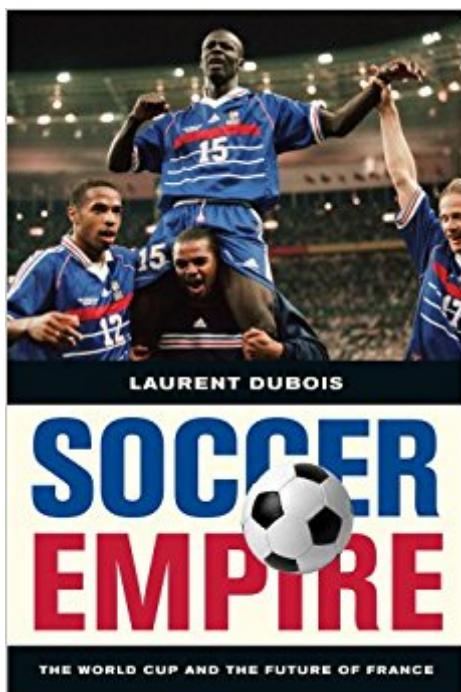


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# Soccer Empire: The World Cup And The Future Of France



## Synopsis

When France both hosted and won the World Cup in 1998, the face of its star player, Zinedine Zidane, the son of Algerian immigrants, was projected onto the Arc de Triomphe. During the 2006 World Cup finals, Zidane stunned the country by ending his spectacular career with an assault on an Italian player. In *Soccer Empire*, Laurent Dubois illuminates the connections between empire and sport by tracing the story of World Cup soccer, from the Cup's French origins in the 1930s to Africa and the Caribbean and back again. As he vividly recounts the lives of two of soccer's most electrifying players, Zidane and his outspoken teammate, Lilian Thuram, Dubois deepens our understanding of the legacies of empire that persist in Europe and brilliantly captures the power of soccer to change the nation and the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An intriguing tale of soccer within the matrix of France's history of colonialism. STARRED REVIEW (Library Journal 2010-05-01) "Drills down to uncover the relationship among politics, race and the legacy of empire." (The New York Times 2010-05-10) "Excellent" (Chronicle Of Higher Education 2010-05-30) "Tale of how even the most seemingly apolitical institutions in a society can become the battlegrounds for its most pressing questions of identity and ambition." (Salon.com 2010-06-18) "The best, most important contribution to soccer scholarship to date. . . . A timely and wonderful book." (A.-P. Durand Choice 2010-09-01) "Soccer Empire has a heart that beats louder than most, and is all the better for it." (Times Literary

"Laurent Dubois mines the history of French soccer for fascinating theories and riveting stories. His understanding of the relationship between the game and politics is subtle, leading readers deep into important discussions about race and national identity. For those of us who admired the poetics of *Les Bleus* this is essential reading." Franklin Foer, author of *How Soccer Explains the World*"Laurent Dubois is historian, fan and graceful writer all in one. In soccer, he has found an innovative way to explore France and its empire. A serious book and an excellent read." Simon Kuper, author of *Soccernomics*"Beautifully lyrical and authoritative. We meet a host of players, colonized and colonizer, following them from their original playing fields a vast lawn, a concrete lot to their triumphs in national and international play." Alice Kaplan, author of *The Interpreter*"This book is a brilliant, beautifully written, and unique history of French colonialism and post-coloniality through the lens of football/soccer. Dubois weaves an eminently readable and engaging narrative that tracks tensions around race and national identity through the biographies of key football players and officials who became iconic of the aspirations of peripheral subjects of the French empire. More than a simple history of French football, the book amounts to a description of France's imperial project and an incisive reflection on the race question in contemporary France. It will please both fans of the 'beautiful game' and those inclined to dismiss sports as but the opium of the masses." Paul Silverstein, author of *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race and Nation*

This well written and thoughtful book is an interesting examination of the recent history of the French national football team. In the mid- to late 1990s, the team was simply superb, winning both the World Cup and the European Championship. Its most famous player, Zinedine Zidane, and several other members of the team were either children of non-white immigrants from former French colonies or born in former colonies. After the World Cup victory, the team was hailed as the showing the promise of racial integration in France. Concentrating on the life stories of Zidane and the outstanding defender Lilian Thuram, Dubois discusses the recent history of French football in the context of France's colonial past, the effects of de-colonialization, and the complex politics of race in France. Dubois shows the way football was used both by colonial administrators and by restive colonials as a political and social tool. Free of sociological jargon, the book is a nice balance of historical scholarship, social analysis, narrative of the lives of the protagonists, and the sporting history itself. The quality of writing is very good and the analysis, as befits a knowledgeable historian,

is thorough. This is well beyond the facile "Soccer Explains the World" journalism and this book provides an interesting view of French imperialism and French society. There are some areas where Dubois might have provided some additional explanation or analysis. Unlike the USA, France is a nominally color-blind society. By and large, no affirmative action and no "diversity" programs, a real difference from the US response to ethnic diversity. Dubois' primary research interest has been the French Empire, and its not surprising that he emphasizes the Imperial-Colonial aspect of the story. But there are more strictly French aspects that are relevant. As Dubois points out, France has absorbed large numbers of immigrants in this century, and some of the controversy about immigrants today is strongly reminiscent of the controversies of 1930s, when the objects of conservative attacks were the Armenian, Jewish, Polish, and Russian immigrants admitted in the 1920s. Indeed, a couple of the members of the great 1998 team were the descendants of that wave of immigration. There is also some continuity in those who attacked the makeup of the French national team. A repeatedly quoted figure in this book is the repellent conservative populist Jean-Marie Le Pen. The latter's political pedigree runs back to the 1950s and the Poujadist movement, and through Poujade back to some of the reactionary political movements of the 1930s.

Great book! Enjoyed every single page. Great insight!!!

Excellent book encompassing not just the history of French soccer but also of France's place within its own cultural legacy.

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