

Peter Tosh True Revolutionary Artist Martyr

Written by Site Staff ID1882

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Peter Tosh was born into this world without a father or mother with the responsibility, or the time to raise young Peter. He was raised by his aunt, although Peter's personality would have you believe that he raised himself. An extremely self-reliant, self-dependent entity, Tosh fought for those who could not fight themselves. He was a voice for those who had not the means, nor the ability to speak to a worldwide audience. While those with power on the island of Jamaica saw Peter as a threat to the existing regime (A regime comprised of corrupt "politricksters" who ally with Jamaica's small, wealthy, land owning class), the people saw Peter as a rebel hero. A champion of human rights, throughout his life Peter fought against the vampires and the duppies and all evil spirits, the spirits which Peter himself feared more than anything. Peter Tosh was a saint. Not a saint in the conventional, religious definition, but insofar as that he was put on this earth with a purpose. He was to expose the filth and corruption and expunge the wickedness of the ghosts which haunted him his entire life. Peter was a savior, sent to liberate the people of Jamaica, both physically and mentally.

As for the majority of Jamaicans, life was spent scrounging for a dollar, struggling to put food on their children's table, and a roof over their head; That was if you can find some brush or metal with which to build one. It was difficult to find employment, and many of those that were employed were done so temporarily. Peter had greater visions for the Island of Jamaica. He was upset with the treatment of his people, and he did nothing to hide his feelings. It is believed by many that this is the very character trait which led to Tosh's murder. The voice of the people was eliminated by three supposed robbers who stole not one material object. At the tender age of forty three, Peter Tosh was silenced, as were the hopes of many Jamaicans.

On October ninth, 1944 Winston Hubert McIntosh was born into this world. The only child of Alvera Coke, a resident of Church Lincoln, Westmoreland on the island of Jamaica. Winston's father, James McIntosh was the preacher at the local church in Savanna-la-Mar, which Alvera attended. However, Winston was just one of the many children which James McIntosh fathered and neglected to help care for. He played no role in Winston's life, refusing even to acknowledge that he was the father. In fact, Winston did not even meet his father until he was ten years of age. When asked about his father Winston had this to say: "My father, James McIntosh, is a bad boy, a rascal. That's what him do for a living. He just go around and have a million-and-one children! Right now me have many brothers that me don't know" (Chang and Chen, Reggae Routes 142). Neither his father nor his mother had the responsibility to care for Winston. Instead, Winston was raised by his aunt, in Savanna-la-Mar. Once Peter was asked if his aunt who raised him had a lot of influence in his life, to which Tosh responded: "No. No. Never (Holmes and Steffens, Reasoning With Tosh 3)." Tosh continued on to say this:

"See, I was three years in size, but fifty years old in the mind, seen? Because I was born with

Peter Tosh True Revolutionary Artist Martyr

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matured mind, and born with a concept of creativity, and any time there's a controversy within me, it create an inner conflict, seen? And any time that inner conflict is created, something is wrong, so you must internally investigate it. And with that mind, I grew up with that mind. I like, and I love everything that is right. seen? I was born, raised in righteousness, not to say that my parents was righteous, because they did not know righteousness. They were being led away to a shitstem, or being deceived by deceivers, you see, because they wanted to know what was righteousness (Holmes and Steffens, Reasoning With Tosh 3)."

Peter began playing musical instruments at a young age, although the only lessons he received was six months worth of piano lessons when he was in fifth grade. Nevertheless, this would not stop him from becoming one of the most adept, prodigious musicians in the entire Island of Jamaica. When later asked if he recalled the first time he learned to play guitar, the instrument which he would later become notoriously known for brandishing, Tosh had this to say:

"Me just one time see a mon in the country play guitar and say "My that mon play geetar nice". It just attract me so much that me just sat there taking it in for about a half-day and when him done-he was playin" one tune for the whole half-day-he had hypnotized me so much that my eyes extracted everything he had done with his fingers. I picked up the guitar and played the tune he had just played with him showin" me a t"ing. And when he asked me who taught me I tell him it was him! "(White, In the Path of the Stepping Razor 143).

In 1956, After living in Savanna-la-Mar for a period of time, Winston and his aunt moved to Denham Town in Kingston, the capital city of Jamaica. When Winston was fifteen-years-old his aunt died, and he moved in with an uncle on West Road in Trench Town.

