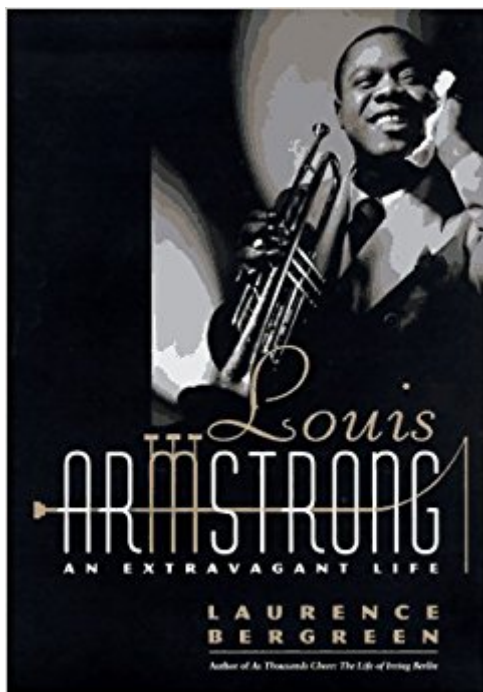


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# Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life



## Synopsis

Louis Armstrong was the founding father of jazz and one of this century's towering cultural figures. His musical innovation and exuberance made him a household name, yet the full story of his extravagant life has never been told. Now, drawing on a vast, previously unexplored archive of Armstrong's writings and recordings, acclaimed biographer Laurence Bergreen presents an intimate, provocative, and definitive portrait of the legendary Pied Piper of American music. The musical talents of Satchmo--as Armstrong became universally known--were prodigious and groundbreaking. After learning to blow his horn in the bordellos and honky-tonks of Storyville, New Orleans's bustling red-light district, he honed his sound on a Mississippi riverboat and later became a featured solo trumpeter in the nightclub bands of Chicago and New York, where his stunning musicianship, gravelly voice, and irrepressible personality captivated audiences and critics alike. Countless recordings, nonstop touring of America and Europe, a radio show--the first ever hosted by a black man--and film appearances catapulted him to international stardom, yet he always remained true to himself and loyal to his roots. Despite his successes, Armstrong's career was also marked by intense struggle--against the Depression, against the Chicago gangsters of the 1930s, and, above all, against racial prejudice. A revolutionary musician and entertainer, Louis Armstrong was also a character of epic proportions. Born in 1901 to the sixteen-year-old daughter of a slave, he came of age, joyfully, among the prostitutes, pimps, and rag-and-bone merchants of New Orleans. He married four times and enjoyed countless romantic involvements in and around his marriages. Throughout his rich and varied life, he was a believer in marijuana for the head and laxatives for the bowels; a prolific diarist and correspondent; a devoted friend to celebrities from Bing Crosby to Ella Fitzgerald; a perceptive social observer; and, in his later years, an international goodwill ambassador. Even as segments of the black community scorned him as a sellout to the white establishment, Armstrong broke color barriers wherever he went and helped other blacks to find equality and identity in modern America. "You see that horn?" he would ask his adversaries. "That horn ain't prejudiced. A note's a note in any language." Filled with insights and information gleaned from Armstrong's voluminous reminiscences and featuring a superb collection of photographs, this remarkable book brings to life as never before the charismatic figure who forever changed the face of music. In vivid detail and with warmth, wit, and breathtaking sweep, Laurence Bergreen's Louis Armstrong reveals a man of passion, courage, humor, and genius.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author of a terrific Irving Berlin biography (*As Thousands Cheer*), Laurence Bergreen produces a similarly astute character analysis of the renowned trumpet player, too often viewed as a musical genius but an Uncle Tom in race relations. On the contrary, Bergreen shows, Louis Armstrong (1901-71) was that rarest of human beings, someone who could respond to injustice with a determination to overcome that never included bitterness. Slightly stronger on milieu than music, Bergreen conveys such zest for the material and such obvious fondness for Armstrong that his book is a delight to read.

Louis Armstrong was a musical genius who left indelible marks on jazz and a legend so potent that it has taken a slew of biographers years to render harmless and formless. Bergreen, the author of *As Thousands Cheer: The Life of Irving Berlin* (1990) and *Capone: The Man and the Era* (1994), brings a great deal of insight to Armstrong's "extravagant" life, because he does not so much try to denounce or confirm the myths (he was born on 4 July\_ 1900, he bought his first coronet with money he earned performing in the streets of New Orleans, his mother was a prostitute, and on and on) as establish that Armstrong was a musical genius who embraced his origins and brought the past into the formidable body of music he produced. Bergreen, an empathetic soul, seeks understanding. For instance, it may appear that Armstrong's managers took advantage of him (he worked close to 15 years without a break until he split his chops in London in 1934 and was forced to stop blowing, yet his then-manager sued him for breach of contract). Bergreen suggests that Armstrong may knowingly have paid for what the "ofays" gave him, which was the freedom to

devote himself to his music while they took care of life's details. A deeply moving biography that fascinates from beginning to end. Bonnie Smothers

An Incredible Biography of an Incredible Man By Debra LaComette November 2016 I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Upon reading this book, which I really took my time, I felt completely immersed in the life of Louis. Louis from early on seem to live on the edge. He was fortunate in the aspect that he was able to discover at an early age, what his passion was and how it would develop into a lifelong career despite the many obstacles he faced. His attitude and his approach to life and its variables was so incredibly positive. That may have very well been 50% of his success. He also had the uncanny ability to ward off anger, hate and pure racism which seemed to consistently be one step in front of him. Louis also seemed to be unusually obsessed with his horn and his productivity with it. It makes one wonder, where did he get that drive? It appeared to be there day in and day out, he could not stop or rest till the 24 hour day was completed. I felt the author spent much time and effort researching his text and also had the ability to remain objective in his relaying of the information. I would highly recommend this book, not only if one is interested in the history of Jazz, but also to appreciate Louis Armstrong, not only as an incredible musical genius but as an extraordinary human being as well.

Really enjoyed this one. I particularly like the balance found by the author between Louis' personal and musical lives, not easy to do but essential in understanding and telling the story of an artist. The author neither flinches nor judges, neither adores nor idolizes. In the end, I had the feeling of knowing this great musician and remarkable man. He lived a very original and authentic life, and we (particularly we musicians) are much the richer for it.

This is a well written and researched biography of Louis Armstrong, one of the founding fathers of American jazz. His colorful life and innovative playing style inspired and set the tone for generations of musicians. His influence on American music is unparalleled. He rose from a childhood of extreme poverty in New Orleans to become the American goodwill ambassador of music. I enjoyed the ride.

A very good book that I highly recommend for the insights, quality of writing, and overall content. I would recommend this as a first book when approaching the life of Louis Armstrong.

I loved it! It is a very good bio. I've read others but this one was fun and easy, I would recommend it

to anyone who like Louis.

Not just about Armstrong, but - of course - the times. Well written. Has made me search YouTube for old recordings of Armstrong and the other early jazz greats.

I enjoyed this well written bio of Satchmo !

Louis Armstrong had an amazing life.

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