

FIRST KILL YOUR FAMILY

Child Soldiers of Uganda
and the Lord's Resistance Army



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“Richard Opio has neither the look of a cold-blooded killer nor the heart of one. Yet as his mother and father lay on the ground with their hands tied, Richard used the blunt end of an ax to crush their skulls. He was ordered to do this by a unit commander of the Lord’s Resistance Army, a rebel group that has terrorized northern Uganda for twenty years. The memory racks Richard’s slender body as he wipes away tears.”

For more than twenty years, beginning in the mid-1980s, the Lord’s Resistance Army has ravaged northern Uganda. Tens of thousands have been slaughtered, and thousands more mutilated and traumatized. At least 1.5 million people have been driven from a pastoral existence into the squalor of refugee camps.

The leader of the rebel army is the rarely seen Joseph Kony, a former witchdoctor and self-professed spirit medium who continues to evade justice and wield power from somewhere near the Congo-Sudan border. Kony claims he not only can predict the future but also can control the minds of his fighters. And control them he does: the Lord’s Resistance Army consists of children who are abducted from their homes under cover of night. As initiation, the boys are forced to commit atrocities—murdering their parents, friends, and relatives—and the kidnapped girls are forced into lives of sexual slavery and labor.

In *First Kill Your Family*, veteran journalist Peter Eichstaedt goes into the war-torn villages and refugee camps, talking to former child soldiers, child “brides,” and other victims. He examines the cultlike convictions of the army; how a pervasive belief in witchcraft, the spirit world, and the supernatural gave rise to this and other deadly movements; and what the global community can do to bring peace and justice to the region. This insightful analysis delves into the war’s foundations and argues that, much like Rwanda’s genocide, international intervention is needed to stop Africa’s virulent cycle of violence.

First Kill Your Family: Child Soldiers of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army Details

Date : Published February 1st 2009 by Chicago Review Press

ISBN : 9781556527999

Author : Peter Eichstaedt

Format : Hardcover 336 pages

Genre : Cultural, Africa, Nonfiction, Eastern Africa, Uganda, History, War



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From Reader Review First Kill Your Family: Child Soldiers of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army for online ebook

Lauren Hopkins says

This is a brilliant telling of the story of the Lord's Resistance Army and how they've affected northern Uganda, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic over their twenty-year reign. Written by a journalist who specialized in the area at a time when no one knew what the LRA was, the book is part history and part investigative journalism, talking in detail of the origins of this cult army responsible for the death and displacement of millions of Ugandans while also explaining more current developments in terms of the peace talks and the search for Joseph Kony. The writing is interesting and includes many personal accounts of the war from people who lived through it, including former child soldiers, abducted girls, and even high-ranking members of the LRA like Vincent Otti, subsequently killed by Kony over disagreements about the peace process. It's an incredibly detailed and important read, especially for those interested in problems facing Africa today.

Anna Dimitrova says

Like all books written by journalists, this too left me with an impression I am reading a long newspaper article and there is something more deep to dig in that's missing. Having said that, the book is worth reading but it's more a brief history of the LRA than something else

Rhona says

OK, I am done reading this stuff to prepare for my Uganda trip. I am prepared. A person can only handle so much tragedy and sadness....It is time to move onto something much lighter....

Laura says

This was a bit dry being that it was written from a journalists point of view, however, the information that he put forth is very disturbing. It seems that there is nothing that anyone can or will do to stop the devastation that the Lord's Resistance Army continues to perpetuate. I found it incredible that the World is not doing anything to stop this, nor seems to care since this has been going on for over 20 years and we as Westerners barely hear about this.

The end of this book wasn't very heartening as his final few sentences are: When he fought in northern Uganda, (Kony) he toyed with the Ugandan government. And now he has the international community dancing for him. The band plays on. Overall, this book is very informative and gives a person insight and knowledge into the LRA, the struggles of the people of the various countries and the continued ugliness that is being perpetuated.

dianne says

His lack of insight is sometimes astounding:

on p. 97: "Appeals to the Aristotelian notion of man's highest aspect, the soul, are little more than deceptive sales gimmicks, crude tricks on a street corner that rob the poor of what little they have, even life and limb. Everyone and everything is fair game. And it is all done for the aggrandizement of the hucksters and the silver-tongued preachers.".

he is, in fact, trashing "witch doctors" taking degrading descriptions from the local Catholic priests; he seems to entirely miss the irony that he could be trashing priests and taking descriptions from Traditional Healers.

