

Justice Carved: Inuit Perspectives on Law in the Northwest Territories

Introduction

This book delves into the captivating history of justice in the Northwest Territories, as seen through the lens of the Yellowknife Courthouse Collection of Inuit Sculpture. With a focus on the period between 1955 and 1970, this collection offers a unique glimpse into a pivotal era of social change and legal transformation.

The Inuit, the Indigenous people of the Arctic, have a rich cultural heritage and a distinct legal tradition. As they encountered Canada's justice system, they faced numerous challenges and complexities. This book explores the interactions between the Inuit and the Canadian legal system, highlighting the challenges,

misunderstandings, and triumphs that shaped their legal experiences.

Through the stories behind the carvings, this book sheds light on landmark cases that illuminate the evolving relationship between the Inuit and the law. We encounter compelling narratives of crime, punishment, and social issues that provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of justice in the North.

Furthermore, this book examines the significance of Inuit art and storytelling as powerful tools for expressing perspectives, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting reconciliation. The carvings in the collection serve as visual representations of legal moments, capturing the essence of Inuit experiences within the justice system.

The book also delves into the contemporary landscape of justice in the Northwest Territories, exploring the ongoing efforts to address systemic racism, promote

economic development, and preserve Inuit culture and language. It highlights the importance of collaboration and partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in working towards a just and equitable future.

This book offers a valuable contribution to the understanding of Indigenous justice, legal history, and the unique challenges faced by the Inuit in the Northwest Territories. It is a testament to the resilience and determination of the Inuit people in navigating the complexities of the legal system and asserting their rights.

Book Description

Journey into the heart of justice in the Northwest Territories through the captivating lens of Inuit art and storytelling in *Justice Carved*. This book offers a unique perspective on the legal history of the region, unveiling the intricate relationship between the Inuit and the Canadian justice system.

Delve into the stories behind the fourteen carvings that adorn the Yellowknife Courthouse, each representing a landmark case that occurred between 1955 and 1970. These carvings provide a glimpse into the challenges and complexities faced by the Inuit as they navigated the legal system, often encountering cultural clashes and misunderstandings.

Discover the significance of these carvings as they serve as visual representations of legal moments, capturing the essence of Inuit experiences within the justice system. They offer a profound insight into the

evolving relationship between the Inuit and the law, illuminating the complexities of crime, punishment, and social issues in the North.

Moreover, this book explores the broader context of justice in the Northwest Territories, examining the ongoing efforts to address systemic racism, promote economic development, and preserve Inuit culture and language. It highlights the importance of collaboration and partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in working towards a just and equitable future.

Justice Carved also delves into the world of Inuit art and storytelling as powerful tools for expressing perspectives, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting reconciliation. It showcases the resilience and determination of the Inuit people in navigating the complexities of the legal system and asserting their rights.

This book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in Indigenous justice, legal history, and the unique challenges faced by the Inuit in the Northwest Territories. It is a testament to the enduring spirit of the Inuit people and their ongoing pursuit of justice and equality.

Chapter 1: Sculpted Justice

The Yellowknife Courthouse Collection: A Unique Perspective

Amidst the vast and rugged landscapes of the Northwest Territories, a remarkable collection of Inuit sculptures resides within the Yellowknife Courthouse. This unique assemblage of fourteen carvings tells a captivating story of justice, culture, and the intricate relationship between the Inuit and the Canadian legal system.

The collection's origins trace back to the 1950s when Justice J.H. Sissons, the first resident justice of the NWT Supreme Court, received a carving of himself on the bench from an Inuit defendant. Recognizing the significance of this gesture, Justice Sissons embarked on a mission to collect carvings that depicted landmark cases brought before the court.

Over the years, the collection grew to encompass a diverse range of legal scenarios. Each carving captures a pivotal moment in the courtroom, portraying Inuit defendants, lawyers, judges, and the intricate legal proceedings that unfolded within the courthouse walls. The carvings serve as a testament to the resilience and determination of the Inuit people as they navigated the complexities of the Canadian legal system.

Beyond their artistic merit, these sculptures hold immense cultural and historical value. They offer a glimpse into the unique challenges faced by the Inuit as they encountered a justice system that often failed to understand their cultural values and traditions. The carvings shed light on the struggles for recognition, equality, and self-determination that have shaped the lives of Inuit communities.

