The Imperial Drawbridge: Alaska and the U.S. Pacific Empire

By

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Abstract

Historians of the nineteenth-century West generally agree that the United States created a continental empire in the U.S. West. Historians of U.S. foreign relations have long characterized the U.S. presence in the Pacific beginning in the late nineteenth century as imperial. Many historians have acknowledged a link between the two expressions of imperial power, but few have actually attempted to demonstrate the connection. This dissertation argues that Alaska served to bridge the historiographical and geographic chasms between the United States' nineteenth-century continental and twentieth-century overseas empires. Thus, the acquisition of Alaska, the exploitation of its natural resources, and the reordering of the region's human geography created an important gateway for the United States into the Pacific as well as demonstrated the adaptability of U.S. empire in a globalizing world.

This dissertation demonstrates that U.S. leaders had a flexible vision of U.S. overseas empire well before the Spanish-American War, complicating much of the current historiography of U.S. empire. Alaska's non-contiguous geography, isolation, and harsh climate gave Americans a space in which to experiment with overseas empire and reimagine the future of their country, in the changing global contexts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as one no longer based upon continental settlement, but rather global economic imperialism.

This project takes an important step in helping to round out our understanding of U.S. empire. In Alaska, we have a space to investigate, complicate, and better understand all manner of questions related to American imperialism, including race, gender, capitalism, mobility, the environment, and foreign relations, to name only a few. Better understanding these thematic particulars in Alaska serves to not only broaden our local or regional knowledge, but forces us to expand our field of vision when pondering such questions on a global scale.

Acknowledgments

The work of the historian is, almost without exception, one of isolation, consisting of hundreds, probably thousands, of hours spent in archives pouring over nearly illegible documents followed by hundreds, maybe thousands, of hours sitting alone at a keyboard trying to figure out how to concisely and accurately translate the tale of the archives into something useful and interesting to others. As any historian will tell you, though, none of it is possible without the aid and encouragement of a bevy of people, many of whom barely know anything about you or your project, but nonetheless go out of their way to help you. During the researching and writing of this dissertation I have accumulated a number of debts that I cannot hope to ever repay. Along with my gratitude, all I can offer is the finished dissertation and hope that it makes the investment of so many others worthwhile.

First and foremost, I must extend my most heartfelt thanks to my co-chairs, Sheyda Jahanbani and Andrew Isenberg. Sheyda has seen the value of this project from the very beginning and provided nothing but support and inciteful feedback at every step of the process. Often times, she knew what I wanted to say better than I did. I ambushed Drew upon his arrival at KU, knowing that his expertise as a scholar of the North American West would be invaluable to me, and he graciously agreed to sign-on as a co-chair. This dissertation is substantially better because of his involvement. There is so much more I could say about both Sheyda and Drew, but I suppose a simple thank you will have to suffice.

I consider myself lucky to have been afforded the opportunity to study at the University of Kansas. The History Department faculty have always offered their encouragement and it has seemed at times as though the course offerings were designed with my specific needs in mind. Jenny Weber, Katherine Clark, Eve Levin, and Beth Bailey taught the research seminars in

which this project took its first tentative steps, and their feedback was invaluable. Courses on nationalism and empires, taught by Nathan Wood and Erik Scott respectively, were crucial in helping me grapple with big ideas that shape many of my interpretations in this dissertation. To these individuals, as well as the other professors who have helped to shape me, thank you.

I would be remise if I did not also thank my fellow graduate students at KU. Whether debating in class or laughing in our offices, my peers have challenged my thinking and offered their support. We may not have always agreed, but I always learned something. In particular, I would like to thank the various members of the writing group to which I belonged and who patiently read and offered comments on various chapter and article drafts: Ashely Neale, Ariel LaGue, Brian Trump, Steven Davis, and Marjorie Galelli.

It is only when you begin to work on a big project that you truly appreciate the necessity of funding. With that in mind, I would like to first thank the KU History Department for taking a chance on someone like me and providing a full five-year funding package. Next, I would like to thank the Western History Association and, in particular, Elaine Nelson for bringing me on as the WHA's graduate assistant for much of 2020. Also, I would like to thank the Hall Center for the Humanities for supporting me and this project with the Richard and Jeannette Sias Graduate Fellowship. Finally, this project was made possible with additional funding for research and study provided by several additional awards from the KU History Department, the University of Kansas itself, the Kansas Association of Historians, and the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations.

The importance of parents in the lives of their children can hardly be underestimated, and I must admit that I lucked out with mine. Growing up, my parents taught me the value of hard work, integrity, and intellectual curiosity. Because my father was in the Army, I was also

afforded the opportunity to grow up primarily in Germany and my parents ensured that I was exposed to elements of European culture I never could have experienced had I only lived in the United States. Without question these experiences have helped to shape some of the historical interpretations I make in this dissertation. On a more personal level, my parents were also good parents. Certainly we butted heads from time-to-time, but they were always loving and supportive, no easy thing with a person as stubborn as myself. Mom and Dad, thank you for all you did and continue to do.

My children, Nathan and Elizabeth, were not yet in school when I first decided to go to graduate school. One has now been accepted to college and the other isn't far behind. I don't know if they have any recollection of a world in which their father was not in school. As a consequence, there have been moments in their lives that I have missed, but through it all they endured with a patience and understanding well beyond their years. I could not be prouder of the young man and woman they have become.

Finally, the most important thank you of them all, to my wonderful wife and partner Mena. There is no way I can express in words her importance. Never once has she questioned my desire to repeatedly go back to school, even when it meant (on several occasions) dramatic pay cuts. Not only has she served as our primary bread winner for some years now, she has also been a shining exemplar as a parent, a spouse, and a human being. Our family only works because of her. Additionally, she has read and offered feedback on multiple chapter drafts, wading through my muddled thoughts, pointing out where I have both trusted my reader too much and not enough. And on top of it all, she has been earning a doctorate of her own. I do not know how she has balanced it all. Mena, you are an inspiration and I hope this begins to express how much I appreciate you.