Often just gets it wrong: p. 102: some of his counter-factual non-history "Alero says it is an ancient practice. 'Cutting off the hands comes from the use of bow and arrow and spears,' he said, because without them, an enemy is rendered incapable of using such weapons."

when in FACT the first cutting off of hands on the continent of Africa was in the Congo under King Leopold who didn't want ammunition wasted on hunting so for every bullet the Belgian colonialist soldiers used, they had to produce a human hand (or alternatively head) to prove the bullet actually killed a person. Not ancient, not African. Rather the cutting off of hands was: European, colonial, "Christian".

or on p. 245: (re genocide, specifically Rwanda's) "...that humans have hardly distanced themselves from the remorseless beasts with which we share the planet."

Has he EVER met an animal? They do not kill unnecessarily. this author just pisses me off. Very uncritical and vastly uninformed, IMHO.

Ayne Ray says

Eichstaedt puts forth a detailed accounting of the often ignored horrors taking place in Uganda, including kidnapping young children to serve as soldiers or "brides" (i.e. sex slaves), the beating, mutilation and murder of dissenters, and the overall destruction of the country as it spirals out of control through violence, avarice, and greed. While the book takes a more journalistic approach, it does include copious first-person accounts and leaves the reader wondering why we know so little (or choose to care) about this country as opposed to, say, Sudan, Zimbabwe, or Sierra Leone. A powerful and important book, and yet another story of the failure of European colonialism.

Laurie says

This book really explains the 20+ year war that has been going on in Northern Uganda (and now spreading to neighboring countries) -it's origins, major players, the politics involved, and notable events. I was relieved, at the end of the book, to learn that even the author still doesn't understand the motives of Joseph Kony and why this war has lasted so long. I especially appreciated learning more about the role of the Ugandan government and the conspiracies involved. There is so little available literature out there that focuses on this conflict - Eichstaedt has provided a very valuable resource.

Ro says

This book is terribly upsetting - the worst part is it's all real. I never wanted to read it, but I have met several people who work with the kids who have escaped the LRA and I understand the places they are talking about so it is interesting to me.

Mary says

I thought this would be more about child soldiers and less about the Lord's Resistance Army so I was disappointed when it really was about the LRA. Good information to read before going to Uganda but not a book I'd ever pick up again.

Eline says

The book follows the Ugandan history of Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army. It is a terrible history and therefore not always an enjoyable read. Still i believe it is very important to know about the situation. Africa's wars and problems have been generally overlooked, something i find horrible. Peter Eichstaedt portrays several sides to the story and the book is full of information and possible explanations. Definitely a read I recommend, though one does not necessarily need to read every page of the book since it speaks about quite a range of aspects to the conflict.

Ellie says

Harsh and real.

Megan says

This is the second book I've read by this author. While I am attracted to the topics he writes about, I'm left wishing his writing was more engaging.

Mike says

For comparison's sake I would say that this book is the Ugandan equivalent of Philip Gourevitch's book *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families* on the Rwandan genocide (and that's very high praise, just for the record). In fact I wouldn't be surprised if Peter Eichstaedt had this book in

mind while he was writing: it has the same combination of colonial history and recounting of the war, combined with smaller vignettes and personal anecdotes -- with the overarching goal of drawing out the reason behind the conflict.

Of course the comparison does break down, most significantly because Philip Gourevitch is a much better writer. That being said I would highly recommend this book, particularly as an introduction to and explanation of the conflict in northern Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army. I don't agree with all of his assertions and opinions, but it's informative and an easy read.

Dennis Willingham says

Interesting book on the ongoing war in Uganda. Does a great job explaining many of the things that confuse me about Africa, tribalism, problems caused by post-colonial borders that don't take the pre-colonial factors into account, the seeming abandonment of kidnaped child soldiers and "brides" even after they return home, and lots more. A good place to start if you have an interest in the area.

Judy says

"Can we all get along?" By the time I staggered to the end of this book, I thought of Rodney King and his plea for calm during the 1992 L.A. riots. Apparently, L.A. to Uganda, just getting along is quite the challenge.

Take "a very polite man...a peaceful farmer" cum witch doctor who then becomes a revolutionary force and returns to viciously attack his hometown and the entire north end of Uganda. Add a corrupt government and a warrior tribe living on prime farmland, plus missionaries and U.S. aid money that never reaches the people for whom it's intended.

The result is tragedy as written up in this complicated book that is a bit too much information for those, like me, completely unschooled in the geopolitics of Africa. Finally, an ah-ha moment as a tribal elder explains the situation: "When two elephants struggle, it is the grass that suffer. We are the grass."

I wish Eichstaedt would write a "First Kill Your Family: The Light Version." I do not need to be entertained and I certainly need to be educated, but I found this scholarly book a ponderous read.