Furthermore, the collection highlights the importance of art as a medium for storytelling and cultural expression. Through these carvings, the Inuit artists

have created a visual narrative that transcends language barriers and communicates their experiences to a wider audience. The collection stands as a powerful reminder of the enduring spirit of the Inuit people and their unwavering commitment to preserving their cultural heritage.

The Yellowknife Courthouse Collection is not merely a collection of artifacts; it is a living testament to the ongoing dialogue between the Inuit and the Canadian legal system. It challenges us to reflect on the historical injustices faced by Indigenous peoples and to work towards a more just and equitable society for all.

Chapter 1: Sculpted Justice

J.H. Sissons: The Man Behind the Collection

Justice John Howard Sissons, affectionately known as J.H. Sissons, played a pivotal role in the creation of the Yellowknife Courthouse Collection of Inuit Sculpture. His vision and dedication transformed this unique collection into a symbol of cultural understanding and a testament to the resilience of the Inuit people.

Born in 1892 in Victoria, British Columbia, Sissons embarked on a remarkable career in law and public service. After graduating from the University of British Columbia with a law degree, he practiced law in Vancouver before joining the Department of Justice in Ottawa. In 1947, he was appointed as the first resident judge of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories, a position he held for over two decades.

Sissons' passion for justice and his deep respect for the Inuit people shaped his approach to the legal system in

the North. He recognized the importance of understanding and incorporating Inuit customs and traditions into the administration of justice. He believed that the law should not only serve as a means of punishment but also as a tool for reconciliation and healing.

It was during his tenure as resident judge that Sissons conceived the idea for the Yellowknife Courthouse Collection of Inuit Sculpture. In 1955, he received a remarkable gift from an Inuk defendant—a soapstone carving depicting the judge himself presiding over a court case. This gift inspired Sissons to encourage other Inuit artists to create carvings that would capture and preserve significant legal moments and stories from the Northwest Territories.

Sissons' initiative resonated deeply with the Inuit community. They saw the collection as an opportunity to share their perspectives on justice, to document their history, and to bridge the cultural divide between them

and the Canadian legal system. Over the years, the collection grew to include fourteen carvings, each one a masterpiece that tells a unique story of crime, punishment, and redemption.

Through his efforts, Sissons not only created a lasting legacy for the Northwest Territories but also fostered a greater understanding and appreciation of Inuit culture and legal traditions. His vision for the Yellowknife Courthouse Collection of Inuit Sculpture continues to inspire and educate people to this day.

Chapter 1: Sculpted Justice

The Inuit Artists: Capturing Legal Moments in Stone

In the heart of the Northwest Territories, where the Yellowknife Courthouse stands tall, a remarkable collection of Inuit carvings tells a unique story of justice, culture, and resilience. These carvings, crafted by skilled Inuit artists, offer a glimpse into the complex interactions between the Inuit and the Canadian legal system during a transformative period in history.

The Inuit, with their deep connection to the land and their rich cultural traditions, found themselves navigating a new legal landscape as Canada's influence expanded into their territories. Misunderstandings, cultural clashes, and communication barriers often shaped their experiences within the justice system. Yet, amidst these challenges, the Inuit artists found a powerful way to express their perspectives and

document their legal encounters - through the art of carving.

With intricate detail and symbolism, the carvings capture pivotal moments in legal proceedings, from trials and sentencing to interactions with judges and lawyers. Each carving tells a story, providing insights into the challenges faced by the Inuit, their hopes, and their struggles for justice. Through these artistic expressions, the Inuit artists became storytellers, preserving their legal experiences for generations to come.

The artists' skill and creativity breathe life into the stone, transforming it into a medium for cultural expression and historical documentation. The carvings showcase the resilience and determination of the Inuit people as they navigated the complexities of a foreign legal system, asserting their rights and advocating for their communities.

Moreover, the carvings serve as a reminder of the importance of cultural understanding and the need for ongoing dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the pursuit of justice. They challenge us to reflect on the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization and to work towards a more just and equitable society for all.

As we delve into the stories behind these carvings, we gain a deeper appreciation for the resilience, creativity, and determination of the Inuit people. Their artistic expressions offer a valuable lens through which to examine the history of justice in the Northwest Territories, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity, mutual respect, and the ongoing pursuit of reconciliation.

This extract presents the opening three sections of the first chapter.

Discover the complete 10 chapters and 50 sections by purchasing the book, now available in various formats.

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