

# Bob marley: life and contributions to the world

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The form of music known as reggae was not always as popular as it has been in recent decades. Society in the 1960's and 70's had problems with racism and equality causing many people to turn to music as an escape. In *Catch a Fire*, by Timothy White, the author tells all about the life of Bob Marley, his contributions to the music industry and to culture. Bob Marley lived through harsh times, but grew up to become one of the greatest reggae musicians of all time. His music was heavily influenced by religious and social issues. In creating his unique music, he became an icon to future musicians around the world. Today his music continues to influence many musicians, fans, and cultures.

In 1944 a fifty year old British military man named, Captain Norval Marley, married an eighteen year old black Jamaican girl named Cadella Booker. They had a son naming him Robert Nesta Marley, later known as Bob, who was born on February 6, 1947 in Nine Miles, Jamaica (Lee 1). Captain Marley seldom saw his son, although he provided some financial support for the family. When Bob was five years old, his father took Bob away to Kingston, Jamaica's capital. On the journey there, " Bob thought of Nine Miles once the most imposing community he could envision, now reduced to a village in a coffee cup when compared to what was sprawled out before him" (White 80). He was reunited with his mother about a year later. Bob and his mother lived in one of the most dangerous slums of Kingston. Later, these living conditions would inspire Marley to write a song, called " Concrete Jungle", which likened the living conditions and poverty in the slum to the shackles of slavery. This was only one of his many songs written about freedom from oppression.

While Bob lived in the shanty part of Kingston, he met a boy his age, Bunny Livingstone. Bunny, also a native of Kingston, established a close relationship with Bob (Nicholas 23). They sang together everyday after school and made their own instruments. With their adolescent voices, Bob and Bunny began in 1960 to build, what one day became the Wailer's music. In Kingston, musicians were developing a new sound, consisting of a unique mixture of mento (a kind of calypso) and rhythm and blues, which would later be called Jamaican Ska. Bob and Bunny were fascinated with America's rhythm and blues singers such as Fats Domino, and Louis Jordan. Most of all, the "Drifters", and particularly the "Impressions" had a significant impact on them. Like many other Jamaican teenagers, Bob found music a relief from the realities of ghetto life. By spending most of his time writing and practicing songs with Bunny, he attempted to escape the violent and inequitable world of Kingston (Lee 2). All Kingston youths were looking for a way out of the endless cycle of poverty. Crime was a solution for some, known as rudies, but on the violent Kingston streets it almost certainly ended in their early death.

When Bob attended school, he dreamed of music. However, schoolwork prepared him for unattainable goals, which would only result in empty solutions. The life he was destined for in Trench Town had nothing to do with math and science. By the time he was fifteen, he had quit school, and had become a welder's apprentice. He felt this way he could at least bring some money into the household, but he still dreamed of becoming a musician. However, no one took him too seriously, because at that time everyone wanted to become a recording star.

The people Bob grew up with in the Kingston slums were drawn towards Joe Higgs, a popular musician. Higgs like many Kingston residents, was a member of a religious cult known as Rastafarianism (Nicholas 49). This cult would later influence Bunny and then Bob and their music. Soon Bob would realize that he could not make any progress with his music without the help of someone else. He needed someone who could teach him techniques, like how to project his voice and to hold harmony. Higgs held free music clinics at his home in the ghetto, only one street away from Bob's home. So Bob and Bunny decided to attend his classes, and went just about every day. From a harsh life of poverty, Bob had managed to escape the violent Kingston world and began developing his first musical pieces.

As his musical abilities developed, Marley was desperate to make his first album at the young age of 16. Little did he know that his recording career would lead him on a spiritual journey and make him the Third World's first international superstar. In 1962, Bob Marley released his first album " Judge Not" with Bunny and another friend Peter Tosh. That year, after Bob released that album, he formed the legendary Wailing Wailers. They consisted of Bunny Livingstone, Peter Tosh, Joey Brathwaite and Bob Marley himself. The group was named " the Wailers" because, as Bob explained, " in those days we were always crying"(Okoampa-Ahoofe Jr. 18).

On February 10, 1966, Bob Marley married a woman named Rita Anderson. The next day, Bob was on a plane to visit his mother in Delaware after she had written him several times asking him to come visit her in the United States. Although she wanted him to settle there, he was anxious to get back

to the Wailers in Jamaica. So he worked in America just enough to be able to finance his music, and then he returned to Jamaica seven months later.