I offer my thanks to all these people, as well as those unnamed. And as I have read in so many other acknowledgments, I must add that anything good in this dissertation is made better because of the involvement and aid provided by so many others; all errors are my own.

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Introduction

In the spring of 2002, as a specialist in the United States Army, I was stationed at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, as one of the newest members of the 172nd Separate Infantry Brigade. The season of military balls was upon us and naturally unit leadership wanted to ensure all the young soldiers' uniforms were properly assembled. So, one morning I stood before my squad leader, Staff Sergeant Davidson, wearing my Class A Dress Green Uniform, ready for inspection. I had been in the Army less than a year, so my uniform decoration was sparse. A nametag adorned my right breast, while shiny airborne wings, a marksmanship badge, and two ribbons—the Army Service Ribbon and the Nation Defense Service Medal—rested upon my left. To earn these two ribbons I had done nothing more than graduate from Basic Combat Training in October 2001.

Sergeant Davidson looked me up and down. "Specialist Hill," he asked in a weary voice expressing his incurable disappointment that I had been assigned to his squad, "where's your Overseas Ribbon?"

"I don't have one Sergeant," I answered, wondering if Sergeant Davidson was just looking for a reason to be angry with me.

"Why not?" he asked. I could smell the tobacco dip on his breath.

"Because I'm not overseas, Sergeant."

"You're in Alaska, aren't you?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Then you're overseas," he replied in an exacerbated tone.

“But Sergeant, Alaska is a part of America. It’s a state.” I had him dead to rights and I knew it. I just hoped he wouldn’t feel too ignorant after being shown up by the new “shake ‘n bake” specialist.[1]

“I know that, but it doesn’t matter. The Army says Alaska’s overseas. So,” he continued, “this afternoon you’re going to go to Clothing Sales and get an Overseas Ribbon, and you’re going to read AR 600-8-22 and AR 614-30 and find where it says that if you’re in Alaska you get an Overseas Ribbon.” I have never understood how it is that noncommissioned officers always seem to know every Army Regulation off the top of their heads. I never did; maybe that’s why I wasn’t a good NCO.

I found the regulations. Sure enough, Army Regulation 614-30, *Assignments, Details, and Transfers: Overseas Service*, clearly defines Alaska, Hawai‘i, Puerto Rico, and territories or possessions of the United States as service outside the continental United States (OCONUS), and therefore overseas. Army Regulation 600-8-22, *Personnel-General: Military Awards*, clearly states that soldiers are awarded the Overseas Service Ribbon for completion of a normal overseas tour. There it was in black and white. Sergeant Davidson was right, I was wrong. As far as the U.S. Army is concerned, Alaska is just as overseas as Iraq, a foreign country I deployed to in 2005 and 2006, and for which I received a second Overseas Service Ribbon.

Other than being an odd quirk of the Army, the framing of Alaska as an overseas foreign space made little impression on me at the time. Some thirteen years later, however, when I began researching nineteenth-century documents about Alaska as a graduate student, the exchange between Sergeant Davidson and me immediately sprang to mind. If the Department of Defense,

[1] A college graduate can enlist in the Army as a specialist, skipping the three ranks of private. These specialists are often referred to as “shake ‘n bakes” because many believe that little effort or work has gone into achieving this rank, much like little effort is required to produce tasty chicken with the Kraft Foods, store-bought mix.

