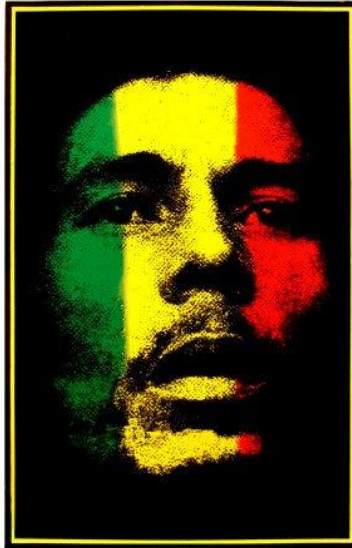


# Bob Marley and Emancipation from Mental Slavery

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<http://unafraseparapensar.blogspot.com/2>

On May 11, 2011 it was thirty years since Bob Marley joined the ancestors. Bob Marley was a cultural artist who became internationally known as a defender of love, freedom and emancipation. This week we remember him, his songs and his contributions to both revolutionary consciousness and his call for us to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery.

### **BOB MARLEY FROM THE JAMAICAN COUNTRYSIDE**

It is usually from the most rural areas where the cognitive skills and the history of community solidarity continue to prevent total mental breakdown. Robert Nesta Marley was born in the rural areas in the island of Jamaica in February 1945. Jamaica was one of the slave holding territories

of British imperialism. The history of rebellions among the enslaved informed the consciousness of the peoples of this island to the point where its name has grown beyond its size as a small island with less than 3 million persons. British cultural imperialists worked hard to inculcate Anglo-Saxon eugenic values of individualism and selfishness but cultural resistance from the countryside provided an antidote to oppression. The assertiveness of the people meant that even among the imperialists, some from among the British fell in love with the island and with its people.

Bob Marley was the product of an interracial relationship between an English military person, (Norman Marley, a captain in the colonial army and overseer) and an African woman, Cedilla Booker, from Jamaica. Marley identified with Africa and broke the long tradition of mixed-race persons who denied their African heritage. Bob Marley spent his early years in the lush countryside of St Ann, but moved with his mother to Kingston while still in his early teens. He grew up in Trench Town among the most oppressed sections of the working class districts of Kingston and was influenced by the Rastafari movement. His formal education came from the Rastafari who developed independent bases for educating the people so that they could escape “brainwash education.” The Rastafari movement has been one of the most profound attempts to transform the consciousness of the Caribbean people so that they recognized their African roots and celebrated Africa’s contributions to humanity. From the Caribbean, this movement has spread to all parts of the world. Bob Marley was one of the most articulate spokesperson for this movement.

Marley’s career as a cultural artist started in 1961 and by 1964 he had teamed up with Neville Livingston (Bunny Wailer) and Winston McIntosh (Peter Tosh) to form the "Wailing Wailers." As a youth I grew up listening to the lyrics of the Wailers and witnessed their transition from rude boys pushing the culture of defiance (in the music of Ska and Rock Steady) to Rastafari spokespersons articulating a different version of peace and love.

Because social movements are not static, the dynamism of the Rastafari culture has been challenged by the mainstream attack on the Rastafari along with the attempts at cooptation within the system. However, one of the severe weaknesses of this movement was the extent to which some of the most conscious elements of the movement succumbed to homophobic and patriarchal ideas.

The fact that this movement had extended itself to embrace a king in Ethiopia reflected the traditions of the colonial society. Many were critical that the Rastas held defensively unto the Ethiopian monarch Haile Selassie. There were those intellectuals such as Orlando Patterson who called them escapists and millenarian. But these writers and intellectuals never said why Caribbean peoples who claimed a European king and queen as the head of state were normal but those who called for an African king were escapists. Unfortunately, if labeling the Rastas escapists was the only crime of the intellectual, this would not be fatal. What was significant was how some of these intellectuals justified state repression and violence against the Rastafarian movement. From the original attacks against the Rasta camps in the hills of Jamaica to the use of the dangerous drugs laws to incarcerate thousands, the repression and the persecution of this social movement demonstrated what the African and the poor had to withstand in all parts of the world.



