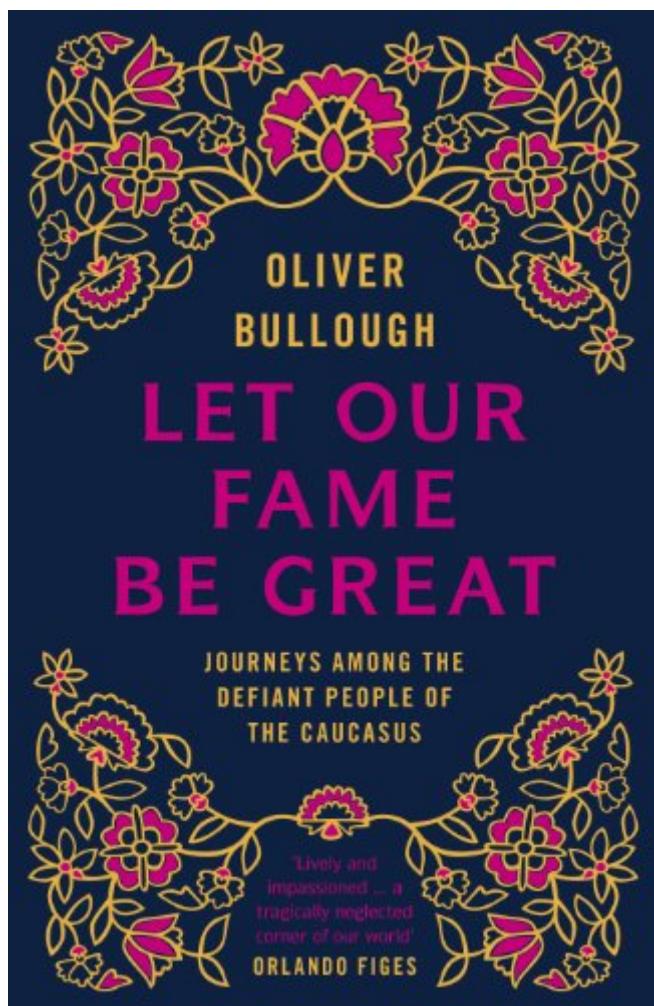


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Let Our Fame Be Great: Journeys Among The Defiant People Of The Caucasus



Synopsis

Two centuries ago, the Russians pushed out of the cold north towards the Caucasus Mountains, the range that blocked their access to Georgia, Turkey, Persia and India. They were forging their colonial destiny, and the mountains were in their way. The Caucasus had to be conquered and, for the highlanders who lived there, life would never be the same again. If the Russians expected it to be an easy fight, however, they were mistaken. Their armies would go on to defeat Napoleon and Hitler, as well as lesser foes, but no one resisted them for as long as these supposed savages. To hear the stories of the conquest, I travelled far from the mountains. I wandered through the steppes of Central Asia and the cities of Turkey. I squatted outside internment camps in Poland, and drank tea beneath the gentle hills of Israel. The stories I heard amplified the outrages I saw in the mountains themselves. As I set out, in my mind was a Chechen woman I had met in a refugee camp. She lived in a ragged, khaki tent in a field of mud and stones, but she welcomed me with laughter and kindness. Like the mountains of her homeland, her spirit had soared upwards, gleaming and pure. Throughout my travels, I met the same generosity from all the Caucasus peoples. Their stories have not been told, and their fame is not great, but truly it deserves to be.

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Customer Reviews

In the afternoon of April 15, 2013, I was listening to the radio. An announcer interrupted the broadcast to report that there had been a blast at the Boston Marathon. He was careful not to attribute the bombing to any one group - because we are all afraid of appearing to stereotype one group as terrorists. Indeed, he insisted, the Boston blast might have been caused by a ruptured gas pipe. After Chechen refugees Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev were identified as the Boston Marathon bombers, one of my students said to me, "See? Everyone thought it was Muslim terrorists. But now it turns out it was Russians!" My student should read Oliver Bullough's "Let Our Fame Be Great: Journeys Among the Defiant People of the Caucasus." So should many people. "Let Our Fame Be Great" is a heartbreakingly informative, recommended book. I was often in tears while reading it. I'm very glad I learned what Bullough had to teach. LOFBG is a travelogue through the history, literature, and current events of the Caucasus. This little-known corner of the world should be better known. I have Circassian and Armenian friends. I've been to Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey, three countries bordering the Black Sea. I remember reading about the Russian destruction of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, in the New York Times. Even so, I knew virtually nothing about the material Bullough introduces in his book. The Caucasus is a spit of land between the Black and the Caspian Seas, between Russia to the north and Turkey and Iran to the south. When Turkey was Europe's "sick man" and its power was declining, Russia moved south to fill the vacuum. Russia wanted access to the Black Sea, because its own ports freeze over in winter. Through brute force, Russia attempted to control or even eliminate the scattered Muslim ethnic groups living in the Caucasus. Russia did this as a czarist empire, as the Soviet Union, and as post-Soviet Russia. Bullough depicts the Russians in the Caucasus behaving, more or less, as American settlers behaved toward the Native Americans. We want your land, and we will do what we have to do to you to get your land. Another comparison: historian Anne Applebaum compared what the Russians did to the Caucasus to what the Nazis did to Poland. Bullough divides his book up into chapters devoted to various Caucasus ethnic groups: Circassians, Mountain Turks, and Chechens. For each group, he works through literature going back hundreds of years, historical accounts, travelogues, state documents, and contemporary accounts. This is a massive amount of material, reduced to brief excerpts. With the Circassians, for example, Bullough quotes literature written by Russian authors like Ivan Turgenev, travel accounts by British representatives toying with the idea of aiding the Circassians against the Russians, quotes from Russian military leaders attacking the

