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Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town

Jon Krakauer

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From best-selling author Jon Krakauer, a stark, powerful, meticulously reported narrative about a series of sexual assaults at the University of Montana - stories that illuminate the human drama behind the national plague of campus rape.

Missoula, Montana, is a typical college town, with a highly regarded state university, bucolic surroundings, a lively social scene, and an excellent football team - the Grizzlies - with a rabid fan base.

The Department of Justice investigated 350 sexual assaults reported to the Missoula police between January 2008 and May 2012. Few of these assaults were properly handled by either the university or local authorities. In this Missoula is also typical.

A DOJ report released in December of 2014 estimates 110,000 women between the ages of 18 and 24 are raped each year. Krakauer's devastating narrative of what happened in Missoula makes clear why rape is so prevalent on American campuses and why rape victims are so reluctant to report assault.

Acquaintance rape is a crime like no other. Unlike burglary or embezzlement or any other felony, the victim often comes under more suspicion than the alleged perpetrator. This is especially true if the victim is sexually active, if she had been drinking prior to the assault - and if the man she accuses plays on a popular sports team. The vanishingly small but highly publicized incidents of false accusations are often used to dismiss her claims in the press. If the case goes to trial, the woman's entire personal life becomes fair game for defense attorneys.

This brutal reality goes a long way toward explaining why acquaintance rape is the most underreported crime in America. In addition to physical trauma, its victims often suffer devastating psychological damage that leads to feelings of shame, emotional paralysis, and stigmatization. PTSD rates for rape victims are estimated to be 50 percent - higher than soldiers returning from war.

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