

West Indian Immigrants Life Stories

1. Sonny Peterson:

- a) I'm here but I'm not here. I'm seen but I'm not seen. I take one step forward, and something always happens that makes me think I must take five steps back, two steps back, but always something back. I can be happy with my life best, you know, when I am left alone. But who leaves us alone to get on with what we do? Nobody. The Government asks me questions. My boss asks me questions. The policeman sees me walking, he asks me questions. My family too, they ask me questions. Sometimes I don't like answering them either. Why do we live here? Why do I work there? Why has someone said something unkind to one of my children? Why don't we visit this place or that place? Daddy, what's a Nigger? Sonny Peterson expressed the message of white England to black England this way: 'You are unwanted. You are here because some higher order official lets you stay, not because I want you. Yet it is my position and not the official's position that is threatened by your presence, your very being. You should have been stopped before you arrived you should be sent back even if you have been here for a while. You only create problems. You want my job, you want my food, you want to live in my home, you want to use my school, my hospital, my stores. But don't take it personally; I have no quarrel with you as a person. It's immigration I cannot tolerate.'
- b) Sonny Peterson expressed the message of white England to black England this way: 'You are unwanted. You are here because some higher order official lets you stay, not because I want you. Yet it is my position and not the official's position that is threatened by your presence, your very being. You should have been stopped before you arrived you should be sent back even if you have been here for a while. You only create problems. You want my job, you want my food, you want to live in my home, you want to use my school, my hospital, my stores. But don't take it personally; I have no quarrel with you as a person. It's immigration I cannot tolerate.'
- c) 'Don't let anybody fool you, immigration is one thing, integration is something very different. I know about this. They can let you in without letting you in. Or they tell you you're part of some great English family. Great English family. They should never tell us anything about families. I know about families. I'm one of nine children, two of us came, one of us went back. Raymond, he never even saw London. The plane came down, he waited three days, he went

right back. You think he made the good decision, or I made the good decision? That's what people ask, I ask it, but that's not the real question. The real question is, why in this Commonwealth is the black man so scomed?

2. A West Indian Woman:

Also speaking from a West Indian experience (but I think it happens with other immigrants, too), another part of the work of being an immigrant is being expected to be two people at once. You have to try to maintain two 'cultures'. You've come from a situation where you're used to doing things in one way, and you're told, well there's something a little bit wrong with that, you have to adjust it a little bit.

3. Winston Forgas:

Friends where I live, you know, they tell me, "Winston, you're being the good Nigger," you know what I'm saying. "You're afraid to stand up to the man and tell him what you need." Hey, man, I'll tell you what I think, I think if I got a good job and I'm getting the same pay as the white guys working alongside me, on both sides, I mean, then I have no complaints. I ain't going to bow to the Queen, I can tell you, but I'm going to make no trouble. I'm not in the strike-making business; my job is what you see me doing out there. You think I need these guys to tell me blacks got a bad shake in Britain? Hey, listen to me for a second, if I was that blind I couldn't be doing what I'm doing out there. But I'm no politician. I see it plain, and only one way. If I have a job, if I can earn money, steady money, every day, and get my time off like the next guy, I have nothing to complain about, least during working hours. You see what I'm saying to you? Those guys want to make politics after I go home and wash up and have a real dinner, then I'm ready to listen to them. But before dinner, I work. And like I said before, I protect that job the same way a parent protects his baby. Work, that's my baby.

4. Payton Cowell:

'Nobody wants us here. That's where this whole history lesson begins, you know. They want us out, they want nobody else coming in. I even hear some black people saying, maybe there's too many of us coming in and maybe the best thing for us is keep the number down so we don't get into nobody's way. I can't believe people talking this way, but they're coming from a whole different part of history. That's all that is. People my age, we're just seeing it different. We can't keep going to school knowing if there's a lot of black people in the school they don't want to keep that school as good as it was a white school. We don't want to keep

getting the worst jobs this country has, when we're lucky to get any jobs at all. My father has been very lucky all his life. He's always had work, made a bad living - he'd tell you that to your face - but he's

working regularly. That's all that counts for him. But I want more. I want it all until I know I am being treated as a person equal to every single other person in this country. Everyone.