



Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality

Rupert Ross

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As a Crown Attorney working with First Nations in remote northwestern Ontario, Rupert Ross learned that he was routinely misinterpreting the behaviour of Aboriginal victims, witnesses, and offenders, both in and out of court. He discovered that he regularly drew wrong conclusions when he encountered witnesses who wouldn't make eye contact, victims who wouldn't testify in the presence of the accused, and parents who showed great reluctance to interfere in their children's offending behaviour. With the assistance of Aboriginal teachers, he began to see that behind such behaviour lay a complex web of coherent cultural commandments that he had never suspected, much less understood.

As his awareness of traditional Native teachings grew, he found that the areas of miscommunication extended well beyond the courtroom, causing cross-cultural misunderstanding—and ill-informed condemnation.

Dancing with a Ghost is Ross's attempt to give some definition to the cultural gap that bedevils the relationships and distorts the communications between Native peoples and the dominant white Canadian society—and to encourage others to begin their own respectful cross-cultural explorations. As Ross discovered, traditional perspectives have a great deal to offer modern-day Canada, not only in the context of justice but also in terms of the broader concepts of peaceful social organization and personal fulfilment.



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