

# ONE MARYLAND ONE BOOK 2010

READER'S GUIDE



***OUTCASTS UNITED***

BY WARREN ST. JOHN

## IMAGINE IF EVERYONE IN MARYLAND READ THE SAME BOOK AT THE SAME TIME

### WHAT NEW THINGS WOULD WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT WITH ONE ANOTHER?

One Maryland One Book, a program of the Maryland Center for the Book at the Maryland Humanities Council, is Maryland's first and only statewide community reading program. It is designed to bring together diverse people in communities across the state through the shared experience of reading the same book and participating in book-centered discussions and other related programs at public libraries, high schools, colleges and universities, museums, bookstores, and other organizations.

The 2010 book selection is *Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, an American Town* by Warren St. John. *Outcasts United* is the story of a soccer team of refugee boys called the Fugees from war zones in Liberia, Congo, Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan; their coach, Luma Muffleh; and the town where they live—Clarkston, Georgia—a sleepy, southern town upended by refugee resettlement. The story is not only an inspiring tale of a small town becoming global, but also a story about resilience, the power of one person to make a difference and the challenge of creating community in a place where people seem to have little in common.

The Maryland Humanities Council has at the core of its mission the deep commitment to providing Marylanders with an opportunity to gather and discuss issues important to their lives, believing that a great work of literature provides an excellent springboard to do so. One Maryland One Book is not just about reading or literature. It is also about bringing people together for meaningful dialogue.

**Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, an American Town**  
By Warren St. John  
31 chapters; 300 pages (excluding Author's Note & Reader's Guide)  
Spiegel & Grau Trade Paperback, 2009  
ISBN 978-0-385-52204-5

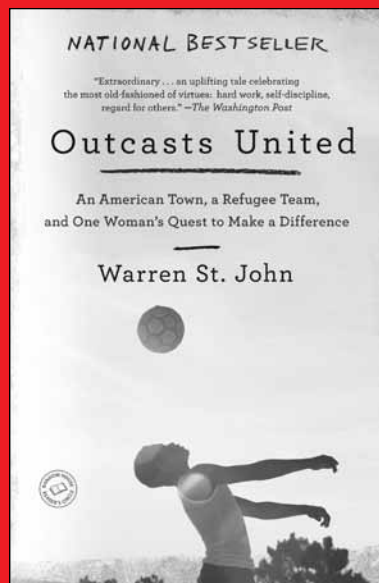
### GET THE BOOK

Pick up a copy of *Outcasts United* at your local public library or bookstore and start up a conversation with your family, friends, co-workers or even the person sitting next to you as you ride the bus or train. This is your chance to take a moment to have a great conversation with an old friend or to make a new one.

### JOIN IN

We invite you to join Honorary Chair, Maryland's First Lady Katie O'Malley, and thousands of other Marylanders at one of the many book discussions and related programs happening around the state in September and October. Look for Warren St. John at the Baltimore Book Festival on Sunday, September 26 and other venues around the state during the last week of September.

To find One Maryland One Book programs in your area, go to: [www.onemarylandonebook.org](http://www.onemarylandonebook.org) and click on **Calendar**.



### LETTER FROM THE HONORARY CHAIRPERSON FIRST LADY KATIE O'MALLEY

On behalf of the State of Maryland, it is my pleasure to invite you to participate in the third year of One Maryland One Book, our state's community reading project. Every year, thousands of Marylanders make time in their busy schedules to take part in the invaluable shared experience of reading the same book and then coming together to discuss the book and how it relates to issues important to their daily lives. I encourage you to join us this year in reading *Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, an American Town* by Warren St. John.

America is known for welcoming those from foreign shores who seek economic opportunity, safety, and political freedom. *Outcasts United* offers a window into the lives of a soccer team of refugee boys, the remarkable woman who coaches them, and the town where they live—a small, quiet, southern community turned upside down by the process of refugee resettlement. *Outcasts United* is complex, inspiring, and sheds a bright light on the many ways we create community in a very complicated and rapidly changing world.

