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A Brief History of Seven Killings

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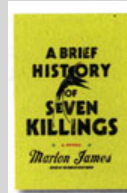
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* A Brief History of Seven Killings

Marlon James. Riverhead, \$28.95 (688p) ISBN 978-1-59448-600-5



There are many more than seven killings in James's (Dayton Literary Peace Prize winner for *The Book of Night Women*) epic chronicle of Jamaica's turbulent past, but the centerpiece is the attempted assassination of Bob Marley on December 3, 1976. Through more than a dozen voices, that event is portrayed as the inevitable climax of a country shaken by gangs, poverty, and corruption. Even as the sweeping narrative continues into 1990s New York, the ripples of Jamaica's violence are still felt by those who survived. James's frenetic, jolting narrative is populated by government agents, ex-girlfriends, prisoners, gang members, journalists, and even ghosts. Memorable characters (and there are several) include John-John K, a hit man who is very good at his job; Papa-Lo, don of the Copenhagen City district of Kingston; and Josey Wales, who begins as Papa-Lo's head enforcer but ends up being a major string-puller in the country's most fateful events. Much of the conflict centers on the political rivalry of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and the People's National Party (PNP), which involves everyone from the CIA (which comes off as perennially paranoid about "isms," namely communism) to the lowest Jamaican gang foot soldier. The massive scope enables James to build an incredible, total history: Nina Burgess, who starts the book as a receptionist in Kingston and ends as a student nurse in the Bronx, inhabits four different identities over the course of 15 years. She is undoubtedly one of this year's great characters. Upon finishing, the reader will have completed an indispensable and essential history of Jamaica's troubled years. This novel should be required reading. (Oct.)

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