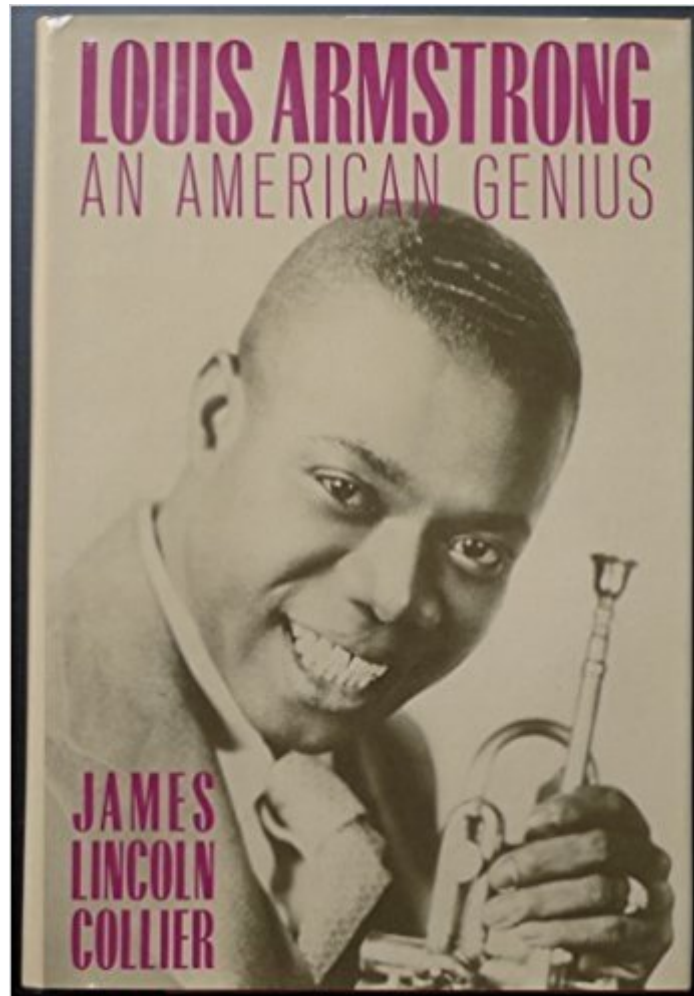




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# Louis Armstrong: An American Genius



## Synopsis

Louis Armstrong. "Satchmo." To millions of fans, he was just a great entertainer. But to jazz aficionados, he was one of the most important musicians of our times--not only a key figure in the history of jazz but a formative influence on all of 20th-century popular music. Set against the backdrop of New Orleans, Chicago, and New York during the "jazz age", Collier re-creates the saga of an old-fashioned black man making it in a white world. He chronicles Armstrong's rise as a musician, his scrapes with the law, his relationships with four wives, and his frequent feuds with fellow musicians Earl Hines and Zutty Singleton. He also sheds new light on Armstrong's endless need for approval, his streak of jealousy, and perhaps most important, what some consider his betrayal of his gift as he opted for commercial success and stardom. A unique biography, knowledgeable, insightful, and packed with information, it ends with Armstrong's death in 1971 as one of the best-known figures in American entertainment. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 400 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press (October 27, 1983)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195033779

ISBN-13: 978-0195033779

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.3 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.9 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #704,116 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #188 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Jazz](#) #348 in [Books > Law > Philosophy](#) #614 in [Books > Law > Legal Theory & Systems > Jurisprudence](#)

## Customer Reviews

"Destined to become one of the enduring jazz reference works."--The Philadelphia Inquirer  
"The definitive account of Armstrong's life. Collier is a tough, unblinkered critic."--The Washington Post  
"By far the most thoughtful and articulate study to date of a much misunderstood titan of jazz."--The Nation

James Lincoln Collier is the author of many books and articles on jazz, notably *The Making of Jazz* and *Louis Armstrong: An American Genius*. Collier has achieved a major international reputation as

a jazz critic; his books have been published in at least seven different languages around the world.

