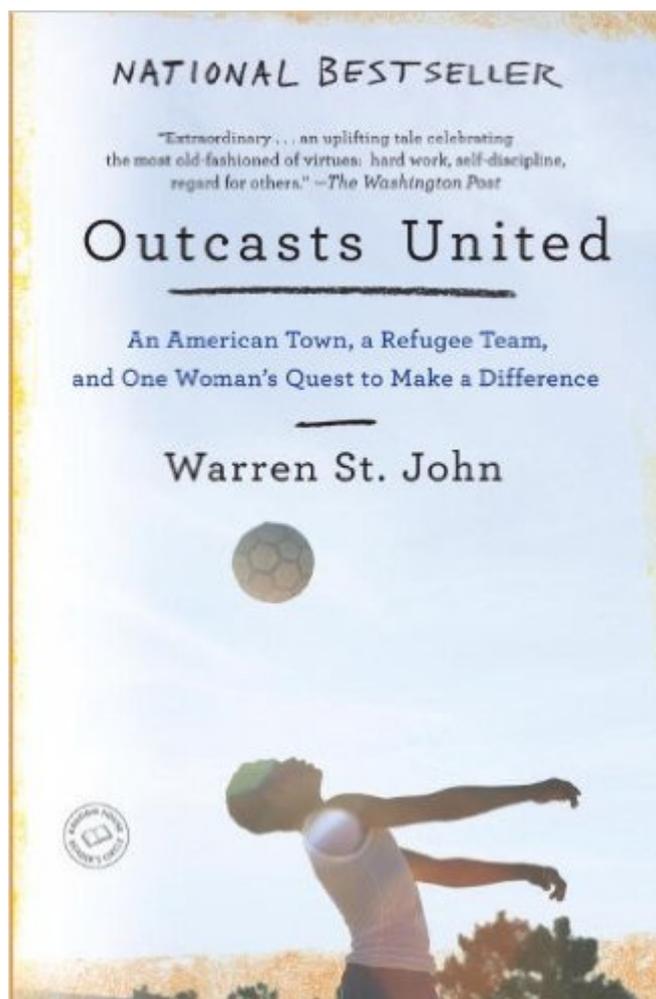


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# Outcasts United: An American Town, A Refugee Team, And One Woman's Quest To Make A Difference



## 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

As someone who once worked for a company where I had colleagues who were refugees of war-torn countries, this book was personally relevant. Just as in the book, I was told the most astounding and frightening tales of what people did to survive on a day-to-day basis and how they were ultimately forced to flee their homes for fear of their own lives and those of their families. It really made me think of how lucky I have always been to have never had to face anything remotely like what they'd gone through. I had the same feeling when I read this book and St. John delved into the stories of the Fugees players and what they had gone through before reaching the U.S. Perhaps the saddest part of this book is the reality that greets these people when they reach the U.S. It was sobering to read about how they were settled in apartment complexes where they lived next door to drug dealers and gang members. It was sad to think that these people had escaped the devastation of their homes only to end up in a totally foreign culture in which they'd face a lot of the same dangers. It was also disturbing to read about their treatment at the hands of the police and the long-time residents of the town. I don't think St. John was trying to paint these people out to be evil. Rather, he showed how human fears of that which is different and misunderstood can really tear at the fabric of a society. These people struggle with trying to find a way to deal with the influx of refugees into their town. Sometimes their solutions are brilliant, such as the story of the local grocery store, and sometimes they are just wrong, such as the Fugees inability to find a decent soccer field near their homes.

How does a soccer coach find a practice field for her team? Google Earth. But why, in a town that's not short of parks, is she looking for a field on Google Earth? Because the mayor keeps issuing what seem like illegal orders to deny her team access to any of the lush local fields. And why would he do that? Because this is Clarkston, Georgia, a town of 7,200 a dozen miles from Atlanta. And the members of the soccer team are not only boys of color, they are foreigners --- Africans, mostly --- who have come to Clarkston as part of a wave of immigrants. 'Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, an American Town' is set in the feel-bad reality of a small town that never wanted to be the dumping ground for people fleeing conflict zones. It's a story of bumbling villains --- the mayor is a decent soul who's way over his head; the bad cop is the sort of jerk you can find anywhere --- and unlikely heroes. The first heroes are, of course, the Fugees, who overcome terrible memories, language barriers and unthinking prejudice to become --- against great odds --- a team. But at the top of the list is the team's coach: Luma Mufleh, who is, in her own way, also a refugee. The boys are really the lesser story, because without the commitment and self-sacrifice of this exceptional coach, their team would never have lasted a year. So weep for their pasts. Cheer for their success. Worry about

their futures. But reserve the standing ovation for Luma Mufleh. Born into privilege in Jordan, she graduated from Smith College and decided to stay in the United States. Her father's response was to cut her off. "No more money, no more phone calls. He was finished with his daughter." So the Smith graduate got work cleaning toilets and washing dishes.

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