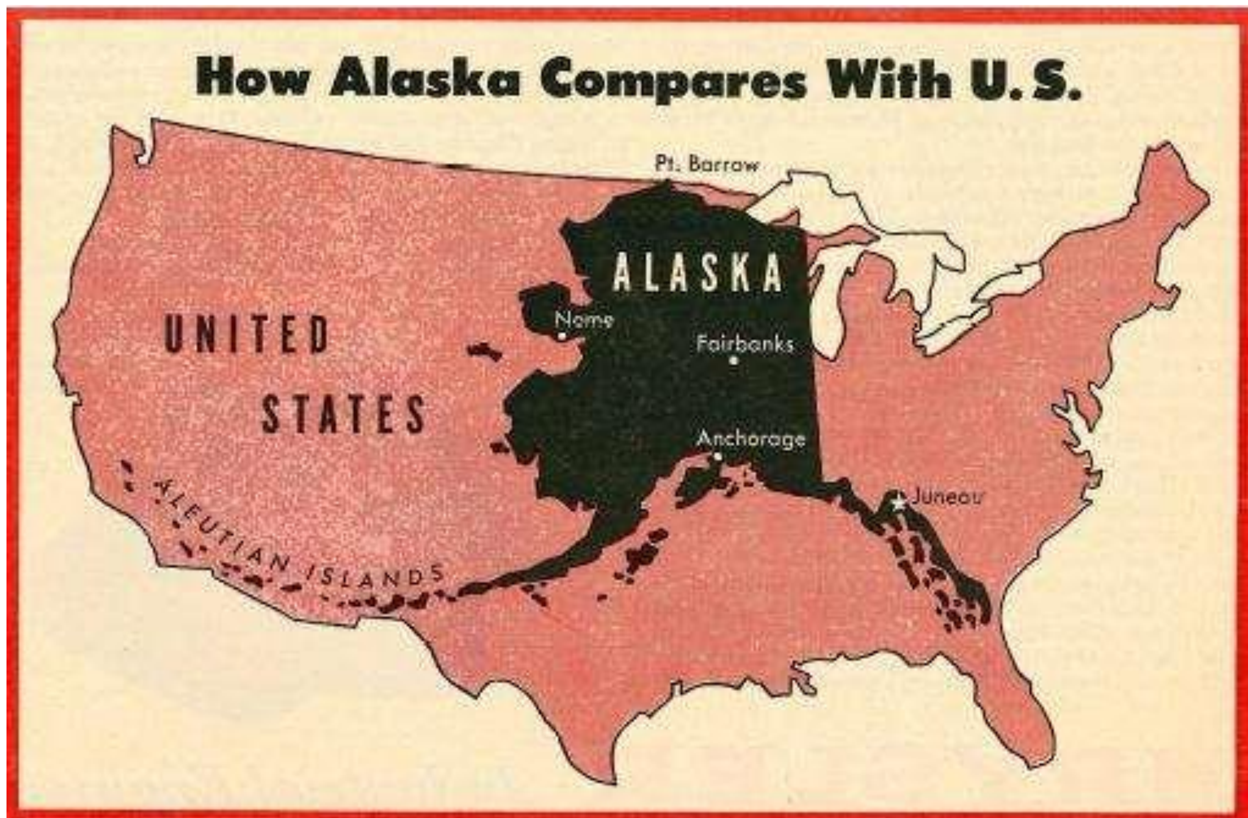

Fig. I-1 This image appeared in a 1955 article in *U.S. New & World Report*. Remarkably, it shows that Alaska, if superimposed on the United States, would stretch from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, and from the border with Mexico to the border with Canada. "We Are Only 5 Miles from Russia," *U.S. New & World Report*, 16 December 1955, box 68, folder 407, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974], Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

the largest organization in the federal government, classifies Alaska as an overseas space on par with Iraq, does that mean Alaska has yet to be fully accepted as an integral part of the American nation-state? And if Alaska is not a full and equal member of the U.S. nation-state, does that make it a colony? But Alaska is a state. Doesn't statehood, by definition, make Alaska part of the nation-state? What about Alaska encourages the United States government to classify Alaska as simultaneously American and foreign? All these questions and others rattled around in my mind. Eventually, I came to a conclussion.

The United States is an empire.

Alaska represents the second largest land acquisition in the history of the United States, totaling nearly 600,000 square miles. Historians, however, have barely reflected on the significance of Alaska's 1867 annexation to the creation of the U.S. overseas empire. Today, it is common for textbooks to reduce Alaska's purchase to a single sentence that does little more than sardonically refer to the purchase as "Seward's Folly," "Walrussia," or "Seward's Icebox."[2] Perhaps because Alaska seems so distant from the rest of the United States, geographically and ideologically (the state is, after all, still referred to as America's Last Frontier), most historians have taken Alaska's centrality to the expansion of U.S. empire too lightly.[3] But Alaska, in fact, occupied a position of great importance in the evolution of American imperial ideology. The purchase of Alaska bridged the temporal, physical, and ideological chasm between continental and overseas empire, providing a crucial opportunity for American leaders to imagine a world in which the United States possessed lands separated from the rest of the country by seas and oceans, even if only, at this time, by oceans of land. Alaska's geographic disconnectedness marked something new in American history, but it is often noted as little more than an anomaly.

In fact, the United States government demonstrated remarkable adaptability in purchasing and governing Alaska between 1867 and 1959. Alaska possessed few of the qualities that encouraged westward migration during the nineteenth century. Most significantly, for most of the American period, few people believed Alaska destined for statehood because it lacked an agricultural base. American leaders recognized this shortcoming at the time of the purchase and chose to adapt their vision of U.S. empire from one of white agricultural settlers to one of non-

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[2] For example, see John Mack Faragher et al., *Out of Many: A History of the American People* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2015). For a recent critique of the Seward's Folly mythology, see: Michael A. Hill, "The Myth of Seward's Folly," *Western Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2019).

[3] The Last Frontier is Alaska's unofficial motto and appears on the state's license plates and is the subtitle of a Discovery Channel reality television series about life in Alaska.

white resource extractors laboring for the enrichment of private investors thousands of miles away. Although Alaska's white population has grown significantly since World War II, the emphasis on resource extraction has not; it too has adapted, from a focus on gold and salmon to oil.

Despite obtaining statehood in 1959, Alaska remains one of the world's ultimate borderlands. It is a former Russian colony geographically closer to Russia than the nearest U.S. state. Borderlands are often places where states undertake imperial projects based on understandings of the region or its inhabitants as somehow backward. Thirty-one years ago, the historian Stephen Haycox wrote that Alaska remains a U.S. colony and that its residents have embraced an exceptionalist understanding of their otherness that celebrates the state's unique position within the U.S. empire.[4] European Russians and their American successors long viewed Alaska as a place beyond the scope of continental expansion or empire, thus helping to establish this borderland self-identification. As the historian Ilya Vinkovetsky points out, for nineteenth-century Russians and Americans, expansion was "conceptualized through the prism of contiguous geography."[5] When faced with having to choose whether to further pursue overseas empire, Russian leaders decided to sell their empire's lone non-Eurasian colony and focus on strengthening their continental holdings. On the other hand, when offered Alaska, American leaders adapted, reimagining their country's destiny as no longer constrained by contiguity.

Alaska's geographic separation from the rest of the United States played a pivotal role in the country's transition from continental to overseas empire. Conceived of as both continental

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[4] For a discussion of both topics, see: Stephen Haycox, "Truth and Expectation: Myth in Alaska History," *North Review* 6 (Winter 1990); and Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 2d ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020).
[5] Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14.

and overseas, yet neither fully one nor the other, Alaska allowed Americans to build upon a tradition of westward conquest while simultaneously experimenting with overseas imperialist ambitions. By 1898, on the eve of the Spanish-American War, some American leaders, desperate to continue U.S. expansion across the sea, looked upon Alaska as the United States' lone example of overseas empire.[6] These leaders believed Alaska set an imperialist example for the twentieth century, legitimizing the acquisition of foreign lands and the creation of a true U.S. overseas empire.