A program of the Maryland Humanities Council, One Maryland One Book is possible through the generosity of our community partners and sponsors, who have been great supporters of the program since its inception. We graciously thank them for their continued support. I hope you will join me and thousands of Marylanders by visiting your local public library or bookstore to pick up a copy of *Outcasts United* and join in the conversation about how we create and define community both in Maryland and in this country.

Thank you for taking part in this very special project.

Sincerely,

Katie O'Malley  
First Lady of Maryland

## ABOUT THE BOOK



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 last thanks to Luma Mufleh, an American-educated Jordanian woman who started a youth soccer team to unify Clarkston's refugee children. With unsentimental compassion and grueling training sessions, and defying some local resistance, Mufleh lead her players through an unforgettable season. In return, from the kids and their grateful loved ones, she receives “a family of 120.”

Set against the backdrop of a fading American town struggling to accommodate its new arrivals, *Outcasts United* is the stunning real-life story of an inspiring group of refugees and a woman who, with tough love and fiery determination, changes an entire community for the better.<sup>1</sup>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Warren St. John is a feature writer for *The New York Times* and best-selling author of *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer: A Road Trip into the Heart of Fan Mania* (2004). *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer* was named one of *Sports Illustrated's* best books of the year, and ranked number one on *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* list of the best books ever written about collegiate athletics. *Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, an American Town* is his latest book based on an acclaimed series of front-page stories in *The New York Times*, which was released to rave reviews in early 2009.

St. John has written for *The New Yorker*, *Slate*, *Wired* and *The New York Observer*, in addition to his work in *The New York Times*. He has appeared on *The Today Show*, National Public Radio, MSNBC, CNN and other outlets to discuss his experience reporting on the town and team in *Outcasts United*. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, St. John attended The Altamont School. He studied English literature at Columbia College in New York City, where he now lives with his wife and daughter.

<sup>1</sup> from the back cover

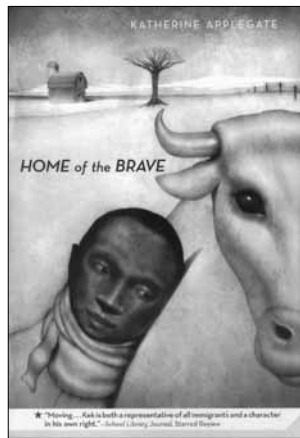
## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Like her players, Coach Luma is a Clarkston “outsider” in terms of her nationality. In what ways does her experience as an immigrant compare with those of her players? How does her “outsider” status affect the bond between the coach and her team?
- 2 Soccer is considered by many to be the “world’s game.” What are the unique qualities of soccer that make it particularly well-suited for refugee children? Do you think other sports would bring the refugee boys together in the same way? How does soccer create a sense of community for the players when they come from such different backgrounds?
- 3 Chapter 3 describes a study led by Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam that states that inhabitants of hyperdiverse communities, such as Clarkston, tend to withdraw from collective life and distrust their neighbors. Are you surprised by Putnam’s findings? Why or why not? Do you see examples of this withdrawal in your community? How can communities best overcome this unfortunate tendency?
- 4 The refugee community in Clarkston is composed of a multiplicity of religions, ethnicities, and languages. How do the experiences of the players contrast with the complexities that face the refugee community as a whole? The town of Clarkston as a whole?
- 5 What challenges of being both a refugee and a teenager impact the Fugees?
- 6 Is diversity within a community something that can be achieved through a proscribed process or does it just happen? Do you think diversity develops and grows by addressing it as an issue, or do you think it is better left to develop organically?
- 7 Many of Luma’s team rules teach what some would consider “traditional” values. Given the strong sense of values that Luma was working to instill in the Fugees, why do you think many Clarkston residents continued to oppose the team?
- 8 While there were many residents who did not welcome the refugee community, some residents found ways to adapt to the changing face of Clarkston. Discuss some of these changes. Have you seen similar changes in your community?
- 9 There is a disconnect between the opportunity many refugees thought they would experience in the U.S. and the reality of their lives once they arrive. Where does this disconnect occur?
- 10 Discuss Mayor Swaney, his treatment of the Fugees and the refugee community in general and how his actions as mayor affected the community.