Trench Town, at that time, was an area composed of housing projects which provided inadequate, yet much needed shelter for the indigent people of the city. Trench Town was the place where Winston would first meet Robert Nesta Marley and Neville O'Reilly Livingston, who would later be known as Bunny Wailer. Winston Hubert McIntosh decided to change his name as well, and became Peter Tosh. Together, these three individuals, known as the Wailin' Wailers, would change the face of music in Jamaica, and throughout the world.

Joe Higgs, the group's first mentor, remembers the band's earliest days: "Peter came from the country when we were living in Trench Town. He had some family that were cabinet makers and they used to sell syrup, that's how I first saw him. He was introduced to me by Bob Marley, because they wanted to form a new group. They practiced and became perfect (Steffens, The

Peter Tosh True Revolutionary Artist Martyr

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Thursday, 08 September 2005 22:08 -

Peter Tosh Biography 44). "According to Tosh, the three began singing together in 1962, and formed the Wailing Wailers around 1964-65. Peter asserts that he was the beginning of the group, as he was the only one who played an instrument, and that he was the one who taught Bob Marley to play the guitar.

Under Joe Higgs' tutelage, the newly formed Wailers passed their audition for Clement "Coxsone" Dodd who was the owner and producer of a local record company named Studio One. The day after the audition the Wailers were once again at Studio One, this time cutting their first release, Simmer Down. The song was an immediate number one hit on the Jamaican music charts, and the group went forward from there. The Wailers immediately became the most successful group in Jamaica, yet all the while unbeknownst to them, they were being mistreated and betrayed by their producer. Tosh recalls that the Wailers were being paid a mere three pounds a week, while their songs were topping the Jamaican music charts. While this was the Wailers first encounter with ill-willed producers it certainly was not going to be the last.

Through all this adversity the Wailers survived, as they bounced around from one producer to another. Around 1970 the Wailers decided to leave Studio One, and signed on to work with perhaps the most famous Jamaican producer of all, Lee "Scratch" Perry. This deal proved no better for the Wailers, though, as they released three albums in the United Kingdom under the Trojan label, none of which they received payment for.

There were also instances where producers would record rehearsal sessions that Peter himself did, and then release these recordings without Tosh even knowing. Most of these secret releases occurred in England, many of them under the pseudonym Peter Touch.

Undaunted, Peter and the Wailers trod on until 1972 when they were introduced to the producer who would change their lives forever. Chris Blackwell was the producer of the up and coming Island Records label, and the Wailers were going to be his ticket to stardom. The deal seemed great for everyone involved. The Wailers were finally going to get the exposure and acclaim which they had toiled so long to attain, and Blackwell was going to take them there.

The group's first collaboration, *Catch A Fire*, served as an introduction for many people to reggae music. This album contains many classic reggae tunes, including *400 Years* and *Stop That Train*, both of which featured Peter Tosh on lead vocals. These songs introduced people to the militant, outspoken, candid approach of Peter Tosh, qualities which would remain with him to his grave. These characteristics elevated Peter from his peers. Unlike most musicians in

Peter Tosh True Revolutionary Artist Martyr

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Jamaica, Peter always let his feelings be known. He cared more about principals and morals, than popularity and fame.

The Wailers' second album, *Burnin'*, was a progression of the first, serving both as a launching pad for the group's career, while still reflecting the band's sense of awareness concerning social injustice. No tune embodied this ideal more than *Get Up, Stand Up*, a song which once again featured Tosh on lead vocals. In this song, Peter led the charge to freedom as he called for people to "Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights. Get up, stand up, don't give up the fight." Everything was going great, or so it seemed. As it turned out, *Burnin'* would be the group's final collaboration.

In 1974 the trinity of the Wailers, Peter, Bunny, and Bob was no longer. No longer a harmony of three, the group carried on as one, now known as Bob Marley and The Wailers; The Wailers being the name of his backing band. Many attribute this disintegration directly to Chris Blackwell. Blackwell saw the group's success resting in the voice of Bob Marley, and wanted to shift the focus solely onto Bob. Another reason for the band's breakup is that both Bunny and Peter were unwilling to suffer through the physically taxing tours like the one the band had just embarked on to promote the release of *Catch A Fire*. As for Chris Blackwell, Peter did not hold his one time producer in very high regard, as evidenced here in one of Tosh's interviews: "Chris Whiteworst. You talk about Blackwell, what was well with him? (much laughter) So me call him every time me see him, "what happen whitewell, what happen Blackwell?" (Holmes and Steffens, *Reasoning With Tosh* 12)."

