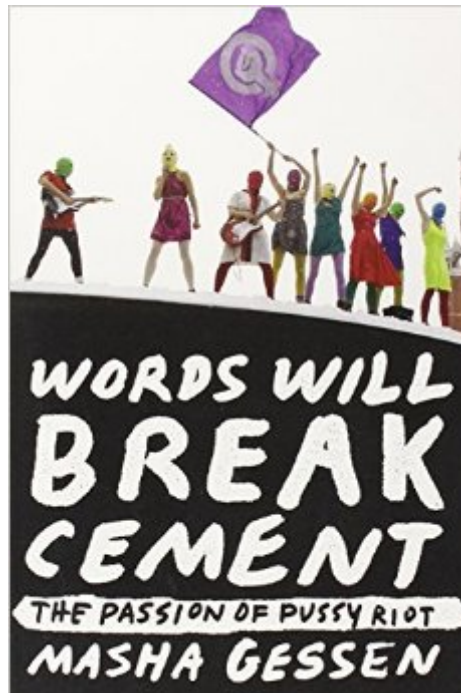


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Words Will Break Cement: The Passion Of Pussy Riot



Synopsis

The heroic story of Pussy Riot, who resurrected the power of truth in a society built on lies. On February 21, 2012, five young women entered the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. In neon-colored dresses, tights, and balaclavas, they performed a "punk prayer" beseeching the "Mother of God" to "get rid of Putin." They were quickly shut down by security, and in the weeks and months that followed, three of the women were arrested and tried, and two were sentenced to a remote prison colony. But the incident captured international headlines, and footage of it went viral. People across the globe recognized not only a fierce act of political confrontation but also an inspired work of art that, in a time and place saturated with lies, found a new way to speak the truth. Masha Gessen's riveting account tells how such a phenomenon came about. Drawing on her exclusive, extensive access to the members of Pussy Riot and their families and associates, she reconstructs the fascinating personal journeys that transformed a group of young women into artists with a shared vision, gave them the courage and imagination to express it unforgettably, and endowed them with the strength to endure the devastating loneliness and isolation that have been the price of their triumph.

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Customer Reviews

"If they wanted to show something radical, feminist, independent, street-based, and Russian, they would have to make it up." Since I first read about Pussy Riot in Western media I've been hooked. Their actions were both understandable but somehow foreign in the eyes of someone who has

never been deprived of basic human rights. Once I opened the book I could not put it down. Gessen is the perfect interpreter of Russian culture, in her graceful writing style she combines the story of Pussy Riot with Russian history, literature, culture and language. She explains the context of their actions and puts their staged trial into perspective for the Western reader. The three members of Pussy Riot, Nadya Tolokonnikova, Yekaterina Samutsevich and Maria Alyokhina, which were prosecuted for the minute-long punk prayer are the focus of the book. I felt as I got to know the women behind the masks, but more importantly, I got a better understanding of why they felt obligated to protest in the way they did. We follow the three women from their first performance to a Russian penal colony. Their journey is described by Gessen with the help of the women's speeches in court, interviews with their families, letters they sent from prison and interviews with themselves. If you have ever been curious about the actions of Pussy Riot, showed an interest in Russian history and culture, if you are in favor of human rights and if you call yourself a feminist: this book is for you.

I loved this book! I gained a great deal of respect for the women of Pussy Riot, their creativity, their humor, and especially their courage. Gessen does a wonderful job of describing their different personalities, including not only their virtues, but also their faults and failings, as well as the various quirks of mind that makes each of them unique individuals. By the end of the book you will love each of them like a friend, and you will be horrified at what they went through trying to make the world a better place. Gessen raises an interesting question in the book. What is it that makes a political action work? What is it that grabs people's attention? Pussy Riot had launched a number of actions, almost all of them, they felt, better executed than the "Punk Rock Prayer" to the Virgin Mary in the cathedral that made them so famous. They went into hiding afterwards, but as they did they wondered if it was even necessary. In all likelihood, they suspected, no one was going to pay them any attention. The action felt like a dud. But sometimes life doesn't turn out the way you expect. Soon Putin himself would be on trial in the world press, trying to explain that he wasn't really the overbearing dictatorial jerk that about everyone concluded he was for what he did to Pussy Riot. If you are interested in political activism, this book will help you figure out what works and what doesn't.

This is an incredibly important book in revealing the lack of justice in the Russian court system that is so foreign to an American reader. Indeed the court system exists as an arm of the government attached to the leader. It seemed that Masha Gessen, a wonderful Russian author, journalist, and

activist was pressed by time to get the story out as fast as possible, and there's no doubt she overcame many obstacles to write it. The author did the impossible - or at least the very difficult- she corresponded with the women of Pussy Riot despite the censorship, gained the trust of their families to interview them, visited the women at the prisons, and attended court hearings and gained access to the records. While the story doesn't have the usual flow of Gessen's writing, the story is gripping and timely. It also explains the logic of Pussy Riot's actions, especially protesting the close ties between the government and the Orthodox Church.

Masha Gessen is a writer I admire and trust, and like her I am impressed by the courage shown by the women of Pussy Riot, but "Words Will Break Cement" is not her best work. I think Gessen felt obligated to write this book in support of what Pussy Riot stands for, but the writing gets increasingly trivial and tedious as the book progresses. The book has its interesting and even amusing spots when it describes the bumbling and clueless Russian police/bureaucracy's response to Pussy Riot's antics, but otherwise the book is eminently forgettable.

A clear look at how things are in Putin's Russia. We need to be very concerned about what he is doing in and to Russia and the Ukraine. He is a frightening man, actually, a thug, only concerned with cementing his power as an ultimate dictator and controlling every aspect of the country; its people and its boundless resources for his own gain.

The further you go into the book the more it will shock you. It is a story of a group of idealistic women punished with an iron fist for a youthful (and admittedly, rather irresponsible and clearly provocative) appearance in a national cathedral. The book, if read to the end, will leave you speechless. The first human instinct here is to try to help, but there are simply no tools. There is an endless sadness to the story of contemporary Russia. Nobody insists that the West is perfect but the Russian reality certainly doesn't belong to the 21st century. It seems like the concepts of fair trial or human rights are not in use there, except for propaganda purposes. The book is not an easy read and it tends to be tedious, but it certainly does have lots of content and it is entirely based on primary sources, it does not quote newspapers, journalists or other books. A very honest approach indeed. I am looking forward to more books by this author.

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