# Inside the Dark Corners of Bob Marley's Jamaica

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## **ABSTRACT**

Part crime thriller, part oral history, part stream-of-consciousness monologue, James' nearly 700-page tale reconceives the questions, conspiracies and half-truths surrounding the incident.

## **FULL TEXT**

#### Headnote

**ROCK NOVEL** 

1976 assassination attempt on the reggae star inspires imaginative new novel

ON THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 3rd, 1976, gunmen broke into Bob Marley's home in Kingston, Jamaica, and opened fire, seriously wounding Marley, his wife, Rita, and his manager. The shooting, which remains unsolved, is a big part of Marley's legend - he defied his attackers by performing at a massive free concert in Kingston just two days later. Now, the incident has inspired A Brief History of Seven Killings, an excellent new work of historical fiction by Jamaican writer Marlon James.

Part crime thriller, part oral history, part stream-of-consciousness monologue, James' nearly 700-page tale reconceives the questions, conspiracies and half-truths surrounding the incident. "It's like writing about Kennedy - there's no straightup narrative," says James, a former music critic for the Jamaica Observer. "There are all these rumors and contradictions, and very few facts."

One of the main characters is aRoLLiNG Stone writer who serves as a narrator at times, while also getting entangled in Jamaican gang politics and international drug trafficking. "Rolling Stone put Marley on the cover in 1976," says James, referring to a profile by Ed McCormack that seemed to anticipate the shooting. "I read it probably a million times."

James works tons of musical detail and history into his story. "The first Jamaican writers to talk about social conditions were musicians," he says. "If you're going to write a novel about Seventies Jamaica, it kind of has to be a rock &roll novel."

JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

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