**Bob Marley and Peter Tosh**

<http://www.bob-marley.es/2006/10/19/el-ultimo-duo-con-tosh/>



**Bunny Wailer**

<http://rastavolucion.blogspot.com/2009/03/bunny-wailer-roots-radics-rockers.html>

Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and Bunny Wailer came from the ranks of the oppressed youth and soared to great heights internationally. Together they had formed Tuff Gong Label in 1970, which marked a turning point in their career. Soon, the Wailers' reputation spread outside Jamaica after they began to tour Europe and the USA. After the breakdown of the group in 1974,

Bob Marley formed his own group "Bob Marley and the Wailers." Bob Marley was backed up by three of the most gifted female artists in Jamaica: Marcia Griffiths, Rita Marley and Judy Mowatt. From 1974 to 1981 Marley became a world leader for truth and justice. He did not allow individual fame to detract from the message of the music.

## THE INSPIRATION OF MARLEY AND HIS REGGAE PHILOSOPHY

Bob Marley was one of the most articulate spokespersons for peace, love and justice. His music of inspiration continues to act as a rallying cry for those who are struggling for change. In the past thirty years, the literature and writings on the philosophy of Bob Marley served to shed more light on the role of music and song as a mobilizing force in society. His songs of love and inspiration are now enjoyed in all parts of the world, breaking language and racial barriers. It is now acknowledged on all continents that Bob Marley was one of the most influential musicians of all time. His performance at the Zimbabwe Independence Celebrations in April 1980 sent the message to the apartheid rulers that oppression would not stand. Within South Africa, Lucky Dube deepened a brand of progressive reggae so that today in all parts of the world there are reggae groups placing their own stamp on this culture of resistance. In 1999, *Time* magazine dubbed Bob Marley and the Wailers' *Exodus* the greatest album of the 20th Century, while the BBC named *One Love* the song of the millennium.

The hypocrisy of the British knew no bounds: the same British imperialists who celebrated the song, *One Love* as the song of the millennium were the same downpressors that unleashed police to arrest and harass young persons who identified with the Rastafari movement. Bourgeois intellectuals in Britain continue to criminalize youths who identify with Bob Marley, stating that these youths belong to a "criminal subculture." Yet, it is the Rastafari reggae song and the positive musical healers from among the Rastafari who continue to inspire young people to stand up to defend their humanity in the face of the massive push to turn young people into mindless consumers and gadgets without care for the world in which they live. These youths listen to Peter Tosh who wailed, "everyone is talking about crime, but who are the criminals." The progressive wing of the Rastafari movement continues to challenge young people in the capitalist centers to oppose the current social order that is "dominated by the relentless privatizing and commodification of everyday life and the elimination of critical public spheres where critical thought, dialogue, and exchange take place."

One of the songs that continues to be played in all parts of the world is "**Get up stand up, stand up for your rights.**" Bob Marley was aware that there could be no peace in a world of injustice and brutal exploitation.

## IT TAKES A REVOLUTION TO MAKE A SOLUTION

Though Bob Marley transitioned on May 11, 1981 when he was thirty six years old, but today we can hear the music of reggae in differing languages around the world. Today, as revolutionary upheavals shake Africa and the Middle East, young rebels listen to the lyrics of Bob Marley as they instill in themselves the confidence to stand up for their rights. In Tunisia and Egypt, home grown reggae artists were parts of the revolutionary process which is still unfolding. Tunisian youths played Reggae music and other songs calling on the soldiers, **don't shoot the people**. Clearly, in the revolution, one of the tools was progressive hip hop and reggae. The music of **Lion revolution** used symbols popularized by Bob Marley to rally the youths of Tunisia to stand up and fight.

Marley had emerged as a Caribbean Revolutionary who wailed to promote the spirit of love as the basis for revolution. The revolutionary Che Guevara had clearly stated that, "At the risk of sounding ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by feelings of love." It is this revolutionary love that informs the philosophy of Rastafari, and their principles of peace and love could be discerned in the present international revolutionary pressures. Wherever one goes, young people instinctively turn to the song, "**One Love**" to express group solidarity. It is to this song, **One Love**, where we have to turn from time to time to cope with the challenges of "Babylonian provocation."