## FOR YOUNGER READERS

To encourage readers of all ages to participate in One Maryland One Book 2010, we recommend *Home of the Brave* by Katherine Applegate for upper elementary and middle school-age readers. Written in free verse, *Home of the Brave* takes readers on a journey with Kek, a young Sudanese boy, as he travels to the U.S. to live with his aunt and cousins in Minnesota. Look for more suggestions for younger readers later in this guide.



Kek comes from Africa where he lived with his mother, father, and brother. But only he and his mother have survived. Now she's missing, and Kek has been sent to a new home. In America, he sees snow for the first time and feels its sting. He wonders if the people in this new place will be like the winter—cold and unkind. But slowly he makes friends: a girl in foster care, an old woman with a rundown farm, and a sweet, sad cow that reminds Kek of home. As he waits for word of his mother's fate, Kek weathers the tough Minnesota winter by finding warmth in his new friendships, strength in his memories, and belief in his new country.<sup>2</sup>

*Home of the Brave* By Katherine Applegate  
Square Fish Publishing, 2008

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We hope that your participation in One Maryland One Book inspires you to keep reading, talking, and delving into the many thought-provoking topics examined in *Outcasts United*. The following list of books and movies might also be of interest. We encourage you to continue your exploration!

## FICTION

*Things Fall Apart: A Novel* - Chinua Achebe

Considered by many to be Achebe's masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart* tells the story of Okonkwo, strongman of an Ibo village in Nigeria, as he witnesses the destruction of his culture and the loss of his own place within it.

*Little Bee* - Chris Cleave

*Little Bee* is a haunting novel about the tenuous friendship that blooms between two disparate strangers—one an illegal Nigerian refugee, the other a recent widow from suburban London.

*Krik? Krak!* - Edwidge Danticat

This award-winning collection of stories details daily life under dictatorship in Haiti. The stories tell of women who continue loving behind prison walls and in the face of unfathomable loss and of people who resist the brutality of their rulers through the powers of imagination.

<sup>2</sup> from the publisher

## FICTION CONT.

*What is the What* - Dave Eggers

Based closely on true experiences of the Lost Boys of Sudan, who fled their war-ravaged country to come to the U.S. in the mid-1980s, this novel is heartbreaking and arresting, filled with adventure, suspense, tragedy, and finally, triumph.

*The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* - Dinaw Mengestu

This award-winning fictional debut thoughtfully portrays the isolation and frustration of immigrant life, telling the story of an Ethiopian immigrant struggling to live the American dream in a gentrifying Washington, D.C., neighborhood.

*Cutting for Stone* - Abraham Verghese

The story is a riveting saga of twin brothers, Marion and Shiva Stone, born of a tragic union between a beautiful Indian nun and a brash British surgeon at a mission hospital in Addis Ababa. Orphaned by their mother's death in childbirth and their father's disappearance, and bound together by a preternatural connection and a shared fascination with medicine, the twins come of age as Ethiopia hovers on the brink of revolution.

## NONFICTION

*Silent Exodus: Portraits of Iraqi Refugees in Exile* - Zalma'i Ahad

In 2008, the UN reported that an estimated 4.4 million Iraqis had been displaced from their homes as a result of the war. While nearly half were uprooted internally, the remaining citizens escaped to neighboring countries. Today, months and years into forced flight, many are running out of money, food and the good will of their hosts.

