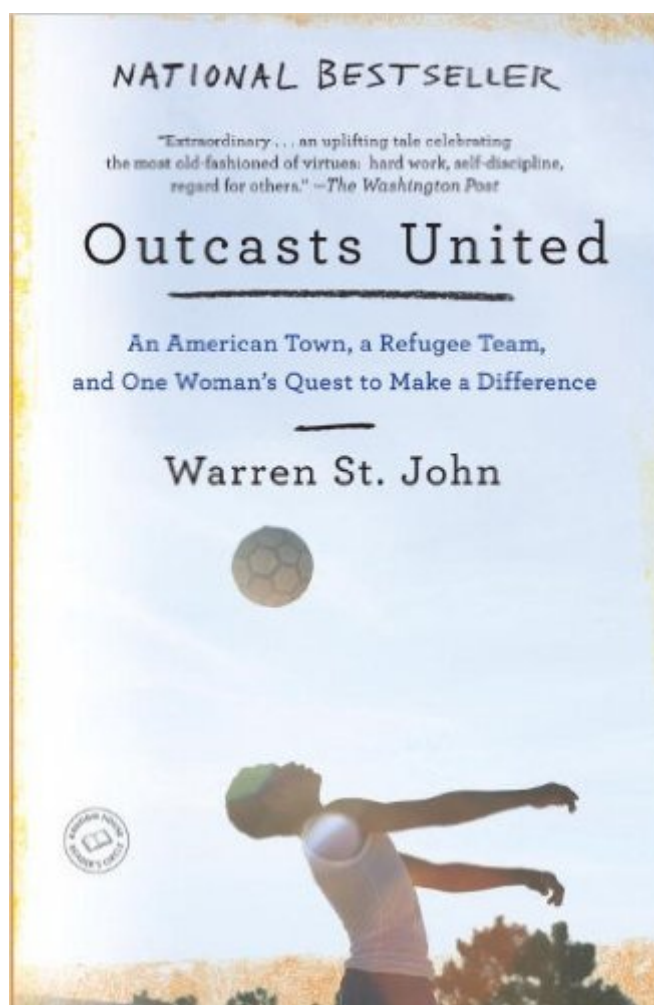


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# Outcasts United: An American Town, A Refugee Team, And One Woman's Quest To Make A Difference



## Synopsis

The extraordinary tale of a refugee youth soccer team and the transformation of a small American town Clarkston, Georgia, was a typical Southern town until it was designated a refugee settlement center in the 1990s, becoming the first American home for scores of families in flight from the world's war zones—from Liberia and Sudan to Iraq and Afghanistan. Suddenly Clarkston's streets were filled with women wearing the hijab, the smells of cumin and curry, and kids of all colors playing soccer in any open space they could find. The town also became home to Luma Mufleh, an American-educated Jordanian woman who founded a youth soccer team to unify Clarkston's refugee children and keep them off the streets. These kids named themselves the Fugees. Set against the backdrop of an American town that without its consent had become a vast social experiment, *Outcasts United* follows a pivotal season in the life of the Fugees and their charismatic coach. Warren St. John documents the lives of a diverse group of young people as they miraculously coalesce into a band of brothers, while also drawing a fascinating portrait of a fading American town struggling to accommodate its new arrivals. At the center of the story is fiery Coach Luma, who relentlessly drives her players to success on the soccer field while holding together their lives—and the lives of their families—in the face of a series of daunting challenges. This fast-paced chronicle of a single season is a complex and inspiring tale of a small town becoming a global community—and an account of the ingenious and complicated ways we create a home in a changing world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

