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James, Marlon. A Brief History of Seven Killings

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* James, Marlon. A Brief History of Seven Killings. Riverhead. Oct. 2014.704p. ISBN 9781594486005. \$28.95. F

Winner of the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, James (The Book of Night Women) offers a stunning fictional investigation of the attempted assassination of reggae star Bob Marley just days before Jamaica's 1976 general election and only 48 hours before he was scheduled to play the Smile Jamaica Concert. Surprisingly, though, Marley is not the center of the book--he's the Singer, on the periphery and hardly seen or heard. Instead, James gives us Jamaica itself, showing a country that's fractured and uncertain of its identity as he follows the exploits of various lowlifes in the country's toughest neighborhoods, some surprisingly antagonistic toward Marley--and toward the reigning People's National Party, the more left-leaning of Jamaica's two major political parties. CIA agents, a white Rolling Stone reporter who declares (embarrassingly) that he knows the real Jamaica, a woman who wants to trade in on her one night of glory with Marley, even a dead politician--these are only a few of the many characters encountered in the novel's lush, intensive outpouring of voices, often delivered in Jamaican patois. VERDICT A brilliant novel, highly recommended; one of those big, rich, magisterial works that lets us into a world we really don't know. [See Prepub Alert, 4/7/14.] Barbara Hoffert, Library Journal

Hoffert, Barbara

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