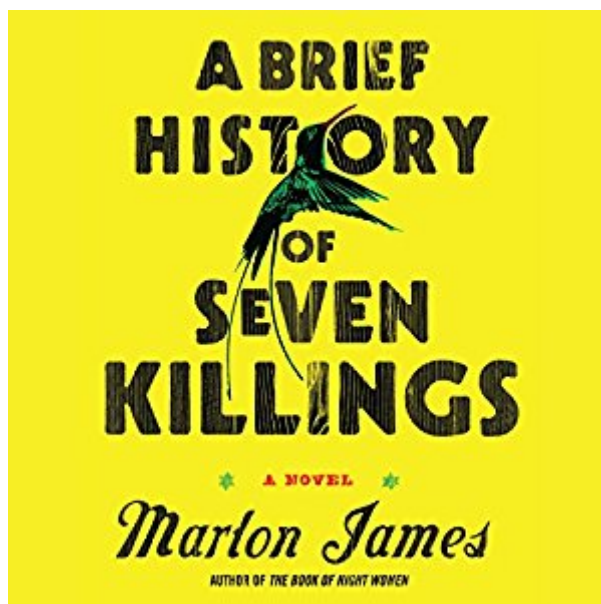


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# A Brief History Of Seven Killings



## Synopsis

Winner, The Man Booker Prize, 2015 On December 3, 1976, just before the Jamaican general election and two days before Bob Marley was to play the Smile Jamaica Concert, gunmen stormed his house, machine guns blazing. The attack nearly killed the Reggae superstar, his wife, and his manager, and injured several others. Marley would go on to perform at the free concert on December 5, but he left the country the next day, not to return for two years. Deftly spanning decades and continents and peopled with a wide range of characters - assassins, journalists, drug dealers, and even ghosts - *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is the fictional exploration of that dangerous and unstable time and its bloody aftermath, from the streets and slums of Kingston in the 1970s, to the crack wars in 1980s New York, to a radically altered Jamaica in the 1990s. Brilliantly inventive and stunningly ambitious, this novel is a revealing modern epic that will secure Marlon James' place among the great literary talents of his generation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEVEN KILLINGS is bound to be a bestseller as it has an intriguing premise inspired by fact, an interesting setting and many critical endorsements even before the book is actually released. However prospective readers should also know this is a long complicated book that has a diverse cast of characters telling the story. Thankfully there is a list of seventy-six characters mentioned by these narrators sorted by the location and time period where they appear helpfully supplied at the beginning of the book. This list even includes a brief statement of these

players' roles in the novel. I admit to turning to these four pages frequently in the course of reading the novel. Some of the narration uses a great deal of slang that is occasionally difficult to figure out even using context clues. I found myself often using internet resources to decipher some of this language as well as to get more background information about Jamaica in the 1970's, 80's and early 90's. This is certainly an ambitious book and it is well rendered. However the casual reader may want to realize the investment in time and effort needed to appreciate it.

This was probably the most challenging novel I've read in several years. Who am I kidding? There's no probably about it. Marlon James has constructed an incredibly complex story, and it took every bit of memory available to me to keep up. He was kind enough to include a cast of characters, but I made it a point to refer to it as little as possible, opting instead to try and follow the story under my own power. Add to the story's complexity the fact that most of the characters are from the ghettos of Kingston, and speak in a patois that takes some serious acclimation initially, and will slow your reading speed to a crawl at times. Amazingly though, after spending nearly a week with these characters, I felt like I had picked up the meanings quite well and could read those sections much quicker. Strangely, for me, this adaptation was the most rewarding aspect of this particular reading experience. In fact, as much respect as I now have for Marlon James' talent, I have to admit that I did not actually enjoy this novel, and found it made for an almost constantly uncomfortable reading experience. The last time I felt the inability to enjoy such a well written book, I was reading *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, a Pulitzer finalist. Both books require the reader to spend most of their time in very difficult places. By difficult I mean places where innocents suffer a great deal of agony and injustice, and both books left me feeling a certain hopelessness from which I felt the reader was never released. That may well be James' intention, and the fact that he could take me to such places and make them feel so real as to make me uncomfortable is a testament to his talents. This novel contains a great deal of incredibly graphic violence (including rape), and in fact I cannot name a more graphically violent novel that I've read in the past few years. Perhaps Philip Meyers' "The Son" comes close? There is also a lot of quite graphic sex, and since the majority of the novel's many characters are hardcore criminals, the language is very often coarse throughout the story. The number of such moments are what makes it difficult for me to recommend the book to anyone whose taste and tolerance for such things I do not know well. But the novel seems to me to have been an honest one, and as you wallow in the depths and the dregs with these gangsters, you sense the suffering from which they were born, and begin to understand their Machiavellian existence. Again, James was able to take me to some places I've certainly never been, but I can't

necessarily say I'm glad I went there. Overall, this is a brilliantly executed novel by a man who possesses a great deal of talent, and yet it is a book that is likely to prove a challenging read to most, for the reasons I've listed and more. I can't say that I'm happy to have read it, but I can certainly appreciate the art that James has created, and I do take some personal satisfaction in having followed such an intricate story to its end. Reading difficult fiction isn't always enjoyable, but it is usually beneficial, and for that I can say I'm grateful to have read *A Brief History of Seven Killings*.

To say this book is impressive is an understatement. But before I go further, let me state that it was a difficult one to complete. I struggled through the dialog, constantly checked the very long list of characters, and wished for another listing to decipher the slang. Sometimes it took me a minute or two to realize what the character's point was and I began that section again. In spite of the difficulties to get through this hard and complex novel, it is ambitious as well. It covers three decades of the unstable history of Jamaica with its stark poverty, the attempted assassination of Bob Marley, and horrific violence told through many voices and dialects. I feel in the future this author will be reading sections to a captivated audience. I hope that he does because I plan to be there, if I can. Unflinching in scope, this young writer is one to watch.

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