Historiography

Scholars have paid relatively little attention to Alaska until recent years. The earliest works on the territory tended toward reports of natural resources and caricatures of the Indigenous population as well as the former Russian inhabitants.[7] During the middle of the twentieth century, historians placed Alaska within the tradition of westward expansion, arguing that although the frontier remained in Alaska, its residents were ready for the final step of Westering—statehood—thus fulfilling the American promise of democracy in the Cold War world.[8] Beginning in the 1970s, historians began to ask more sophisticated questions, particularly interrogating the purchase in the context of nineteenth-century U.S. foreign relations.[9] In 1983, Paul Holbo published one of the most cited works of Alaska history,

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[6] See, Michael A. Hill, "Imperial Stepping Stone: Bridging Continental and Overseas Empire in Alaska," *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 1 (2020).
[7] For examples, see: Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft: History of Alaska, 1730-1885*, vol. XXXIII (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 1886); A. P. Swineford, *Alaska: Its History, Climate and Natural Resources* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1898); and John W. Brown, *An Abridged History of Alaska* (Seattle: Press of Gateway Printing Company, 1909).
[8] Examples include: Merle Colby, *Alaska: Last American Frontier* (New York: The MacMaillan Company, 1944); Hector Chevigny, *Russian America: The Great Alaskan Venture* (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort Publishing, 1965); and Ernest Gruening, *The Battle for Alaska Statehood* (College, AK: University of Alaska Press, 1967).
[9] Ted C. Hinckley, *The Americanization of Alaska, 1867-1897* (Pal Alto, CA: Pacific Books, 1972); and Ronald J. Jensen, *The Alaska Purchase and Russian-American Relations* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975).

Tarnished Expansion. In the book, Holbo argued that the purchase of Alaska amounted to little more than a scandalous plot intended to fatten the pockets of American and Russian elites that stained U.S. expansion so terribly that thirty years lapsed between the purchase of Alaska and the next U.S. land acquisition.[10]

In the 1980s and 1990s, Alaskan scholarship investigated specific issues, tackling the histories of Alaskan statehood, Orthodox Christianity, and Alaska Natives.[11] Importantly, it was during these years that some scholars began viewing Alaska through the lens of empire. Two collections of essays, *Russia's American Colony* and *Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier*, reminded readers that Alaska's inclusion in the Russian Empire mattered.[12] Shortly thereafter, scholars asked if the U.S. relationship with Alaska also constituted empire. The most important historian to ask this question is Stephen Haycox, whose book, *Alaska: An American Colony*, has remained in print since its original 2002 publication and was recently updated with a second edition.[13] In the past decade scholars have published a number of additional books further investigating the Russian American period, statehood, and Alaska in the early twentieth century.[14] Some of the most recent and well-received scholarship on Alaska has situated Alaska

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[10] Paul Sothe Holbo, *Tarnished Expansion: The Alaska Scandal, the Press, and Congress, 1867-1871* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983).
[11] Some examples are: Claus-M. Naske, *A History of Alaska Statehood* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985); Michael Oleska, *Alaska Missionary Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987); and Ramona Ellen Skinner, *Alaska Native Policy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997).
[12] *Russia's American Colony*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987); and *Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier*, ed. Barbara Sweetland Smith and Redmond J. Barnett (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1990).
[13] Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony.*
[14] Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*; Kenneth N. Owens, *Empire Maker: Aleksandr Baranov and Russian Colonial Expansion into Alaska and Northern Canada* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015); Gwenn A. Miller, *Kodiak Kreol: Communities of Empire in Early Russian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Terrence Cole, *Fighting for the Forty-Ninth Star: C. W. Snedden and the Crusade for Alaska Statehood* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Foundation, 2010); and Thomas Alton, *Alaska in the Progressive Age: A Political History, 1896 to 1916* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2019).

within the broader north-Pacific world and interrogated the connections between the region's environment, capitalism, and empire.[15] Taken as a whole, Alaskan historiography now provides a solid foundation for understanding the history of the state since the mid- eighteenth century. Nonetheless, beside a few hesitating attempts—of which Haycox's is by far the strongest—historians have yet to firmly place Alaska within the context of U.S. empire.

Applying the imperial nomenclature to the United States continues to gain scholarly support. Early debates of U.S. empire tended to center around whether or not U.S. economic expansion, usually depicted as centering around the Pacific Ocean, actually represented a form of empire.[16] Building upon the work of the historian of U.S. foreign relations William Appleman Williams and his students, while also expanding the realm of U.S. empire beyond economic interpretations, scholars have nearly rendered debates about whether or not the United States is an empire boorish. Despite some remaining hesitance to embrace an imperial interpretation of the United States, discussions today focus much less on whether or not the United States was (or is) an empire, and much more on what kind of empire the United States was (or is).[17] Perhaps the most dramatic debate took place between Daniel Immerwahr and Paul Kramer. Immerwahr has

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[15] Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).

[16] For example, William Appleman Williams unambiguously argued that economic expansion, buttressed by the Open Door Policy, represented the fruition of a long-term policy of U.S. empire, while Ernest R. May argued that U.S. expansion at the end of the nineteenth century represented a mere aberration, after which the United States returned to its traditional policy of international non-involvement. William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 50th Anniversary ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009); and Ernest R. May, *American Imperialism* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1967; repr., 1991).

[17] Perhaps most provocatively, William Appleman Williams argued that empire explains the totality of the American way of life. William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America's Present Predicament Along with a Few Thoughts About an Alternative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Nancy Shoemaker represents those who find imperial interpretations of U.S. history unsatisfying or unconvincing. She recently recommended the term extraterritoriality instead. Nancy Shoemaker, "The Extraterritorial United States to 1860," *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 1 (2018).

taken an approach that focuses on the territoriality of U.S. empire, while Paul Kramer countered by arguing that studies of U.S. empire must focus on recovering the voices of neglected imperial subjects and interrogating the repertoires of power imperial agents have used to silence those actors. Both, however, seem to suggest that in the twentieth century U.S. empire has been disguised and oblique.[18] Regardless of the precise interpretive imperial lens any particular scholar uses, suffice it to say that the study of U.S. empire, as is true of all empires, focuses primarily on how the country's people came to politically dominate lands not included in the metropolitan nation-state through the use of political, economic, or cultural forms of force, coercion, or subterfuge. Differentiating between national citizens and colonial subjects, whether through race, religion, gender, or some other social construct, is an inherent part of the imperial project.[19]

Most discussions of American overseas empire ignore the purchase of Alaska, suggesting instead a gap, and thus differentiation, between nineteenth-century continental expansion, ending in the middle of the century, and overseas expansion, beginning in 1898. The literature on the

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[18] See: Daniel Immerwahr, "The Greater United States: Territory and Empire in U.S. History," *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 3 (2016); Paul A. Kramer, "How Not to Write the History of U.S. Empire," *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 5 (November 2018); and Immerwahr's response, "Writing the History of the Greater United States: A Reply to Paul Kramer," *Diplomatic History* 43, no. 2 (2019).