St. John (Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer) builds on his 2007 New York Times article about the Fugees, a soccer program for boys from families of refugees from war-torn nations who have been resettled in the town of Clarkston, Ga., 13 miles east of Atlanta. Led by the founder and coach Luma Mufleh, a strong-willed, Jordanian woman who turned her back on a privileged past to stay in America after attending Smith College, the three youth teams are a conglomeration of players from Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East. The challenges they face are many, including an ongoing fight against city hall for a field on which to play, and getting by with subpar equipment. Their biggest challenge, however, is the difficulty immigrants face in learning the ways of a strange land and living with the memories of tragedy (some players had lost a parent to violence or imprisonment). In spite of it all, the Fugees compete admirably with mostly white, better-funded suburban teams. St. John begins with an inspiring description of a beautifully played game and then delves into the team's formation, but his storytelling takes on the methodical approach of a long series of newspaper articles that lack narrative flair and progression. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Adult/High School "St. John, a New York Times reporter, brought Clarkston, GA, to national attention in 2007 with a series of articles about the changes in the small Southern town brought about by an influx of refugees from all over the world. This book comes out of those articles. It gives more detail about the town and, most particularly, the three soccer teams composed of refugee boys (the Fugees) who were coached by Luma Mufleh, an American-educated Jordanian woman. The book is a sports story, a sociological study, a tale of global and local politics, and the story of a determined woman who became involved in the lives of her young charges. Keeping the boys in school and out of gangs, finding a place for them to practice, and helping their families survive in a new world all became part of her daily life. Engagingly written, this volume will appeal to fans of Larry Colton's *Counting Coup* (Grand Central, 2000), H. G. Bissinger's *Friday Night Lights* (HarperCollins, 1991), and Madeleine Blais's *In These Girls, Hope Is a Muscle* (Grand Central, 1996).â" Sarah Flowers, formerly at Santa Clara County Library, CA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I chose this book from a course list for an undergrad liberal arts paper. I grew up playing soccer and thought, "I love soccer, and there is most likely something deeper to this story but it beats reading a

biography or historical event novel." I very pleasantly surprised! This tugged on my heart strings, brought a smile to my face, a tear to my eye, and had me disgusted and appalled by various people/events throughout the book. I just finished the audio book while I was waiting for the paperback to arrive. Very well written. This story is honest, horrible and wonderful all at the same time. Many opportunities to step back and wonder: Do I think like that? How do I feel about this? What would I do if that happened?

Warren St. John relates the story of Luma Mufleh, a Jordanian responsible for serving the refugee community of Clarkston, Georgia. After graduating from Smith College, Ms. Mufleh decided to stay in the United States, as opportunities for women were few and far between in Jordan. As a result of this decision, her old-guard parents disowned her and she was left to fend for herself. A lifelong soccer enthusiast, she was surprised to see countless immigrant youths playing pickup games of soccer in empty lots in Clarkston. She organized a group into a team called The Fugees, pairing rigorous soccer practices with mandatory after-school classes. Managing 45 young men between the ages of 10 and 17 is no easy task, as St. John shows us thorough Mufleh's struggles to build solidarity and confidence amongst group of immigrants from all over the world. The author shows us, through first-person interviews with Mufleh, the players and their families, the tenacity and spirit of those who seek refuge from war-torn countries only to encounter difficulties in their new homes. Clarkston's mayor as well as a number of law enforcement officers and civil servants do all they can to prevent the Fugees from finding a home playing field, despite Mufleh's passionate advocacy of her charges. St. John points out how refugees' struggles in Clarkston are a microcosm of the immigrant experience as a whole. This deeply inspiring story is told artfully, in thoroughly readable prose.

Great book!

Good Read

School text

It is a wonderful story of a Jordanian woman's journey, who through forming a soccer team, pulls together refugee families. The author, a New York Times reporter, does a tremendous job of letting us meet a Southern town faced with accommodating refugees from many lands and the refugee

families in adapting to a new culture.

This book is well-written a good way to get a high-level insight into the trouble immigrants and local natives in the United States face when placed in the same town in such a government enforced and large scale way. A great example of how one sport, one unrelenting woman, and the backlash of a scared town can do for a bunch of young kids that need nothing more than to have purpose.

The book has a good story and it is well written. The author wrote it in a way that is easy to understand, even with the larger words thrown in every now and then.

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