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A Brief History of Seven Killings

Author: Mark Levine

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* A Brief History of Seven Killings. By Marlon James. Oct. 2014. 688p. Riverhead, \$28.95 (9781594486005).

This lengthy novel by the acclaimed Jamaican author of *The Book of Night Women* (2009) is a densely imaginative fictional retelling of the 1976 assassination attempt on reggae superstar Bob Marley ("The Singer") and its aftermath. It is far less about music than about Jamaican (and international--the CIA is implicitly engaged) politics and its gangs, inextricably linked. The book is, as a result, nasty, complicated, violent, and profane. That it is also beautiful is testimony to author James' immense talent. Despite the lack of suspense (one knows Marley survives, though James handles the ensuing events deftly), James keeps the pages turning. He handles a complex cast of characters with disparate viewpoints and voices (literally) that, although daunting to readers unfamiliar with the country's culture and speech ("No star me no know a who that?"), will please and delight (and shock) many but should impress all diligent readers. This is a breakthrough novel not only for the author but also for Caribbean and world literature. The Kingston milieu (and its extensions, including New York) is made horrifyingly believable; the patois is rhythmic, slangy, and often quite funny. This is a unique, difficult (the latter portions less so), and very worthwhile reading experience. --Mark Levine



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