[19] A cursory list of valuable studies of U.S. empire include: *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Nick Cullather, *Illusions of Influence: The Political Economy of United States-Philippines Relations, 1942-1960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011); and Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

U.S. empire that emerged as a consequence of the Spanish-American War is vast.[20] Recently, historians of the nineteenth-century United States, and especially of the U.S. West, have argued for the existence of a continental empire well before the country added noncontiguous territories.[21] Such scholars push back against a teleological interpretation of U.S. history that normalizes the borders of the eventual U.S. nation-state and discounts the lived realities of people in areas that were not yet part of the United States or people the United States refused to incorporate into the nation-state during the nineteenth century.[22] A better understanding of the role nineteenth-century American leaders believed Alaska played in encouraging the expansion of U.S. empire helps scholars to usefully re-evaluate the causes and consequences of U.S. empire and provides further evidence that 1898 was not an imperial hiccup in U.S history.

Historians have intuited a connection between the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century U.S. empires since at least William Appleman Williams, one of the earliest and most influential of the Wisconsin School, who wrote in 1961 that following the United States victory in World War II, Americans were, "casually confident that their earlier visions of Manifest

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[20] Examples of scholarship discussing U.S. empire in the Pacific include: H. W. Brands, *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Julian Go, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Elite Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico During U.S. Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); David J. Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Empire: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and María-Dolores Elizalde, "Observing the Imperial Transition: British Naval Reports on the Philippines, 1898-1901," *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 2 (April 2016).

[21] Examples of such scholarship include: Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire*, Revised ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); and Andrew C. Isenberg, "Industrial Empire," in *The Routledge History of Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Jonathan D. Wells (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[22] For example, Brian DeLay argues that U.S.-Native American interactions are better understood in terms of foreign relations, rather than domestic policy. Brian DeLay, "Indian Polities, Empire, and the History of American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 5 (November 2015).

Destiny were materializing as the reality of the present."[23] Nonetheless, historians have yet to successfully explore the continuity between continental and overseas empire. Indeed, the two remain, in practice if not in theory, distinctly delineated and distinct eras. Reevaluating Alaska as an imperial bridge aids in understanding U.S. expansion beyond the continent. Alaska's unique geographic position helped U.S. leaders understand, justify, and critique U.S. empire in 1867 when the United States purchased Alaska. Not only did U.S. leaders understand that the acquisition of Alaska meant empire, but many average Americans did as well. Not all believed the path Alaska pointed to was one the United States should follow, but all recognized that the path was one of greater empire.[24]

Not only did the annexation of Alaska help Americans and their leaders imagine a U.S. empire that spanned oceans, but Alaska's unique physical and human geography encouraged imperial experimentation. Few Americans believed Alaska capable of ever supporting a significant white population, unlike previous land acquisitions in U.S. history. Until well into the twentieth century, Americans imagined Alaska as a land of valuable natural resources but not a land of settlers. In short, Americans imagined Alaska as a colony, but not a settler colony.

Empire or Nation?

Throughout this dissertation, the word nation and its derivatives—national, nationalism, nationalist—is used only in reference to people, not states. Empire is used broadly to refer to any imperial (the adjectival form of empire) project. Imperialism, while a type of empire, is used only to refer to capitalist empires from the late nineteenth century forward, as is its adjectival

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[23] William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History*, 50th Anniversary ed. (New York: Verso, 2011), 17.
[24] Hill, "Imperial Stepping Stone."

form, imperialist. The visual and auditory similarities between imperial and imperialist are perhaps unfortunate, but are also unavoidable.

The coinciding rise of nation-states and imperialism has complicated discussions of the two. The normalization of the nation-state has made it seem that U.S. imperialism appeared rather suddenly at the end of the nineteenth century. As a consequence, historians have long referred to the U.S. insular empire as an aberration.[25] Understanding the nation-state as an innovation, however, helps shed light on the U.S. empire at the turn of the nineteenth century as a continuation of what came before and inverts the emphasis placed on empire and nation-state in U.S. history. Squaring the circle suggests that nation-states and imperialism arose side-by-side because capitalism encouraged both.[26] Thus, broadly speaking, the nation-state is the metropole of imperialist states. There is no need to define the United States as an empire *or* nation-state; being an imperialist state means it is both simultaneously.

When people use the word nation, they often mean the nation-state. Nations are self-identified communities that share values, traditions, culture, and customs, regardless of statehood or political power or organization.[27] The nation-state is a territorially bounded political state that

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[25] In early example is Julius W. Pratt, *America's Colonial Experiment: How the United States Gained, Governed, and in Part Gave Away a Colonial Empire* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951).

[26] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origins of Capitalism: A Longer View*, Revised ed. (New York: Verso, 2017), chapters 7 and 8.

[27] The foundational text examining the nation is Ernest Renan, "'What Is a Nation?', Text of a Conference Delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11, 1882," in *Qu'est-Ce Qu'une Nation?* (Paris: Presses-Pocket, 1992). The most well-known investigation of the nation must be Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Revised ed. (New York: Verso, 2006). Perhaps more useful, however, are Eric J. Hobsbawn, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Second ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983; repr., 2008). An argument for the primordial nature of nations is advanced in Anthony D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008). On the other hand, some scholars contend there is nothing inherently natural or essential in the formation of any group, that all group membership is variable and negotiated, and that scholars must understand all groups, including nations, as ongoing discursive acts rather than primordial in origin. Perhaps most important among such scholars is Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

attempts to homogenize those residing within its borders while excluding those from outside its borders. The basic goal of the nation-state is to make political boundaries conform to the spaces in which the members of a nation live, thus creating a national homeland cleansed, as much as possible, of the presence of any other national groups.

