

Overrepresented: Indigenous Women as Profit Makers for Canadian Judicial System

Annette L. Vermette

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The sobering social science book Overrepresented shares potent information about Canada's legal and cultural oppression of Indigenous people.

Social worker Annette L. Vermette's social science book *Overrepresented* discusses the disempowerment of Indigenous women in the Canadian justice system.

The book reveals that the incarceration of Indigenous women in Canada skyrocketed by 90 percent during the 2010s; in the 2020s, Indigenous women make up over 50 percent of the total incarcerated population. And it notes that Indigenous women in Canada are also affixed with damaging stereotypes—designations that are often used as justifications for state charges that are further informed by colonial practices, including assimilation and coercion. The justice system, the book says, must be reconstructed to address these inequalities.

Even as it seeks to illuminate an underaddressed situation, though, the book is light on the necessary background information to foster nuanced understandings. In covering Canadian residential schools, which separated children from their families, the book mentions past abuses, but only in passing, saying that further information can be found elsewhere. It also presumes prior study and awareness of colonial structures and Canadian history, as well as foundational political and economic concepts. For instance, its analysis of game theory and its correlation to Canada's political system is too abbreviated to be persuasive to general audiences.

The individual chapters are also unfocused. Topics as broad as stereotypes against Indigenous women and racial disparities in the legal system are rushed through with insufficient evidence and analysis. In place of statistical support are dilute, theoretical analyses. Further, as the book progresses, its focus on Indigenous women falls to the wayside; oppression against Indigenous communities at large is centered instead. Still, the book includes some potent and persuasive information, as with that regarding the cascading effect of incarceration across multiple generations.

More effective in illustrating the issue is Vermette's recurring personal example of a client who was charged with drug dealing because of their association with a relative. In that case, Vermette had to provide unconventional evidence in her client's defense; she notes that she worked against a system that was searching for a simple and efficient solution. The example is striking, imparting a clear sense that the system is rigged against Indigenous people. Such illustrations are too rare, however; further, this one repeats without need.

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ALEENA ORTIZ (July 10, 2023)

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