



The Tour de France: A Cultural History

Christopher S. Thompson

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In this highly original history of the world's most famous bicycle race, Christopher S. Thompson, mining previously neglected sources and writing with infectious enthusiasm for his subject, tells the compelling story of the Tour de France from its creation in 1903 to the present. Weaving the words of racers, politicians, Tour organizers, and a host of other commentators together with a wide-ranging analysis of the culture surrounding the event—including posters, songs, novels, films, and media coverage—Thompson links the history of the Tour to key moments and themes in French history. He argues persuasively that this hugely popular sporting event has been instrumental in French attempts to grapple with the great challenges they have confronted during their tumultuous twentieth century—from World Wars, political divisions, and class conflict to economic modernization, women's emancipation, and threats to public health. Examining the enduring popularity of Tour racers, Thompson explores how their public images have changed over the past century. He concludes with a discussion of the longstanding practice of doping and considers the complex case of the seven-time champion Lance Armstrong.

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