As for his take on the Wailers' breakup, Peter had this to say: "Well was not a breakup you know...Is just going in three different ways and sending the music in three different directions...was just that my inspiration was growing and my cup filled and runneth over (Holmes and Steffens, *Reasoning With Tosh* 13)." After the separation, though, Marley and Tosh were not on such good terms. Peter was angry at Bob for continuing to use the name of the Wailers, and he had this to say about it: "When we left as "the Wailers," Bob Marley took unto himself some other people and called them "the Wailers." And that is what is now causing the animosities (Walker, *Tough Tosh* 3)". When Tosh was asked if he had a feeling of loss when Bob died he replied: "No, I never lose NOTHING. When my woman die, I never lose nothing, so when my brother die, I lose nothing. I don't fret about it. (Walker, *Tough Tosh* 3)." Peter felt no sense of loss when his brother Bob died. On one occasion Peter was asked if he would see Bob in heaven to which Tosh replied that he would not go to heaven, that he had already been there many times. Peter believed that those who act rightly and justly receive the gift of eternal life, and thus he felt no loss when Bob Marley left this world. He just continued on the work which he had pledged to do, to fight for his people's rights. While the Wailers as a group was no longer, Peter Tosh had a bright future ahead of him.

Peter Tosh True Revolutionary Artist Martyr

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Thursday, 08 September 2005 22:08 -

When Peter was asked about his future as a solo artist he replied: "Now, today in this September of 1976, I am a new mon again-as I have jus" recently come to realize it (White, In the Path of the Steppin" Razor 1). "Peter was heading in a different direction than Bob, and he had this to say about it:

"Bob do his work and leave, I have my work to do. The three hands that symbolize " Tuff Gong" on the label each symbolize one of us, the original Wailers. We did pledge as a group to continue the work of Rastafari, whatever happen. So I just continue the work, I not replacing no other worker. Bob use his style to give his message, I have to continue with mine (Brown, High Times magazine 1983 1)."

And so the work of Peter Tosh continued. It blossomed into a brilliant solo career, a career which allowed Peter to impart his messages of equality and justice through his spirited, uplifting music. His first solo project, Legalize it, came to fruition in 1976. The album's title track, Legalize it, called for the legalization of Marijuana in Jamaica. Tosh believed that marijuana, or herb, was the healing of the nation. Peter felt that herb gave the small man a brief solace from the problems of everyday life. To Peter, herb was a source of inspiration. He wrote all of his songs after he smoked herb because it gave him spiritual enlightenment. He felt that this was why the government had declared it illegal, as a means of keeping the people down. The song caused such a great controversy that it was banned in Jamaica. As a result, Peter was now seen as an outlaw and a threat to Jamaica's old, established system, or 'shitstem" as Tosh would put it. Peter was a revolutionary, a freedom fighter who always spoke his mind, and was not afraid to seize an opportunity to expose the inequities of Jamaican society. This conduct culminated in his performance at the One Love Peace Concert. At the time, Jamaica was experiencing a political civil war. Kingston was the sight for the battle, which pitted Prime Minister Michael Manley, of the People's National Party, against Edward Seaga and his Jamaican Labor Party. In hopes of resolving this problem plaguing Jamaican society a concert was arranged. The concept behind the concert was that instead of all the "fussin" and fightin" "there should be one love for all brethren, and peace on the island of Jamaica. The organizers of this event got the biggest acts in reggae music to agree to perform. Included in this group was Peter Tosh, as well as Bob Marley and the Wailers, who were the headline band. It was at this concert that Peter took the opportunity to lecture the audience, which included Mr. Michael Manley himself, about the injustice of the Jamaican 'shitstem". This "livatribe", as Peter liked to refer to his speeches, or diatribes, that he gave including the following statements directed at both the Manley and Seaga:

"Me glad all the Prime Minister is here and the Minister of Opposition and members of Parliament. We can't make the little pirate dem come here and rob up the resources for the

Peter Tosh True Revolutionary Artist Martyr

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Thursday, 08 September 2005 22:08 -

country. Because that is what dem been doing a long bloodbath time...I am not a politician but I suffer the consequences (Steffens, The Peter Tosh Biography 48)."

