

Peter Tosh: a pioneer of reggae and trailblazing rastafarian



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Peter Tosh: A Pioneer of Reggae and Trailblazing Rastafarian Peter Tosh was not only an incredible Reggae musician, but an incredible person as well. He had a history of doing his part to help those in need of help, fighting for those who were unable to fight for themselves. Tosh, a pioneer of the Rastafari movement, would lead the people of Jamaica through his selfless actions and his music.

Peter Tosh, born Winston Hubert McIntosh, was born in Westmoreland, Jamaica on October 9, 1944 to parents, Alvera Coke and James McIntosh. Tosh's father would have nothing to do with his upbringing or even acknowledge that Tosh was his son. In fact, they would not even meet until Tosh was ten years old. His mother, unable to care for Tosh herself, asked her sister to raise him, which she did in Savanna-la-Mar, Jamaica. Due to the feeling of rejection that this placed inside of him, Tosh grew up extremely self-reliant and independent, which would help him later on in his fight for his people. During the time of his upbringing, life in Jamaica was extremely difficult. Jobs were scarce and money even more so.

The majority of families were struggling to make ends meet, scrounging for money and building supply scraps to keep roofs over their heads. Jamaica's government was extremely corrupt and the wealthier, land-owning class was taking advantage of those less fortunate. Tosh recognized this and would later become a modern day Robin Hood, using his presence in the public eye to his advantage by speaking on behalf of his fellow Jamaicans to raise awareness on the issue. Tosh began playing music at a very young age, keeping him away from gang life. He had no formal training of any instrument, aside from six months of piano lessons when he was in fifth

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grade. Music was his passion and he excelled in it. Tosh moved to Trenchtown with his uncle after his aunt grew very ill and nearly died.

It was here that Tosh would develop his musical talents and go on to form the most influential band in reggae history. Trenchtown, named because of the many trenches that ran through it carrying sewage waste away from Kingston, was filled with music. While walking through town one day, Tosh came across a guitarist by the name of Joe Higgs, among others, singing and playing in the street. During the jam session, he met a couple who were looking for other vocalists to join a group. The couple was impressed by Tosh's guitar playing and his baritone voice. Johnson) The couple, Bob Marley and Bunny Livingston, and Tosh, who taught Bob Marley how to play guitar, would hold jam sessions in Higgs' backyard. These sessions became more and more serious and would eventually lead to the forming of the influential ska-style band called the Wailing Wailers in 1964.

The Wailers went on to record twelve albums including One Love, When the Well Runs Dry, and Simmer Down and released groundbreaking singles including 'Stir it Up', 'Get Up, Stand Up', and 'Trenchtown Rock'.

(<http://reggaediscography.blogspot.com/2009/10/peter-tosh-discography.html>) By 1966, the band began to fall apart. Marley had moved from Jamaica to the United States to pursue a solo career and Tosh was arrested and served a short stint in jail. By 1972, the Wailers would slowly diminish until they finally broke up.

It would be absurd to speak of Peter Tosh and not mention the Rastafari movement, which he had begun to get heavily involved in by this time. The

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movement was founded in the slums of Kingston, Jamaica in the 1920's and 1930's by a man by the name of Marcus Garvey. (www. religionfacts. com) Garvey taught that Africans are the true Israelis and that Ethiopia, referred to as Zion, is the real holy land. He further proclaimed that Africans were exiled to Jamaica and other parts of the world outside of Africa (the America's and Europe are referred to as Babylon) as a form of divine punishment. (ww.

religionfacts. com) In the 1930's, peaceful communities had begun popping up in Kingston and Rastafarians began to adopt their own culture to include a distinctive dialect and hair style, and developed their own style of art and music. It was their music that would help spread the ideology of the Rastafari movement across the globe. The music of Bob Marley and Peter Tosh would become messengers of Jah (God) spreading the word throughout the world. After the Wailers went their separate ways, Tosh focused on a solo career. His first album, Legalize It, went public in 1976. The name of the album, as well as the title track, refers to his stance on the legalization of marijuana.

Tosh believed that smoking marijuana was a path to enlightenment. It was a way for the working class of Jamaica to get relief from the stresses of life. He further believed that the government made marijuana illegal as a way of oppressing Jamaicans and keeping them in order. Tosh only wrote songs after he had smoked marijuana because he felt he could see clearly. (www. thetalkingdrum. com) By the time of the One Love Peace Concert of 1978, Jamaica was in the midst of a political civil war.

The concert was held in an effort to set aside the differences of Jamaicans and promote peace, love, and harmony. Tosh took this concert, at which Bob Marley and the Wailers were headlining, as an opportunity to speak to the audience. Tosh bluntly put the government down, accusing them of using Jamaica and the people that lived there for their resources with little regard as to what would happen to them. He spoke his mind, as always, without caring who would hear. He spoke for the rights of his brothers and sisters of Jamaica. That concert was the first time that a person held in such high regards amongst the public had spoken out against the Jamaican government. It was at this moment that Peter Tosh became a heroic figure and a public rights leader.

The high regard in which he was held by his peers would turn out to be a blessing and a curse. Four months after the One Love Peace Concert and his lecture against the Jamaican government, Tosh was brutally attacked by up to ten police officers and nearly died. This was the first of many attacks, both verbal and physical, but this is where Tosh wanted to be. He wanted to be the center of attention, not for his own ego but to be in a position to speak on behalf of his people. It was a way for him to voice their concerns and demand corrective action. The One Love Peace Concert not only boosted Tosh in the political eye, but would end up boosting his American musical career as well. Mick Jagger, of the Rolling Stones, was in the audience at the concert and would go on to sign Tosh under the Rolling Stones' record label.

Tosh would go on to release two albums under the label, *Bush Doctor* and *Mystic Man*. The short life of this relationship ended when Tosh felt he was not being promoted properly. [www. talkingdrum. com](http://www.talkingdrum.com)) Two years after <https://assignbuster.com/peter-tosh-a-pioneer-of-reggae-and-trailblazing-rastafarian/>

releasing *Wanted Dread or Alive*, Tosh had hit the pinnacle of his career in 1983, which was the time of his European tour promoting *Mama Africa*. These two albums would go on to become known as Tosh's best work. (www.talkingdrum.com) While on this tour, Tosh appeared on stage with his signature M-16 [military assault rifle] guitar. The guitar was significant in the fact that it was a symbol for Tosh's music being his weapon against the corrupt politicians and evils in the world. (www.talkingdrum.com) His concerts were more than just music. They were spiritually enlightening and informative.

It was not uncommon for Tosh to set aside some time during a show to talk to the audience about his views on the evils of the world. Despite the public being supportive of Tosh and his cause, he was murdered by three assailants on September 11, 1987. Record has it that three men, one of whom Tosh knew and tried to help find work after a term in jail, had approached him at his home demanding money. When Tosh replied that he had none, he was shot three times. The assailant that Tosh knew turned himself in to the authorities, while the other two were never found. The story of the robbery, however, remains under scrutiny. According to reports, nothing from Tosh's home was missing.

The three men who went there to rob him took nothing. Many speculate that it was a hit to forever silence Tosh and his outspoken ways. From the moment he was born, it seems Peter Tosh was destined to live the life he did. He was a man with many admirable qualities, most importantly the courage to speak up for those who were not in a position to do it themselves

in effort to better the lives of his fellow Jamaicans. He was a pioneer for the Rastafari movement and a prominent figure in the development of Reggae music, forming it into the shape it holds today.