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Thanks for this book. Buyer from Colombia.

Long before his death in 1971, Louis Armstrong had become a major figure of 20th-century music. To an extent unequaled by any other musician of his time, his influence cut across boundaries of country, class, culture, race, and taste. The impact of his trumpet, voice, musical thought, and public persona was of prodigious scope and was by no means limited to jazz or even to music. Only the realm of "serious," cultivated music proved largely, although not wholly, impervious to his influence. Despite his renown he remained something of an enigma. His autobiographies (1936 and 1955, only the second of which is a substantially original work) are fascinating but unreliable works that do not, in any event, touch on anything after the mid-1930s. Several writers have offered analyses of aspects of his music and career, mostly brief and sometimes valuable, but only with the publication of James Lincoln Collier's biography is a truly comprehensive critical study of Armstrong available. And a splendid one it is. Collier treats Armstrong in all of his many roles-musician, colleague of musicians, comic entertainer, spouse, public symbol-and he does so with sound and humane scholarship. He dispels much of the myth and misinformation that has clung to his subject and replaces it with an objective portrayal of a man of extraordinary talents who was, nonetheless, very much a product of his time. The de-mythologized Armstrong who emerges from these pages has his achievements intact, however. Collier offers fresh views on the well-known and still astounding recordings of the 1920s. He explains more fully than any predecessor the apparent decline of Armstrong's powers in the 1930s and shows that such a simple characterization as "decline" is inadequate. He argues convincingly that there is more of merit in post-1940 Armstrong than most critics have allowed. In his analysis of recordings, which are full of acute observations and illuminating comparisons, Collier's discussion is nontechnical in the sense that anyone listening to the music can easily follow what he describes. He contends that the necessary economies of show business, on- and offstage, contributed to the development of Armstrong's style, and he identifies other external forces as well. But he also shows, quite persuasively, that the inner forces were the essential ones -- that Armstrong's intelligence, inventiveness, and independence (of an idiosyncratic kind) were qualities of a very high order, and that his failings were, in the end, lovable ones. Explaining Armstrong's music is a less daunting task than sorting out his life and the world of subcultures in which he lived, but Collier has been remarkably successful here, too. His chapters on

New Orleans are exemplary and put to rest some of the romanticized notions of the origins of jazz. He has welcome correctives about race records, the business of jazz booking, and Armstrong's marriages. Lil Hardin Armstrong gets the admiring attention she deserves. Collier's sociological digressions are always interesting, although now and again he repeats or restates a point as if he were not quite confident about his readers' abilities to remember what he has said. He is a bit hard on John Hammond and other commentators of the 1930s in making their interest in jazz seem so largely ideological, and he might have provided Chick Webb with a more apposite characterization than "a hunch-backed drummer

Whatever else you might want to know about Louis Armstrong, the chances that you'll find anything else as comprehensive and unbiased as this are slim indeed. This is made the more so because of the many other unreliable texts there are available, many of them drawing uncritically on what Armstrong himself said, much of which has been shown to be unreliable. Collier does a fine job of walking the line between serious music critic and biographer.

Collier did a great job! His historiography is as brilliant as ever. It seems to me that the mainstream of Jazz so-called "scholars" don't like Collier because he's got no race bias and because of his impartiality. Actually, Mr. Collier is the best American writer on the subject, as he knows musical theory and is also a fine researcher.

I was completely disappointed by this book. Since the beginning the author is only taking advantage of the trapped reader to show him how much he knows about the origins of technical jazz. There is really little about Louis and his life per se. The author rather gives a rough background stating that little is known (he shouldn't have written a book about such a personality if little was known about him) and the few facts that he states he refutes arguing they are not true or completely true. Even referring to Louis autobiography trying to demonstrate that the artist himself was wrong in his own words. Just a well written account of Jazz origins dressed up as a Louis Armstrong Biography, maybe the only way James Lincoln Collier could sell a copy. Disguising the buyer and cheating on the reader. Strongly not recommended !!!

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