Never before had such a public figure openly insulted and contested the Jamaican regime. That is what separated Peter from the rest of his peers in the Jamaican music industry. While Bob Marley decided to go more mainstream, and easygoing, and Bunny became somewhat reclusive and unnoticed, Peter continued on in his same staunch, militant manner. This gave the people of Jamaica a strong leader whom they could trust to hold his morals steadfast in the face of adversity. It is not a coincidence that just four short months after Peter's verbal assault on the powers that be in Jamaica, that he was beaten to within an inch of death by as many as ten police officers. This, however, was just one of many cases of police brutality involving Peter Tosh. These attacks did not stop Peter, though, as they seemed to just make him madder and stronger. Peter loved the limelight, not because of the attention he got, but because of the issues it allowed him to bring attention to. While these physical attacks did little to censor Peter, it was the ethereal attacks which put fear into his heart.

"in the middle of the night, before daylight, I was attacked by evil forces, seen? Spiritual evil forces that cause my mouth to cease from function cause my hands and legs to cease from moving. Is only my mind that was in f unction, and my two eyes. As close as four of my friends was to me, which was about 12 inches away, I could not tell a man nothing, or ask a man to do anything to help me; and I was on the brink of what you call "death. "Seen?...it started with these three (?) man here. Seen? Coming from the hospital I saw ghosts, three ghosts (Steffens, Rebel With a Cause 4)."

Peter was taken to the hospital after an incident with a drunken man who attacked him with a bar stool left his hand severely lacerated. That night something very strange occurred.

"Coming from the hospital I saw ghosts, three ghosts...Is what they call duppies. Ghosts. "Cause I can see them. Seen? I saw three of them. And I was the only person out of about 400 that saw them. And they become terrified because they don't like to know that people are, you know, interfering in their business. Seen? So after I left the hospital every night--which I was there for three days, trying to get these things stitch up (Steffens, Rebel With a Cause 4)."

Peter's experiences with ghosts caused him to compose and release the song "Bumbo Klaat". The phrase bumbo klaat is one of the most coarse expressions in Jamaica. If used publicly it is a jailable offense. This, however, did not stop Peter from entitling his song "Bumbo Klaat" , a

Peter Tosh True Revolutionary Artist Martyr

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Thursday, 08 September 2005 22:08 -

phrase which he saw as one of the secret passwords of Jamaica to fight against evil spirits. Tosh believed that the power which this phrase wielded was the very reason it was outlawed by Jamaica's government. During his aforementioned late night encounter with duppies, Peter found that the only thing that could free him from his paralysis was to say "Move yuh bumbo Klaat!! (Pierson and Steffens. Discography 18)" From that day forth, Peter vowed never to stop saying bumbo klaat.

The next chapter in Peter Tosh's life served to expose the world to his struggle for equity. Mystified by Tosh's performance at the One Love Peace Concert, Mick Jagger, who was in the audience that evening, signed Peter to The Rolling Stones own record label. Peter was optimistic about this deal, a deal which would get him worldwide acclaim. What followed was just one more instance of Peter not harmonizing with his producer. He felt that, for reasons unknown to him, his records were under promoted and poorly marketed. Many of Tosh's critics felt that the work he did with The Rolling Stones was the worst of his career. During this tenu re, he released two albums, Bush Doctor and Mystic Man. The most successful tune from either of these albums was (You Gotta Walk and) Don't Look Back, which featured Mick Jagger on backup vocals. While this song was wildly successful and had great commercial appeal, teaming Jagger and Tosh together, it would be the two's only successful collaboration. Nevertheless, it was a business deal, a deal fetched him international acclaim and allowed Peter to reach a much wider audience. This was important because he was not under such scrutiny outside of Jamaica. He could not be censored internationally the way he could be censored in Jamaica. In a later interview Peter expressed this saying that he enjoyed the spotlight in America, where he felt much more free.

This is not to say that he liked America, because America embodied many of the evils which Peter frequently combated, such as discrimination, deception, technology, and politics. One song which criticized the political structure of the United States was No Nuclear War. This song is referring to the cold war situation between the United States and The Soviet Union, a situation which Peter likens to a ransom. Ultimately, though, Peter warns that there are much greater forces than any earthly power, and that as much destruction as people can create, these forces can create more.