Christopher Gonzalez's Controversial Sculpture of Bob Marley  
<http://www.petrinearcher.com/cg>

Today, many are again turning to the inspiration of Bob Marley in their search for levers to understand the chaos and destruction of the capitalist world. Over the years, I have written on the

electric presentation of Bob Marley at the independence celebrations in Zimbabwe in 1980. Such was the power and force of the music that hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans flocked to the stadium that night to turn the independence celebrations into a people's celebration. Because many people could not get into this official celebration, Bob gave a free concert the next night at the Rufaro stadium in Harare and pledged that the music of reggae was now at the gates of apartheid South Africa and that the task of the reggae artists was to continue the fight, just as Peter Tosh had sung, "We have to fight, fight against apartheid."

In his small newspaper called *Survival*, which was published from the Hope Road Headquarters in Kingston, Jamaica, Marley had this to say in 1980:

"I and I make our contribution to the freedom of Zimbabwe. When we say natty going to dub it up in Zimbabwe, that's exactly what we mean, give the people of Zimbabwe what they want, now they got what they want, do we want more? Yes, the freedom of South Africa. So Africa Unite, Unite, Unite. You're so right and let's do it."

## REGGAE AND REVOLUTION

In any revolutionary process, one of the most important tasks is for the people to recover their self confidence in order to make history. Rastafari imbued confidence in the peoples of the Caribbean, and it was this same self confidence and self esteem that underpinned the spirit of resistance among the Rastafaris from the hills of Jamaica to the streets of Zimbabwe. In his song, **Africans a liberate Zimbabwe**, Marley prophetically predicted that, "soon we would find out who are the true revolutionaries." Robert Mugabe and his clique exposed themselves soon after independence, when the Zimbabwe government attacked the Rastafari movement in Zimbabwe, castigating Rastas for not dressing "properly" because they did not wear British suits like the leaders. Mugabe called the Rastas "dirty" and "unwashed," but this was the first sign of a regime that attacked women, same sex persons and those who opposed the self-enrichment of a small clique. Many Rastas are now listening to the words of Bob Marley who in the song "Ride Natty Ride" call on politicians to pull their own weight and stop making speeches to confuse and oppress the people.

The Caribbean reggae lyrics of confidence and personal dignity continue to spread as people gear themselves for today's revolutionary moment in world history. As one of the commentators on the Egyptian revolution stated,

“what the revolution offered the people was the opportunity to restore their sense of self-esteem, honor and dignity. Once the fear barrier was knocked down, they acquired a new sense of pride and empowerment that not only challenged the state monopoly on violence but also defeated it using solely peaceful means. With each passing day they became more determined to fight for their rights and quite willing to tender the sacrifices needed to gain their freedom.”

Bob Marley articulated the need for radical revolutionary change and he dug deep into black life to grasp what C.L.R. James had understood that, black people formed a revolutionary force in world politics because of where they had been located in the system since the Atlantic Slave Trade. The task of the revolutionary artist and revolutionary intellectual was to unearth the revolutionary potential of the people. This Bob Marley consciously sought to do through his music and concerts. In his last years, his concerts were like giant political rallies.

Of his many renditions about emancipatory politics and the emancipation of the mind, Marley turned to religious language and images to reach a section of the population that is not usually reached by traditional radical discourses on revolution. Those who study wave theory and the physics of music are examining the lyrics and vibrations of the music produced by Bob Marley and reggae artists to see how this art form and spiritual message emerged as a revolutionary form. They are studying the real meaning of **Rasta Vibrations**. Today, these vibrations are helping to inspire revolutionaries as they remember the words of Bob Marley: “It takes a revolution to make a solution.”

Bob Marley’s use of religious metaphors stimulates the imagination of the oppressed. In the song, ***It Takes a Revolution to Make a Solution***, Marley starts out with the need for a memory of truth. He used the word *revelation*, which served as the opener for his call for truth. Secondly, this truth telling would allow the people to expose the mainstream politicians who perpetuated what was termed, “the Babylonian system.”