The United States did not emerge from the American War of Independence a unified nation-state.[28] As the name of the original governing document makes clear, the Articles of Confederation governed the newly decolonized states in a highly decentralized confederacy. Even after the Constitution replaced the Articles, the United States did not yet represent a nation-state, in part because independence "created a state, not a nation," as A. G. Hopkins argues, and in part because the world of nation-states did not truly arise until after World War II.[29]

Yet already in the 1780s, the United States was an aspiring empire. Empires are large, expansionistic states that incorporate new territory and people through coercion or conquest and that seek to rule disparate populations by means of distinction and hierarchy rather than assimilation. Whereas nation-states seek to make political boundaries align with nations, in the process rejecting, ejecting, or eliminating national minorities, empires recognize and accept national differences and explicitly seek to use those differences as methods of imperial rule. In short, empires rule different people differently.[30]

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[28] John M. Murrin, "A Roof without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity," in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American Identity*, ed. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).
[29] A. G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 129. On nation-states not predominating until after World War II, see: Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 7.
[30] This definition of empire is heavily indebted to Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 8; and Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia's Empires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4.

The world into which the United States entered at the end of the eighteenth century was a world of empires. Not all states were empires, but all great powers were. Empires, though, are adaptable political constructs, not rigid behemoths that watched as the world passed them by. To be certain, some empires, like some non-empires, lacked the flexibility needed to evolve in a world of ever-changing social, political, and economic pressures. But the system of imperial rule has constantly adapted and survived. One of the most important of these adaptations occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century and is therefore key in understanding the argument of this dissertation. That flexible adaptation was the rise of imperialism, which was a response to changes in capitalism.

Many *raisons d'etre* have justified the existence of empires. Religion, security, and a higher civilizing mission have all been used to defend empire. One of the most common imperial motivations has been economic, what the historians Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper call "enrichment through expansion."[31] Beginning in the fifteenth century, and due in great part to tremendous environmental luck, the relatively weak states of western Europe transformed themselves into the maritime empires that dominated the globe for some four hundred years.[32] In their earliest forms, these empires were not only maritime, but also mercantilist. That is, empires and the trade they engendered existed to enrich the state. During the nineteenth century, however, the intended beneficiaries of imperial economies shifted from the state to private individuals.[33] This represented a shift from mercantilist empires to capitalist empires and found

[31] Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 10.
[32] Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
[33] On the decline of mercantilist empires and the beginning of the rise of capitalist empires, see: Hopkins, *American Empire*, especially chapters 2-4. For examples of the spread of U.S. empire through the spending of government money primarily for the benefit of private businesses and investors, see: Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W.

fullest expression in the race for Africa, where, for example, the Congo became a colony belonging to Leopold II, rather than Belgium.[34] The Congolese example is simply the most blatant; around the globe imperial powers spent tremendous sums of money to conquer, subdue, cajole, and annex foreign lands and people primarily for the benefit of private economic interests.

The economies of the world's leading powers shifted from agrarian to industrial capitalism during the second half of the nineteenth century. The market imperatives that drive capitalism—competition, accumulation, and profit-maximization—demand that capitalist economies grow. According to the social scientist Ellen Meiksins Wood, capitalism, "can and must constantly accumulate, constantly search out new markets, constantly impose its imperatives on new territories and new spheres of life, on all human beings and the natural environment."[35] Capitalism, to survive, demands expansion. While such expansion does not inherently or inevitably lead to empire, a strong connection seems evident. The earliest countries to industrialize—Great Britain, Germany, Italy, the United States, France, Russia, and Japan—were also the leading imperial powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century the imperative of capitalist expansion combined with technological advantages developed in Western Europe and the United States to produce imperialism.

This dissertation refers to the capitalist form of empire that arose during the nineteenth century and reached maturity toward the end of the century as imperialism. Rather than serving

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Norton & Company, 2011); Greene, *The Canal Builders*; and Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[34] Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

[35] Wood, *The Origins of Capitalism*, 97.

as an adjective simply for empire or the spread of empire, this dissertation uses imperialism to refer specifically to nineteenth- and twentieth-century capitalist empire. By doing so, this dissertation holds closely to the definition of imperialism first proffered by J. A. Hobson in 1902: "Imperialism is the endeavor of the great controllers of industry to broaden the channel for the flow of their surplus wealth by seeking foreign markets and foreign investments to take goods and capital they cannot sell or use at home."[36] Economic profit had, of course, helped drive the colonization of North America by Europeans and Euro-Americans. The earliest economic factors, though, had been mercantilist, followed by agrarian capitalist motivations in later years. Both of these systems demanded the formal control of land, mercantilism to ensure profits returned to the state and agrarian capitalism because land was the factory. With the rise of industrial capitalism and imperialism, direct control of land became not only unnecessary, but financially prohibitive. Formal annexation of land was no longer necessary, because the land itself was no longer the prize. Imperialists realized that natural resources could be more cheaply acquired without the added expenses of territorial empire; much better to rule by indirect means to ensure the greatest profit margins for investors.