*However Tall the Mountain: A Dream, Eight Girls, and a Journey Home* - Awista Ayub

This book tells the moving account of Ayub's efforts to engage girls in soccer in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban.

*A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* - Ishmael Beah

The riveting story of a boy from Sierra Leone who at the age of 12 fled violent attacks by the rebel army and by age 13 was recruited to fight and kill for the government army.

*They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky: The Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan* - Alephonsion Deng, Benson Deng and Benjamin Ajak

Two brothers and their cousin were all under the age of 7 when they left their homes after terrifying attacks on their villages during the Sudanese civil war. In 2001 they were relocated to the U.S. from a Kenyan refugee camp.

*Zeitoun* - Dave Eggers

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, longtime New Orleans residents Abdulrahman and Kathy Zeitoun are cast into an unthinkable struggle with forces beyond wind and water. In the days after the storm, Abdulrahman travels the flooded streets in a canoe, passing out supplies and helping those he can. A week later, Zeitoun abruptly disappears—arrested and accused of being an agent of al Qaeda.

## NONFICTION CONT.

### *How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory of Globalization* - Franklin Foer

This book presents a wide-ranging tour through the world of soccer, using the sport as an arena to examine world events.

### *Refugees* - Margaret Haerens

This book of collected essays offers varying perspectives on issues related to refugees, including who is responsible for aiding refugees, and U.S. and international policies.

### *Notes from my Travels: Visits with Refugees in Africa, Cambodia, Pakistan, and Ecuador* - Angelina Jolie

From the American actress come the true, personal journals she compiled while performing humanitarian relief efforts in Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Pakistan, and Cambodia.

### *Asylum Denied: A Refugee's Struggle for Safety in America* - David Ngaruri Kenney

The author and his lawyer tell of Kenney's near-murder, imprisonment, and torture in Kenya, his escape to the U.S., and the ordeals and proceedings he faced as U.S. government agencies sought to deport him to Kenya.

### *Strength in What Remains* - Tracy Kidder

Pulitzer Prize-winner Kidder shares the story of Deo, a young man who arrives in America from genocidal and civil war-torn Burundi. Deo lives a precarious existence in Central Park and learns English by reading dictionaries in bookstores until he meets strangers who change his life.

### *One Day the Soldiers Came: Voices of Children in War* - Charles London

London, working with the nonprofit organization Refugees International, interviewed child soldiers and other young people affected by ethnic conflict in Africa, Burma, and the Balkans to bring their plight to the attention of Americans.

### *The Middle of Everywhere: Helping Refugees Enter the American Community* - Mary Bray Pipher

In cities all over the country, refugees arrive daily. This is a book that moves beyond the headlines into the homes of refugees from around the world.



## MORE FOR YOUNGER READERS

### *Diamonds in the Shadow* - Caroline Cooney

This book alternates narratives of American teens in a host family and African refugee teens who can't forget what happened even as they adjust to their new surroundings and try to convince themselves they will eventually find a safe home.

### *The People of Sparks* - Jeanne DuPrau

Hundreds of refugees from the underground city of Ember flee their dying community and head above ground to the unfamiliar city of Sparks. The citizens of the two cities face conflict and challenge as they try to work together. This is the second book in the four-book, science fiction *City of Ember* series.

### *Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees* - Deborah Ellis

This book contains interviews with 23 Iraqi children who have moved away from their homeland. They share their fears, challenges, and struggles to rebuild their lives in foreign lands as refugees of war. (Nonfiction)

### *The Day of the Pelican* - Katherine Paterson

In 1998 when Kosovo hostilities escalate, 13 year-old Meli's life as an ethnic Albanian changes forever and the entire family flees from one refugee camp to another until they are able to immigrate to America and settle in a small Vermont town.