In contemporary society, politics is more or less about accumulation, exclusion and divisions. Bob Marley said that one cannot trust a politician: “Can’t trust no shadows after dark.” He added: “never trust a politician to grant you a favor.” In addition to calling on the people to self-organize by standing up for their rights, Marley, in this song on revolution also called for the people to fight so that “Rasta can never flop.” He used the metaphor of the storms and hurricanes to remind the people of the chaos caused by the social system and to call for the overthrow of

this system which is capitalism: “blood a go run.” Marley states: “In this process of revolution there will be redemption as righteousness covers the earth, as the water covers the seas.” For Marley, the weak in mind and heart cannot make revolution. The weak conceptions of inferiority had to be transcended in order for revolution to develop. Revolution and freedom were the constant theme of the lyrics in which Bob Marley was calling for the prisoners of Babylon to be free:

*“Too much confusion; so much frustration*

*I don’t want to live in the park*

*Can’t trust shadows after dark*

*Like the birds in the tree, the prisoners must be free.”*

Eusi Kwayana, the Caribbean revolutionary grasped the importance of the Marley intervention and called his contribution one of the landmarks achievements of the Caribbean Revolution. In the preface to my book, ***Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney***, Kwayana wrote:

“The placing of the stamp of Babylon on the whole of official society and the wide acceptance of this description is one of the landmark achievements of the Caribbean Revolution. The more it is seriously accepted, the more the culture divides into two poles of authority: a necessary forerunner to any long term revolutionary objectives. Those members of the society who do not accept or embrace the dress, or need the religious ideas, accept the language, those who do not accept the language with the movement’s definition of the order of things, accept the music. In fact, such is the power of art that Bob Marley’s music has done more to popularize the real issues of the African liberation movement than several decades of backbreaking work of Pan Africanists and international revolutionaries.”

## **PAN AFRICANIST MARLEY AND AFRICAN UNITY**

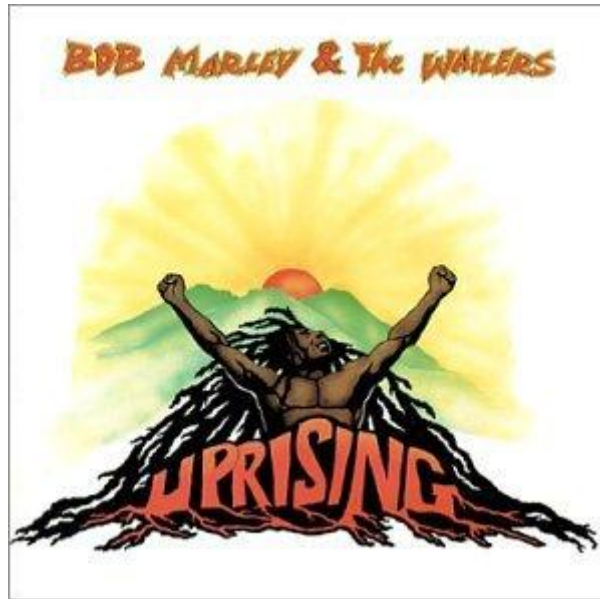
Bob Marley was very conscious that the African revolution and African unity were inseparable. In February 2005 at the moment of his posthumous 60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration, Rita Marley and other members of his family organized the massive African Unity concerts in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Members of the Marley family were reminding the youth that long before Col.

Muammar Gaddafi claimed to have supported African unity, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, and Bob Marley were supporting the full unification of Africa. In all parts of Africa the people sing the song of Bob Marley, **Africans Unite**.

This call for African unity from the grassroots is as urgent today as it was 31 years ago when Bob Marley uttered these words of unity from the stage in Harare Zimbabwe. Marley had joined his voice to the push for the full liberation of Africa. He understood that no black person could be free until Africa was free, united and liberated from foreign domination and military interventions. Bob Marley worked hard. I witnessed this in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1980 when he was spending his time grounding with Zimbabwean musicians attempting to learn as much as possible about Zimbabwean music while he was there. One could also see that he was intimately studying the situation on the ground. This capacity for hard work ensured that the Rastas of that period developed independent sources of information on Africa.