After his short-lived stint with The Rolling Stones, Peter got his solo career back on track. During his 1983 tour of Europe Peter unveiled a new instrument to fight against injustice. That instrument happened to be a guitar which he requested to be shaped like an M-16 rifle. Concerning his newly fashioned guitar, Peter had this to say: "This guitar is firing shots at all them devil disciples. Music is my weapon to fight against apartheid, nuclear war and those gang-jah criminals (Steffens, The Peter Tosh Biography 52)." It was at this time that Peter was in his prime. He released Mama Africa in 1983, two years after the release of Wanted: Dread and Alive. Both albums are vintage Tosh and feature some of his greatest work as a solo artist. The

Peter Tosh True Revolutionary Artist Martyr

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Thursday, 08 September 2005 22:08 -

tune Bumbo Klaat, first debuted on Wanted, the European edition, as well as perhaps Peter's most famous song, Reggae-Mylitis, which tells of him coming down with some kind of musical flu which he can not shake. Mama Africa contained many classic cuts, including Glasshouse which warned that if a person lives in a glass house he should not throw stones, and in the same fashion that if one can not take a blow one should not throw a blow. The heart of this album, much like the heart of its creator, is comprised of revolutionary tunes like Not Gonna Give It Up, which calls for people to continue the fight until Africa and Africans are free, Where You Gonna Run, which says that the world is faced with problems and many illusions, to which love is the only solution. Also debuting on this album was a track entitled Peace Treaty, which details the dec eption that occurs in the city of Kill-Some, or Kingston. After Mama Africa came Captured Live, which was nothing more than an album of a show he did in Los Angeles, or Hell-A as Peter liked to refer to it. It is on this album that one can witness Tosh's incredible power and presence live. Peter was a remarkable performer. His concerts were moving, not just musically, but spiritually as well. Often times on stage he seized the opportunity to speak to his people about the wickedness of society, and the people listened, keying on his every word.

Peter Tosh was unhappy with the world, and wanted things to change. He saw evil, and wickedness, and destruction lurking. It came to him in his sleep, and in visions. On one occasion Tosh recalled a terrible vision where he:

"see the pit of destruction and seen millions of people inside of the pit going down. And I went to the side of the pit, and stand up like this, say "Blood Bath, where so much people come from?" And looking in the pit, man, it the biggest pit...people going down in the pit, but the way the people was crying, it was awful (Holmes and Steffens, Reasoning With Tosh 18-19)."

Peter knew of the evils which prowled, laying hidden, waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike. He was a saint sent to save the world from the duppies and the vampires, whom the devil had sent to create mayhem and destruction. When Peter was once asked who the biggest vamp ire in Jamaica was, he replied, "Lucifer". Wielding more power than any of the mortals whom he had sent to spread badness, Lucifer was the one whom Tosh feared more than any. In one interview that he gave Peter forewarned that one must be careful of his friends because a friend is easiest to deceive, for you already have his trust. This statement was all too prophetic.

On September 11, 1987 Peter Tosh was murdered by three intruders. The leader was a man named Dennis "Leppo" Lobban, a man whom Peter had befriended and tried to help find work after a long jail sentence. The three came in demanding money and when Tosh told them that he did not have any with him they simply shot him. Dennis Lebbo turned himself over to the

Peter Tosh True Revolutionary Artist Martyr

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Thursday, 08 September 2005 22:08 -

authorities, and was tried and convicted in the shortest jury deliberation in Jamaican history, eleven minutes. As for the other two assailants, neither were found, although the rumor is that both were gunned down in the streets. Whether this was purely a robbery, or an assassination plot is yet to be determined. Many believe that there were ulterior motives to the killing, citing that nothing was taken from the house. Peter neither resisted, nor did he cause commotion. The government had been trying for years to eliminate Tosh, a feat which was finally accomplished at the hands of his friend. The vampires which had been haunting Peter throughout his life finally caught up with him. In one interview he gave the year that he died he had this to say: "Vampires don't come out and bite your neck anymore. They cause...something destructive to happen that blood will spill and those invisible vampires will get their meals (Boyle, Word, Sound and Power 4)." Peter Tosh was martyred at the age of 43.

"I'm on my way to happiness. Where I can find some peace and rest", Peter Tosh: No Sympathy

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