

Remembering Roots Rock Reggae

True story: I was at the local barbershop one morning, in desperate need of a haircut – a crew cut, buzz cut, fade, caesar, flattop, or even dreadlocks would've sufficed, because my mop was out of control. While waiting, I overheard the following from a teen, also waiting his turn: "Yo son, that n'gg* is gettin' mad close. If that n'gg* was up in my grill like that, I'd have to pop a n'gg*, f' real."

I was utterly horrified. You see, the needlessly expensive flat panel television mounted on the barbershop wall was projecting the digitally-remastered DVD images of the one-and-only Bob Marley. Now, I'm not sure which DVD it was but I did know the dreadlocked guitar player was Bob Marley. Fortunately, so did this uneducated teen's friend. Well, sort of. "Yo, kid. That's that reggae n'gg*," his friend responded. "Jimi Hendrix or something. You gotta respect that n'gg*. He's one of the greats."

Sure, I understand that – at the very least – the friend realized that he should respect "that reggae n'gg*", but it made me cringe to realize that neither of these black teenagers had any real clue who they were watching.

"I don't care who he is, yo," continued the first teen. "He shouldn't be all up in the people's faces like that. That's the kinda thing that a n'gg* will get killed for." If only this boy knew of Marley's peace-loving, nonviolent ways, he'd understand that both Marley and his fans enjoyed his intimate and passionate live performances. His friend – to my genuine surprise – spouted out another grain of knowledge, this time valid: "I think he died young. All the greats die young."

The legendary master of roots rock reggae, Robert Nesta Marley, died at 36 from cancer on May 11th, 1981. Yet during his short lifespan, Marley did great things. In addition to being the first Jamaican artist to earn international superstardom, Marley was a Rastafarian who was able to unite people through the power of his songs about faith, devotion and revolution leading to a near assassination in 1976. He has influenced practically every artist since his death including the hip-hop and dancehall flavored Fugees, Sean Paul, OutKast and Lil Jon.

Marley's 60th birthday was celebrated this February – and this May we mourn his death giving those who know of Marley a chance to pay their respects and those who don't know of the legend, a chance to educate themselves on his great legacy. Remember, you never want to be that kid in the barbershop who referred to this legend as the (equally legendary) Jimi Hendrix... never.... —A.O.Casasnovas