Americans conducted some of their first imperialist experiments in Alaska. The historian Gregory Cushman argues that, "U.S. overseas imperialism got its start by claiming dozens of uninhabited atolls with guano deposits in the Pacific and Caribbean Basins."[37] While it is true that the Guano Act of 1856 allowed U.S. citizens to take possession of islands with significant guano deposits, those islands, by law, had to be uninhabited. Empire, including imperialism, is more than the seizure of lands and resources; it is a form of political control. That control can be

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[36] J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 1902; repr., 2005), 85.
[37] Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 78.

exercised in numerous ways and prove to ultimately be successful or not, but there must be people to control. The guano islands lacked people. Americans may have conducted capitalist experiments on the guano islands, but they were not imperialist, even if the lessons learned were later applied to imperialist situations. Alaska, like the guano islands, was overseas. Unlike the islands, however, Alaska was home to tens of thousands of people.[38]

In 1867, imperialism was a hazy concept yet to reach maturity. Territorial possession seemed necessary because U.S. leaders still imagined empire through the prism of agrarian capitalism, in which tilled soil offered up a bounty that humans transformed into wealth through the market. The history of Alaska demonstrates the tenacity of this idea. Well into the twentieth century, Alaskan leaders still envisioned the territory's development as dependent on agrarian capitalism. The reality of life in Alaska eventually crushed hopes of agricultural wealth, but the natural resources of the territory allowed American business leaders to demonstrate that, by the end of the nineteenth century, industrial capitalism dominated on the economic and political stages. Gold, salmon, and to a lesser degree timber proved that U.S. businesses could extract sizable profits from colonies with no significant white population, and no expectation that there would ever be a significant white population, as long as the U.S. government kept local Indigenous populations from interfering. In fits and starts, without a clear plan, Alaska introduced Americans to the reality that imperialism offered greater profits than formal territorial empire.

These experiments were conducted on territory the United States had already formally annexed, however. By the time U.S. leaders began to grasp the benefits of imperialism, too many

[38] For more on the importance of the guano islands in U.S. history, including the evolution of labor laws, see: Christina Duffy Burnett, "The Edges of Empire and the Limits of Sovereignty: American Guano Islands," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (September 2005); and Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), chapter 3.

white Americans had migrated to Alaska to simply relinquish formal control of the territory, as the United States would later do with the Philippines. As a result, Alaska was placed on the path to statehood in 1912 and achieved that goal in 1959. Statehood, though, did not end the imperial relationship between the United States and Alaska. The veneer of statehood has disguised the reality that Alaska remains a colony, valuable to the United States in the twenty-first century only as a source of natural resources and because of its strategic geopolitical location.

This dissertation is not an apology for empire, nor is it an attack on nation-states. But this examination of the workings of U.S. empire demonstrates that blanket denunciations of empire reflect a teleology and presentism that hinders our ability to understand the past. The decolonization movement's political and rhetorical vigor and power after World War II resulted in the nearly universal anathematization of empire, at least in public discourse.[39] Empire became so closely associated with evil, that in 1977 George Lucas did not even have to name the oppressive galactic government of *Star Wars*; he simply called it the Empire.

But empires, like nation-states, are human constructions, and as such are no more inherently evil than nation-states. Both political entities have the potential for good or bad. Nation-states did not arise out of a desire for social justice. Indeed, as the historian Gregor Thum argues, in "most national movements, liberal and imperialist dreams went hand-in-hand."[40] Often times, those who protested the imperial systems in which they found themselves did not disapprove of empire or even truly desire independence. American colonists agitated for reform,

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[39] There are, of course, exceptions. For example, Niall Ferguson argues that U.S. empire provides order and structure to the world, and that the United States should embrace the reality that it is an empire in order to more efficiently and effectively serve as the global leader. Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

[40] Gregor Thum, "Megalomania and Angst: The Nineteenth-Century Mythicization of Germany's Eastern Borderlands," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 47.

not revolution, until George III declared them traitors and forced their hand, just as many nationalists within the Hapsburg Empire did not desire independence, but rather sought to use imperial structures to strengthen national communities within the empire.[41] The rise of nation-states in the twentieth century led to countless examples of ethnic cleansing, genocide, and civil war.[42] Empires have no exclusive claim to oppression while nation-states have not eliminated calls for justice.

Organization

Each chapter of the dissertation examines a different aspect of imperialist Alaska, arranged in a roughly chronological order. Because theme is the principle organizing feature, however, there is a fair amount of temporal overlap among the chapters. That being said, the first three chapters focus on Alaska primarily during the nineteenth century, while the final three chapters look at themes more closely associated with Alaska during the twentieth century.

Chapter one examines the U.S. purchase of Alaska from Russia as a conscious act of expansion justified by imperialist motivations. Despite a long historiography portraying Alaska as the unpopular Seward's Folly, many Americans supported the purchase of Alaska because they recognized the potential for wealth the acquisition promised. Imperialism, not settler-driven expansion, justified the purchase of Alaska. Chapter two explores how mapping and the census made Alaska legible to U.S. leaders. These initiatives represented departures from past government efforts to encourage expansion, however. Instead, in Alaska efforts to map the land

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[41] The persistent loyalty to Great Britain of many Revolutionary leaders is now well established. See: John Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Joseph J. Ellis, *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007). For desires of Hapsburg subjects to strengthen national communities while remaining within the Austrian Empire, see Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016).
[42] Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Fig. I-2 Nestlé congratulated Alaska's residents on statehood by invoking the myth of Seward's Folly as well as encouraging them to continue buying coffee and chocolate. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, 26 January 1959, MS 0067, series iii, box 3, Special Newspaper Editions Related to Alaska, 1867-[ongoing], Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

and the people were closely tied to efforts to encourage absentee capitalist investment but not white settlement. Chapter three looks at how the writings of Jack London and John Muir shaped the ways in which Americans imagined Alaska. Writing different genres intended largely for different audiences, both men nonetheless presented Alaska as a land of financial opportunity too exotic for significant white settlement.

Chapter four investigates the experiences of the Alaskeros, Filipino workers in Alaska's salmon canneries. This chapter sheds light on how the imperialist networks of the early twentieth-century United States created opportunities for imperial subjects to exercise agency in ways U.S. leaders did not foresee, as well as highlighting the importance of capitalist imperialism for creating the networks and opportunities in the first place. Chapter five begins by asking why

there are no Alaska Native reservations in Alaska and concludes by demonstrating that a corporate imperialist understanding of Alaska embraced by both the U.S. government and Alaska Native leaders resulted in the largest land settlement agreement in the history of the United States. Chapter six argues that advocates of Alaskan statehood used anti-colonial rhetoric to win statehood for Alaska in the midst of the Cold War. Statehood, however, did not end the imperialist relationship between Alaska and the United States. Instead, statehood served as a veneer that disguised imperialism while simultaneously making its continuation acceptable in a decolonizing world.

