

- 5 B. Las Casas, *The Tears of the Indians*. (New York: Oriole Chapbooks, 1972), p. 3.
  - 6 R. Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), p. 19.
  - 7 Marcel Trudel, *The Beginnings of New France* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 91.
  - 8 G. Myers, *History of Canadian Wealth* (Toronto: James Lewis & Samuel, 1972), p. 17.
  - 9 J. Lafitsau, *Customs of the American Indians* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1974), p. 52.
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Rupert Ross. *Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*. Markham, Ontario: Octopus, 1992.

For many years, Rupert Ross has been known in justice circles for his pioneering efforts in changing the way the justice system handles Aboriginal peoples. This book essentially recounts how he came to see the light, so to speak, to become an advocate for reform. Based primarily on his work in northwestern Ontario, Ross eloquently pleads that most "White" people who have official cause to interact with Aboriginal people, and especially those in the North, really have no clue just how different they are. The reference to "exploring" in the title is somewhat ironic, given that the book was published in the 500th year after another "White" explorer's own adventure. Much like his historic predecessor, and with apologies to a popular television show, Ross promises to take us boldly where no ("White") man has gone before.

The value in the book lies not so much in the recounting of Ross's personal journey (in which he bleeds humility and "White" guilt), but in his discussions of how Aboriginal peoples interact with the justice system. He presents tantalizing bits of information from his own experiences of the way travelling courts process offences in northern communities, and how Aboriginal offenders are clearly discriminated against in the justice system. These are the highlights of the book, yet Ross approaches these justice issues in a disorganized fashion. A thorough analysis would have benefited the reader, since the issues are very timely.

In explaining how and why the current justice system has failed northern Aboriginal peoples, Ross borrows heavily from the work of Claire Brant, a psychiatrist, who has written on the various rules of ethics and behaviour that characterize some Aboriginal groups. This approach can be faulted for the manner in which certain behavioural characteristics are ascribed to Aboriginal peoples: despite disclaimers that such traits are

not characteristic of all Aboriginal peoples, the reader walks away from the book forgetting this important point. Certainly northern Cree and Ojibwa peoples display cultural behaviours that differ from those of Euro-Canadians, but there is also significant intra-cultural variability and degrees of orientation to Euro-Canadian culture. These important issues are not handled by Ross, and the reader must constantly be reminded that the case material pertains to a relatively limited group of people.

There is really nothing new in Ross's book. Anthropological research has already identified the various cultural traits he identifies, and various justice inquiries (especially in Manitoba) have informed us in much more concrete ways just how the justice system is in conflict with Aboriginal peoples. In this sense, the book really does represent Ross's own personal journey. While we are brought to be happy that he has uncovered some important (for him) revelations, it is sad that he (and no doubt many others) have been forced to undergo such a process of reinventing the wheel for themselves. There exists much information that can inform professionals such as Ross, if they are interested. The book implicitly argues for more coherent programs in cultural education, so that each person who comes into contact with Aboriginal societies does not have to learn only through first-hand experience and blundering. Nonetheless, the simple fact of experiencing the conflict between Aboriginal peoples and the justice system may be the spark that is needed to push people like Ross to a higher level of understanding.

The tone of this book is irritating, suggestive of a small child on Christmas morning who dashes from present to present, exclaiming, "Oh, and look what I found here!" No doubt many readers will find merit in it, particularly those who feel the need to humble themselves and expunge the "White" guilt from their souls. A rigorous analysis of the conflict with the justice system would have been more useful, since Ross is well suited to the task. His efforts at anthropological and psychological analysis are embarrassing, and his numerous speculations and theorizings, in the apparent absence of a rigorous investigation of the literature, represents social scientific malpractice. Nevertheless, the book is worth a read for the occasional tidbits that reinforce what we already know from other disciplines. But these data could have been condensed into a more succinct journal article, and the rest left alone in Ross's diary where it belongs.

James B. Waldram

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