a family.'

I saw a picture of a man
Tryin hard,
Very thin,
Homeless, moneyless,
One more starving,
De Credit Legacy
Hopeless in Chelsea,
De Mudder countrys home
Of de New Age Yuppie.

I saw a picture of meself
In me British Passport,
An me tink of all de people
Dat de British hav fought,
*Like 'De Blacks, de Irish, de Dogs,
De Children, de Cats and de Wogs.'*
Now de Mudder country is down
On her knee,
She is tough and quite persistent,
But I picture some ting different.

Poem published in *City Psalms* (Bloodaxe Books, Highgreen, 1992, pp. 30-31)

Audio version from the album *Reggae Head* (57 Productions, 1997)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdCkvkxyOho>

Inglan Is A Bitch

Linton Kwesi Johnson

wen mi jus come to Landan toun
mi use to work pan di andahgroun
but workin pan di andahgroun
yu dont get fi know your way aroun

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no runin whe fram it

mi get a likkle jab in a big otell
an awftah a while, mi woz doin quite well
dem staat mi awf as a dish-washah
but wen mi tek a stack, mi noh tun clack-watchah!

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
noh baddah try fi hide fram it

wen dem gi you di likkle wage packit
fus dem rab it wid dem big tax rackit
yu haffi struggle fi mek enz meet
an wen yu goh a yu bed yu jus cant sleep

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch fi true
a noh lie mi a tell, a true

mi use to work dig ditch wen it cowl noh bitch
mi did strang like a mule, but, bwoy, mi did fool
den awftah a while mi jus stap dhu owevahtime
den awftah a while mi jus phu dung mi tool

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
yu haffi know how fi suvive in it

well mi dhu day wok an mi dhu nite wok
mi dhu clean wok an mi dhu dutty wok
dem seh dat black man is very lazy
but if yu si how mi wok yu woulda seh mi crazy

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
yu bettah face up to it

dem have a likkle facktri up inna Brackly
inna disya facktri all dem dhu is pack crackry
fi di laas fifteen years dem get mi laybah
now awftah fiteen years mi fall out a fayvah

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no runin whe fram it

mi know dem have wok, wok in abundant
yet still, dem mek mi redundant
now, at fifty-five mi getin quite ole
yet still, dem sen mi fi goh draw dole

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
is whe wi a goh dhu 'bout it?

Poem published in *Mi Revalueshanary Fren: Selected Poems* (Penguin, 2002, pp. 39-41)

Audio version from the album *Bass Culture* (Mango/Island, 1980)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isMjvRpAckU>

A cappella live version (featured on *The Crown*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zq9OpJYck7Y>

Sonny's Lettah

Linton Kwesi Johnson

(Anti-Sus Poem¹)

Brixtan Prison
Jebb Avenue
Landan south-west two
Inglan

Dear Mama,
Good Day.
I hope dat wen
deze few lines reach yu,
they may find yu in di bes af helt.

Mama,
I really don't know how fi tell yu dis,
cause I did mek a salim pramis
fi tek care a likkle Jim
an try mi bes fi look out fi him.

Mama,
I really did try mi bes,
but nondiles
mi sorry fi tell yu seh
poor likkle Jim get arres.

It woz di miggles a di rush howah
wen evrybody jus a hosel an a bosel
fi goh home fi dem evening showah;
mi an Jim stan-up
waitin pan a bus,
nat cauzin no fus,
wen all af a sudden
a police van pull-up.

Out jump tree policeman,
di hole a dem carryin batan.
Dem waak straight up to mi an Jim.

One a dem hol awn to Jim
seh him tekin him in;
Jim tell him fi let goh a him
far him noh dhu notn

¹ Sus, short for 'suspicion': the Vagrancy Act, a revived piece of nineteenth-century legislation that led to disproportionate arrests of black youths. Repealed 2000.

an him naw teef,
nat even a butn.
Jim start to wriggle
di police start to giggle.

Mama,
mek I tell yu whe dem dhu to Jim
Mama,
mek I tell yu whe dem dhu to him:

dem tump him in him belly
an it turn to jelly
dem lick him pon him back
an him rib get pap
dem lick him pan him hed
but it tuff like led
dem kick him in him seed
an it started to bleed

Mama,
I jus coudn stan-up deh
an noh dhu notn:

soh mi jook one in him eye
an him started to cry
mi tump one in him mout
an him started to shout
mi kick one pan him shin
an him started to spin
mi tump him pan him chin
an him drap pan a bin

an crash
an ded.

Mama,
more policeman come dung
an beat mi to di grung;
dem charge Jim fi sus,
dem charge mi fi murdah.

Mama,
dont fret,
dont get depress
an doun-hearted.
Be af good courage
till I hear fram you.

I remain
your son,
Sonny.

Poem published in *Mi Revalueshanary Fren: Selected Poems* (Penguin, 2002, pp. 27-29)

Audio version from the album *Forces of Victory* (Mango/Island, 1979)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlrqPweVpnU>

Live version with the Dennis Bovell Dub Band from *Live in Paris* (LKJ Records, 2003)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bb35KxH4pls>

Mekin Histri

Linton Kwesi Johson

now tell mi someting
mistah govahment man
tell mi someting

how lang yu really feel
yu couda keep wi andah heel
wen di trute done reveal
bout how yu grab an steal
bout how yu mek yu crooked deal
mek yu crooked deal?

well doun in Soutall
where Peach²¹ did get fall
di Asians dem faam-up a human wall
gense di fashist an dem police sheil
an dem show dat di Asians gat plenty zeal
gat plenty zeal
gat plenty zeal

it is noh mistri
wi mekin histri
it is noh mistri
wi winnin victri

now tell mi someting
mistah police spokesman
tell mi someting

how lang yu really tink
wi woodah tek yu batn lick
yu jackboot kick
yu dutty bag a tricks
an yu racist pallytics
yu racist pallyticks?

well doun in Bristal
dey ad noh pital
but dem chace di babylan away
man yu shooda si yu babylan
how dem really run away
yu shooda si yu babylan dem dig-up dat day
dig-up dat day
dig-up dat day

¹ Blair Peach, an Anti-Nazi League member who was killed by the Special Patrol Group on an anti-fascist rally in Southall, London, in 1979.

it is noh mistri
wi mekin histri
it is noh mistri
wi winnin victri

now tell mi someting
mistah ritewing man
tell mi someting

how lang yu really feel
wi woodah grovel an squeal
wen soh much murdah canceal
wen wi woun cyan heal
wen wi feel di way wi feel
feel di way wi feel?

well dere woz Toxteth
an dere woz Moss Side
an a lat a adah places
whe di police ad to hide
well dere woz Brixtan
an dere woz Chapelton
an a lat a adah places dat woz burnt to di groun
burnt to di groun
burnt to di groun

it is noh mistri
wi mekin histri
it is noh mistri
wi winnin victri

Poem published in *Mi Revalueshanary Fren: Selected Poems* (Penguin, 2002, pp. 64-66)

Audio version from the album *Making History* (Mango/Island, 1984)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZ_Y_Xlwnb4

Live version recorded from Channel 4's *The Tube* (1984)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtVklVOP9cU>