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Summer Reading *Outcasts United* Raises Awareness

June 26, 2013

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— This year, the Illinois Wesleyan University community will read Warren St. John's *Outcasts United: an American Town, A Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference* for Illinois Wesleyan's **Summer Reading Program**.

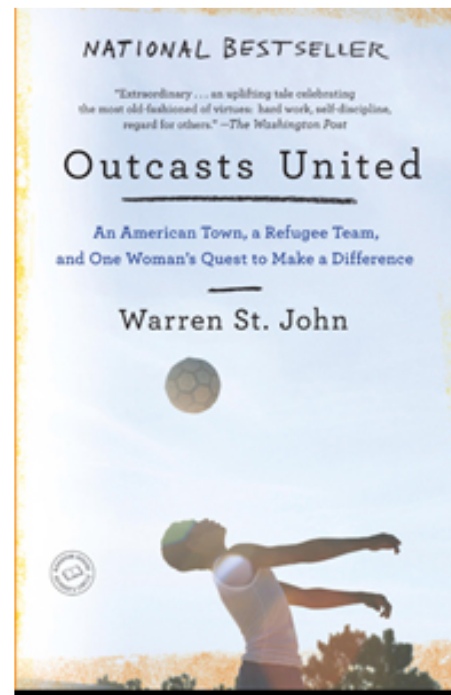
The Summer Reading Program is designed to introduce incoming students to reading, reflecting, discussing and writing critically about a text. It allows students to engage in intellectual exchange with fellow newcomers and faculty and staff members.

The Advising and Summer Reading Committee, in coordination with the University's Speakers Committee, has selected *Outcasts United* (2009) in keeping with the University's mission. IWU's mission includes a comprehensive worldview toward citizenship and globalization, as well as a commitment toward social justice and the value of diversity. Consistent with the University's mission, St. John's story about the refugees and their struggle to assimilate and succeed in American culture—and those who chose to adapt or resist changes the refugees brought to their community—raises awareness and inspires questions and insights about social justice and immigration, diversity and the impact of globalization.

The book is a true story about a soccer team from Clarkston, Ga., known as "The Fugees," formed entirely of refugee children, and about the woman who coached them, Luma Mufleh, an immigrant herself.

The story takes place in a small hamlet, Clarkston, situated approximately 10 miles from downtown Atlanta. According to the *Outcasts United* website, in the 1980s and 1990s, agencies for the resettlement of refugees chose the town as a home for new arrivals. It was hoped the town's proximity to downtown Atlanta would help the refugees find employment. The earliest refugees were from Southeast Asia, then refugees arrived from the conflicts in the Balkans, and later, from Africa and the Middle East, radically changing the cultural landscape of the small southern town. The new influx of immigrants faced resistance and sometimes hostility from the longtime residents of Clarkston. As St. John observed, at Clarkston, soccer meant more than just a game; it meant the game of the immigrants, with the immigrants sometimes being called "the soccer people." At the same time for the immigrant children from different nationalities, soccer was an activity that bound them; based on this common ground Mufleh helped the immigrant children build a new life in Clarkston.

According to a review in *The Observer* (the United Kingdom), "Outcasts United succeeds so emphatically because, just as the Fugees are so much more than a football team, this is much more than a sports book. St. John...has produced a dense and unjudgmental portrait of America in the 21st century."



As a follow up on the summer reading program, St. John is scheduled to be the keynote speaker at the President's Convocation on Wednesday, Sept. 4, 2013 at 11 a.m., in Westbrook Auditorium of Presser Hall (1210 Park St., Bloomington).

St. John has written for the *New York Observer*, *The New Yorker*, *Wired* and *Slate*, in addition to his work as a reporter for *The New York Times*. His first book, *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer: A Journey into the Heart of Fan Mania* (2004), 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. His second book, *Outcasts United* was published in the U.S. in April 2009, and subsequently in the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Japan and China.

Born in Birmingham, Ala., 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.

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