

July 2010

REVIEW: Regeneration! A Journal of Creative Writing

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Recommended Citation

Broome, Susan G. (2010) "REVIEW: Regeneration! A Journal of Creative Writing," *Georgia Library Quarterly*: Vol. 47 : Iss. 3 , Article 22.

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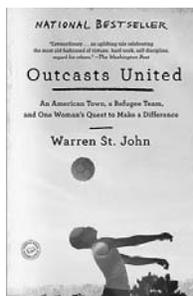
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FICTION

Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference by Warren St. John

(Spiegel & Grau, 2009; ISBN 978-0-385-52203-8, \$24.95.)



Expanding upon a *New York Times* report, author Warren St. John writes a compelling story of a woman coach, her soccer team comprised of refugee boys, and the impact they had on a small Southern town. Not only the tale of how one person can make a difference, it highlights the struggles of both immigrants and native residents as they adjust and adapt to each other.

Outcasts United revolves around the coach, Luma Mufleh, a young Jordanian woman educated and living in the United States. Driving around her neighborhood, she stumbles upon a group of boys playing soccer in a parking lot. These boys are refugees, mostly from African countries but also Iraq, Bosnia and Afghanistan, who along with their families have been re-settled in Clarkston, Ga. Coach Luma single-handedly and with little support creates a soccer team for them known as the "Fugees" (short for refugees.) Clarkston, a small town about 13 miles east of Atlanta is remarkable only for being a "homogenous, white, Southern town." Unprepared to receive and re-settle numerous ethnic

groups, the residents are divided between those resistant to these changes, including the mayor himself, and those who recognize that change is inevitable.

The book veers back and forth between the personal struggles of coach Luma and her team, the boys' difficulties within a new environment, the immigrant experience for the boys' families, and the town of Clarkston as it adjusts to a new geography of immigrant residents. With all this, the reading is a bit disjointed at times. But the story is moving and empathetic. The author has produced a book where the reader roots for the Fugees from start to finish. It is recommended for both young adults and adult readers. ►►

— Reviewed by **Amy Harris**
Undergraduate Services Librarian
Georgia State University

NONFICTION

Regeneration! A Journal of Creative Writing by the Regeneration Writers of Mercer University's College of Continuing & Professional Studies (The Regeneration Writers Press [Macon, Ga.], 2009; \$15.95)



The Regeneration Writers all took what one of them called "a long

detour" before recognizing themselves as lifelong learners who needed to return to formal education. Some characterize them as nontraditional students and others as adult working students, but they know each other as individuals with names and stories to tell.

What started as classroom writing assignments evolved into far more — a calling for both students and faculty to write with honesty about their doubts and faith, their despair and triumph, their failings and successes, all of which led to a regeneration of purpose in each of their lives. Coming from careers as varied as postal service, marketing, trade skills and child care, these authors have subjected their work to intense scrutiny with an eye for writing skills, integrity and candor.

Regeneration! A Journal of Creative Writing invites the reader to engagement and reflection through short stories, poems, interviews, essays, photography and artwork collected around themes — "The Road to Mercer," by faculty, staff and students; "Taking Life," stirring thoughts on murder, lynching, innocence, prisons and forgiveness; "Conversation on Race," including poetry, reflections, stories and an interview; "This Is My Story," ranging from hilarity to deadly serious; "A Higher Power," a mix of humor, grim reality, faith and hope; "The Military," written from the perspective of all military family members; "Rhyme, Reason, and/or Rhythm," a section of brief pieces, several authored by guest writers; and "Essays," with attention given to international history and literature, peace and citizenship, abolition of slavery and environmental sustainability, student athletics and welfare.

This 271-page volume is a testament to the Regeneration Writers who wanted to write, and write well, and in the process mastered editing, arranging, illustrating and publishing. An effort by this body to study literary journals of other nontraditional undergraduate programs located none, so this seems to be a pioneer effort. The writings bear the depth of experience gained by "taking a detour" in life before returning to school.

The volume may be approached in several ways. Certainly, the themes could assist a classroom of students or a single reader in focusing on a particular subject for

introspection and further writing. Likewise, the writings may be read and studied by format. A number of the authors have multiple writings, and it is revealing to read each one's material in one sitting, thus getting to know them as individuals and by writing style. Sociology classes might give attention to the wide range of these writers and their experiences, and theology classes could study the authors' expressions of spirituality and religious experience.

Nontraditional students may well be motivated by the rich diversity of these writings to attempt a similar project in their own college and university programs. Indeed, this project was born out of a request by the students themselves for additional creative writing classes and mentoring to improve their skills. This publication gives evidence to those in other creative writing programs of the unexpected results that come through matching budding writing skills with the life experience of working adults.

Though the primary writers are identified with biographical notes and a few writers are noted by job titles, it would have been useful to have all authors identified by relation to the university or by profession, preferably under the title of each work instead of at the end. Likewise, the use of artwork and photography would have been far more meaningful if these creative works had been labeled and connected more clearly with the authors and their writings. An index by author/artist/photographer name with page numbers would have added significantly to the usefulness of the journal.

These students and a devoted faculty mentor have produced a work that is worthy of their efforts. As with many authors, they will see things they wish they had noticed and changed before publication, but they have given voice to a population of students who have not been heard so often. This publication invites others to follow, to gain a better understanding of who they are through writing, to claim their doubts and fears, to grow. ►►

— Reviewed by **Susan G. Broome**
*Associate Director for Technical Services
and Associate Professor, Division of Library Services
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