Circassians, and encounters with modern-day Circassians living in diaspora in Israel. Bullough has a gift for selecting particularly heart-rending quotes, and he uses many of these quotes as chapter titles: "The Caucasus Mountains are sacred to me," "Extermination alone would keep them quiet," "The Circassians do not appear on this list," "Liquidate the bandit group," "It was all for nothing," and "I have become no one." One anecdote Bullough recounts tells of one Caucasus woman, Khozemat Khabilayeva, who, as a child, was part of a Soviet-ordered mass deportation of her homeland. Her dog, Khola, tried to save her family, and he met with a sad fate that Khabilayeva, an old woman now, wept over, decades after his death. There are many such stories in this book, the individual droplets that add up to an ocean wave of history. Because I was so unfamiliar with this history, I did question if Bullough was too sympathetic to the Caucasus peoples, and too hard on the Russians. Bullough, though, includes actual quotes by Russian leaders voicing genocidal intent toward Caucasus people. He cites one Russian leader who decorated his home with the decapitated heads of Circassians. Too, Bullough does report on unappealing aspects of Caucasus culture. Circassians, for example, had the custom of selling their own children into slavery. So many Circassian daughters were sold into sex slavery that the reputation of the beautiful Circassian spread all the way to PT Barnum's sideshow. Bullough describes the 2004 Belsan hostage crisis as a complete horror. I compared what I know of Russian behavior to my own ethnic group, Poles. In Poland, czarist Russia and Soviet Russia deported massive numbers of people, redrew maps, criminalized the identity of oppressed people, executed large numbers of people in order to terrorize populations. Russia, it seems, did to the Caucasus what it did to the Poles. Bullough's account is all too believable. Russia plans to hold the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, one site of its genocide against the Circassians. A Caucasus terrorist leader, Doku Umarov, issued a threat against these games. Terrorism is wrong. The Sochi games should be protested, in peaceful, educational, and solidarity-building ways. Bullough includes photos of the bones of Circassian refugees found lying in the dirt in Akchakale, Turkey. Circassian activists should take these bones from Turkey, by boat across the Black Sea, retracing the route their ancestors took, and bury them in Sochi, with the stated goal of building a genocide monument in Sochi. They should film the entire trip. No doubt the Russians would attempt to stop them. Their peaceful protest would educate the world about their history. I wonder, after reading LOFBG, why no one seems to care about Russia's human rights abuses against Caucasus Muslims. Bullough writes of Khasan Bibulatov, a Chechen man who was horribly tortured by Russians. Zarema Muzhakoyeva is one of the most pathetic human beings I've ever read about - her life story is right out of an over-the-top Dickens orphanage. She gave up her suicide bomb mission, cooperated with the Russian police, and was still jailed for twenty years. I

wonder if so little attention is paid to victims of Russian oppression in the Caucasus because Russia committed many of these crimes as a communist government, and leftists don't want to remind the world that communists were the last century's most prolific murderers.

Excellent history covering the 19th Century through to the present of the peoples of the Caucasus Mountains. The author has done thorough research of the 19th Century and World War experiences of this fascinating region by studying the few and often biased traveler accounts from those periods. And, the author has traveled through the region in recent decades and was on the scene during some of the important recent events. The main groups covered are the Circassians, Balkars, Chechens, and Dagestanis, plus of course Russians who have been mainly working to stamp out the other groups. The author brings the history to life through extensive interviews with people from the region, some of whom are in exile communities outside of the Caucasus.

Engrossing and tragic, this book puts a whole new perspective on the struggles of the Muslims in Chechnya and other mountain regions that battle Russia. Terrorism and involving civilians is never acceptable, but neither is the actions of larger countries, as the author does a very good job of pointing out in this fascinating book which combines current events and history flawlessly.

This History of the Caucuses has been very well written and researched. Oliver Bullough gives a great picture of Chechnya especially during the 1990's with war against Russia. But Bullough also delves into the history of the entire region in a most readable and delightful manner. He does a very good job of explaining the many different peoples, cultures and religions. He also talks about the Diaspora and the many groups and their forced migrations under the Czars, the Soviet Union and Russia. These people are not easy to understand as knowledge of each group, religion, culture and language will go a long way to a better understanding. Bullough goes a long way of solving this mystery. It makes me glad that I found this book and was able to read because here is many groups of people that we are called after (Caucasian) and we in the West have no idea what they are like and how little in common we have with them. I recommend this book to anyone who is serious about History.

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