In the last year of his earthly life Bob Marley worked hard to unearth spiritual energies to make the people stronger. In his growing awareness of his own mortality, Bob Marley intensified his work and pushed himself to the point where he collapsed in his final concert. Bob Marley was suffering from cancer. This suffering showed him that he only had a short time on earth. Today, Bob Marley is larger in death than when he was alive but as we remember him, we must remember him as a human with strength and weaknesses. We now know more of these weaknesses and Marley himself communicated his pain and hurt in his songs. It is this same pain and hurt that infused his songs that connected him with other persons going through similar pain. Despite the weaknesses and the pain, Marley stressed the positive and as we remember him, we seek to highlight the positive while learning from the negative.

In the last album, appropriately called **Uprisings**, Marley reminded the people that they should “have no fear of atomic energy for none of them can stop the time.” The song, “**Redemption Song**,” exposed the versatility of Marley when he returned to strumming the guitar and asked simply, “How long shall they kill our prophets while we stand aside and look?” This was where Marley called on the people to “Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, none but our selves can free our minds.”



This theme of self-emancipation sought to bring the fusion of the ideas of spirituality with the revolutionary changes in the material and technical conditions of production. Reggae music was an early attempt at this fusion in order to provide emancipation from mental slavery so that humans could unleash the latent power of self-expression. In essence, when the Rastafari and Bob Marley called on us to “emancipate ourselves from mental slavery,” they are admonishing the intellectuals and the activists to make a break with the epistemologies that justify and cover up oppression.

Bob Marley seems to have anticipated today’s capitalist push towards mindless consumerism and the attempts to dumb down the kind of deep, critical thinking that is required to challenge entrenched capitalist exploitation and dehumanization.

Thus, Marley’s call for emancipation from mental slavery also speaks to all humans seeking alternatives to the massive push towards mind control and robotization that is promised in the era of technological singularity, where human beings would be rendered inferior to super-humans who would be products of biology, genetic engineering, and robotic science. In such a climate, the Rastafarian movement and the humanist philosophy of Marley promise to act as a force to hold the youth together as humans.

The Rastafari movement has been one of the most profound attempts to transform the consciousness of the Caribbean people. The movement confronted problems pertaining to the colonial and neo-colonial world, human's relationship with the universe, human's relationship with spirits, human's relationships with matter and how to reorganize society. In its own way, this movement that arose out of the hills of the Jamaican countryside challenged the greed, competition and individualism of capitalism.

Bob Marley opposed conspicuous consumption and the obscene accumulation of wealth. Up to the time of his passing there were efforts to make him succumb to the disposition of his material wealth, but he eschewed the capitalist forms of inheritance. One witnessed court cases and long litigation because of his opposition to capitalist wills.

Thus even on his bed while he was making the transition to the ancestors, Bob Marley was opposed to the obscene consumptive patterns of the capitalist mode of production and railed against the forms of economic organization that placed material goods before human needs.

My work on the Rastafari movement in the book *Rasta and Resistance* was an attempt to learn from the positive traditions of this movement to be able to inspire the youth to the long struggles for freedom. This was an attempt at trying to lay the foundations for the move from Resistance to Transformation. This attempt remains premature for such a transformation will only be possible when there is the harmonization of the culture and language of the majority with that which is taught in the schools, colleges and universities in the region. The Egyptian revolution of 2011 has opened new possibilities at the political level.

As we remember Bob Marley, revolutionaries will seek his inspiration to push for a quantum leap beyond the world of capitalist oppression, dehumanization, and injustice. Most importantly, in order to move from resistance to transformation and achieve the quantum leap that takes us beyond the world of exploitation and dehumanization, we must ultimately emancipate ourselves from mental slavery, and from the capitalist forces that celebrate genocide, subjugation, military invasions, environmental plunder, and crimes against humanity as progress.

# RASTA

## AND RESISTANCE



FROM MARCUS GARVEY  
TO WALTER RODNEY

HORACE CAMPBELL

