



Bad Medicine: A Judge's Struggle for Justice in a First Nations Community

John Reilly

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Early in his career, Judge John Reilly did everything by the book. His jurisdiction included a First Nations community plagued by suicide, addiction, poverty, violence and corruption. He steadily handed out prison sentences with little regard for long-term consequences and even less knowledge as to why crime was so rampant on the reserve in the first place.

In an unprecedented move that pitted him against his superiors, the legal system he was part of, and one of Canada's best-known Indian chiefs, the Reverend Dr. Chief John Snow, Judge Reilly ordered an investigation into the tragic and corrupt conditions on the reserve. A flurry of media attention ensued. Some labelled him a racist; others thought he should be removed from his post, claiming he had lost his objectivity. But many on the Stoney Reserve hailed him a hero as he attempted to uncover the dark challenges and difficult history many First Nations communities face.

At a time when government is proposing new "tough on crime" legislation, Judge Reilly provides an enlightening and timely perspective. He shows us why harsher punishments for offenders don't necessarily make our societies safer, why the white justice system is failing First Nations communities, why jail time is not the cure-all answer some think it to be, and how corruption continues to plague tribal leadership.

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