### *The Whispering Cloth: A Refugee's Story* - Pegi Deitz Shea

A young girl in a Thai refugee camp finds the story within herself to create her own pa'ndau, a traditional storytelling cloth. (Juvenile)

### *Under the Persimmon Tree* - Suzanne Staples

During the 2001 Afghan War, the lives of Najmal, a young refugee from Kunduz, Afghanistan, and Nusrat, an American-Muslim teacher who is awaiting her husband's return from Mazar-i-Sharif, intersect at a school in Peshawar, Pakistan.

### *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* - Mary Williams

Eight-year-old Garang, orphaned by a civil war in Sudan, finds the inner strength to help lead other boys as they trek hundreds of miles seeking safety in Ethiopia, then Kenya, and finally in the U.S. (Juvenile)

### *Refugee Boy* - Benjamin Zephaniah

Alem's father leaves him in England, alone, in the hope that Alem will find safety as a refugee. Placed with a foster family, it is his courageous and caring character that wins him the friends, the respect, and ultimately, the legal permission to stay in England and start his own, new life.



## MOVIES

### *Bend It Like Beckham* - Gurinder Chadha

A young British Indian girl is torn between adhering to family traditions and attaining super-stardom on the soccer field.

### *City of Ember* - Gil Kenan

For generations, the people of Ember have flourished in a world of glittering lights. But Ember's once powerful generator is failing and it is up to two teens to save the city.

### *Rebuilding Hope* - Jen Marlowe

Now in their twenties, two Sudanese Lost Boys living in the U.S. embark on a journey back to Sudan to discover whether their homes and families survived, what the current situation is in South Sudan, and how they can help their community rebuild after devastating civil war.

### *The Great Match (La gran final)* - Gerardo Olivares

Three soccer fans, living in the farthest-flung corners of the planet—Mongolia, Niger, and Brazil—are determined to watch the TV broadcast of the 2002 World Cup final.

### *God Grew Tired of Us* - Christopher Quinn and Tommy Walker

This film highlights the story of three Sudanese refugee boys, part of a group that became known as the Lost Boys, who struggled to come to the U.S. for a better life, while still attempting to assist the family and friends they left behind.

### *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* - Gini Reticker

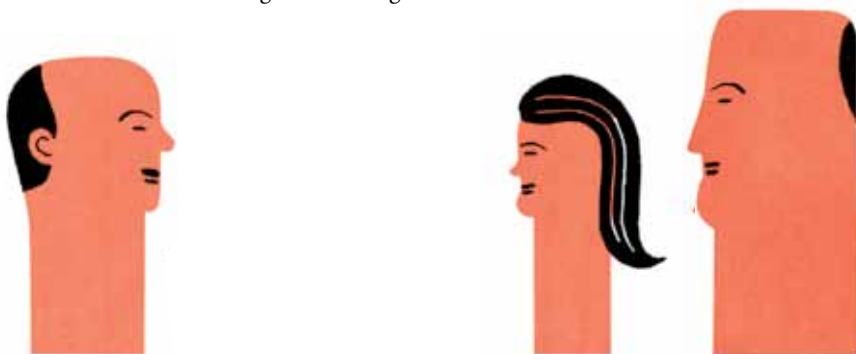
*Pray the Devil Back to Hell* chronicles the remarkable story of the courageous Liberian women who came together to end a bloody civil war and bring peace to their shattered country.

### *Goal Dreams* - Maya Sanbar and Jeffrey Saunders

Comprised of multiple cultures, speaking different languages and having no home field, the Palestinian national soccer team and its players must overcome physical, emotional, cultural, and geographical obstacles just to exist. The documentary follows the team as it prepares for a decisive match in its attempt to qualify for the 2006 World Cup.

### *In This World* - Michael Winterbottom

Two Afghan boys travel from Pakistan through Iran, Turkey, Italy, France, and the UK in search of refuge in London, revealing the desperate measures people take to escape persecution and life-threatening conditions. In Persian, Pashtu, and English with English subtitles.



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Maryland Humanities Council  
108 West Centre Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201

410.685.0095

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