The Jamaican ska music had changed by slowing down and becoming a little more sexual. A couple of the first songs of this type were " Stir it Up", and " Back out", which Bob and the Wailers referred to as " rude boy music" (Hussy 76). At this time, the rude boy themes of earlier songs changed to those of social and spiritual issues as the group became more focused on Rastafarianism. In Jamaica, many individuals were now practicing the Rastafarian way of life. Bunny had been a Rasta since 1963, and now Bob and Peter allowed their hair and beards to grow in the Rasta fashion. In 1967, the Wailers decided to try forming their own record label " Wail 'n Soul", after being pushed around by producers and conflicts over their developing Rastafarian image.

In mid-1967, Bob and Rita, still newlyweds, moved back to Nine Miles. It was a time of contemplation and insight for Bob. He spent a great deal of time reading the Bible and working the land trying to return to his roots for some answers. During this time Bob told of " his overwhelming desire to write songs, new kinds of songs that blended his own day to day thoughts and observations with the folk wisdom of the hills," and the lessons he had learned as a child (White 226). In 1968, all three Wailers served jail terms for the possession of marijuana, which is illegal in Jamaica, but is used sacredly by the Rastafarians. This jail time gave Bob time to think and reflect on his life, leading up to some of his best music ever as he learned a lot about Rastafarianism. He realized that it was not only a religion, but also a way of life. The Rasta's way of life stressed eating chemical free foods, natural foods

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and having a balanced diet (Nicholas 64). They also believed in using local herbs and plants for medicinal purposes and to spice their foods.

In 1970, Bob and the Wailers started another label called Tuff Gong, and released a few more albums and singles (Oumano 2). That winter, Bob went to Sweden where he worked on a movie soundtrack, and also did a tour. Bob and the Wailers continued to record on and off until 1978 under that record label. At this point, Bob had progressed, from when he started at the age of 16, to an accomplished world famous musician.

As the world heard Bob's new style of music, it influenced a new generation of musicians. " A wide range of young performers from Rage Against the Machine to Wyclef Jean, cite Marley as a role model" (Farley 80). Marley's music was becoming very popular and trends were starting to set in. " Bob noticed that increasing numbers of ghetto youths were growing their hair, allowing it to twine into long happy tresses" (White 225).

During a concert in New York in 1980, Bob nearly blacked out. The following morning, he decided to go for a run. He collapsed and was carried back to the hotel by his running partner. Within days, Marley was told he had a brain tumor, and he had suffered a stroke when he was running. He was also told that he wouldn't live another month. Everyone, and most of all Bob, was shocked. Despite his illness, Bob insisted on going to Pittsburgh for the next show. On the 23rd of September, it was reported that Bob Marley was suffering from exhaustion and the Tuff Gong Uprising Tour was canceled. Bob was flown from Miami to New York's Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, where he was fully diagnosed as having brain, lung, and stomach cancer. He was flown back to Miami where he was baptized as Berhane  
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Selassie in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, a Christian church, at Rita's suggestion. Five days later, in a last effort to prolong his life, Bob was flown to a controversial treatment center in Germany where a doctor, Dr. Joseph Issels, had been successful in treating terminal cases before (White 313). Bob celebrated his thirty-sixth birthday in February of 1981, in the clinic. When he arrived to the clinic, Marley had lost all his hair, but now he seemed to be gaining strength and his hair was growing back. He was, however, still losing weight. A full six months later, on the eleventh day of May, 1981, Robert Nesta Marley died with his wife and mother at his bedside. His rise from the Kingston slums to an influential music star was cut short by this tragic young death.

" Since he passed in 1981, the legendary Robert Nesta Marley continues to pique the imagination of well meaning people all over the world" (Okoampo-Ahoofe Jr. 18). Some people saw Marley's death as the end of the age of Reggae music. However, they failed to notice that he had become a legend, and a legend's influence never dies. Many musicians have turned to Marley's music time and time again for inspiration. Paul Simon, Eric Clapton, the Police, and Stevie Wonder are just a few of the American Musicians who were strongly influenced by Bob Marley's brand of reggae. Marley drew from the myths and tales of the Caribbean, the wisdom and fire of the Old Testament, and the dirt streets of the Jamaican slum of Trench Town to create this reggae music, that rang with poetry and prophecy (Manley 35). In less than twenty years, Jamaica's popular music has emerged from cultural confinement. Today, in many cities around the world, reggae is still one of the most popular types of music.

Raised on hard times and hungry living, Bob Marley never became embittered by the permanent trauma of poverty. He turned hard times into a steely defiance and a zeal to succeed no matter what the odds (Farley 80). From the very beginning his songs expressed his most passionate concerns, creating a new style of music. " Nearly years after his passing Marley is recognized by urban and other pop audiences as the world's greatest roots artist" (Oumano 1). Bob Marley made great contributions to the Rastafarian culture and brought up the reggae style of music. For all of these incredible efforts and contributions, the world will never forget

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