Historians have long struggled to adequately position Alaska within the broader history of the United States. Placing Alaska within the framework of U.S. capitalist empire helps to connect Alaska with what came before in U.S. history. But American political and business leaders understood Alaska as a juncture point, where the past met the future; a laboratory where imperialist experiments might be carried out and the future of empire might begin to take shape. In Alaska, Americans took their first lessons in global imperialist power.

1 – The Imperial Purchase

At the September 1853 dedication of Capitol University in Columbus, Ohio, Senator William H. Seward proclaimed to his audience: "the borders of the Federal Republic, so peculiarly constituted, shall be extended so that it shall greet the sun when he touches the Tropic and when he sends his glancing rays towards the Polar circle, and shall include even distant islands in either ocean." From Seward's perspective, American expansion was inevitable. "It is quite clear to us," he continued, "that the motives to enlargement are even more active than they ever were heretofore." Seward praised the country's passion for territorial aggrandizement which served to increase the United States' wealth, power, and expansion. Only fear, he warned, which "betrays like Treason," could stall the American juggernaut. Near the end of his speech, Seward told his listeners that "a nation must always recede if it be not actually advancing." In 1856, Seward introduced the Guano Act in the Senate, enabling U.S. businesses to temporarily claim uninhabited dung-filled islands for the United States. But in 1867, as Secretary of State, Seward took the first decisive action toward fulfilling his imperial prophecy when he negotiated and secured the purchase of Alaska, thus ensuring that the United States' borders literally did "greet the sun … when he sends his glancing rays towards the Polar circle."[1]

The purchase of Alaska represented both a continuation of prior U.S. expansion as well as a deviation. Alaska was simultaneously continental and overseas. In this way, it served to bridge the ideological gap between the United States' nineteenth-century continental empire and the coming twentieth-century overseas empire. In doing so, Alaska demonstrates an important reality of empire—adaptability. For too long, scholars have attempted to define empires, either narrowly or broadly, or force them into narrow typologies. Instead, it is important to realize that

[1] "Address of Hon. William H. Seward," *New York Times,* 16 September 1853.

successful empires are not static types, but rather flexible structures that find ways to exploit contemporary conditions. The U.S. empire has proven skilled at doing just this; the purchase of Alaska in 1867 demonstrates such skill. When the conditions that had encouraged westward expansion and settlement ceased to be meaningful at the edge of the Pacific, U.S. leaders adapted and managed to continue U.S. imperial expansion by other means.

At the time of the purchase, the country's leaders did not imagine a future in which white Americans would settle Alaska. It is true that government officials used the familiar language of republicanism and liberty to help justify the purchase, and it is equally true that hopes of profit were among the motivations of previous continental expansion. As such, continuities justified the purchase of Alaska for those lacking foresight. But appeals to democracy ring hollow in a land never intended for white Americans, and while profit had helped motivate previous expansions, it had never before served as the primary motivation.[2] The United States purchased Alaska almost completely for reasons of profit, making Alaska the first U.S. imperialist acquisition and demonstrating that the U.S. empire could adapt non-settler based imperial ideologies. Of course, other people lived in Alaska well before the United States acquired Alaska. The United States bought the region from Russia in 1867. And millennia before any Russian glimpsed Alaska, Indigenous people made the land their own.

[2] For example, James Polk greatly desired California for its Pacific harbors and angled for a war with Mexico in order to acquire California for its commercial benefits. Additionally, the discovery of gold in California was of primary importance in initially enticing settlers to California. Nonetheless, Americans imagined California, unlike Alaska, as a place where settlers might find agricultural success and as an eventual state. For Polk's desire to acquire California, see Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 57. For how Californian industry and agriculture drove urbanization, see Andrew C. Isenberg, *Mining California: An Ecological History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 11-12.

Indigenous Alaska

Humans had been living in North America's Northwest corner for thousands of years before Russians or Americans arrived. The earliest migration to North America from Asia occurred between 50,000 and 15,000 years ago, when the sea level was 350 feet lower and Asia and North America were linked by a land bridge, called Beringia, where the Bering Sea now exists. Early Paleo-Indians likely followed migrating herbivores such as bison and mammoth across the land bridge, or perhaps along the coast by boat, and continued south, eventually populating all of North and South America after several thousand years. The ancestors of today's Alaska Natives probably entered the area between 10,000 and 5,000 years ago in a series of migrations.

Broadly speaking, Alaska is home to six groups of Indigenous peoples.[3] The native languages of these people are broken into two large families, Eska-Aleutian and Na-Dene. Speakers of Eska-Aleutian dialects have often been called Eskimos, but this name is not their own and serves to obscure important differences between the four major groups that speak Eska-Aleutian languages.

The Aleutian, or Unangan, people lived on the Aleutian Islands and the western portion of the Alaskan Peninsula. Aleuts were the first Alaska Natives to interact with Russian hunters and have lived on the islands for approximately 8,500 years. Scholars estimate that the Aleutian population was between 15,000 and 18,000 at the time of contact. Sea mammals, such as the Steller sea cow, seals, sea otters, sea lions, and whales, comprised up to fifty percent of the Aleutian diet, with fish such as halibut and cod forming another one-third. Hunting was a highly ritualized endeavor, during which men hunted from kayaks and killed animals who offered

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[3] Generalizations in the following discussion are largely drawn from Steve J. Langdon, *The Native People of Alaska: Traditional Living in a Northern Land* (Anchorage: Greatland Graphics, 2014).

themselves to the hunters.[4] It appears that Aleuts organized their society around matrilineal house groups with differences of wealth largely minimized by kinship ties. Aleuts did keep a small number of slaves, often women captured during warfare with other Alaska Native groups.[5]

The Alutiiq, or Sugpiaq (also referred to as Pacific Eskimos), lived in Alaska's southern lands bordering the Gulf of Alaska. The first Alutiiq settled in the Kodiak Archipelago and on the Alaska Peninsula more than 7,500 years ago. Like Aleuts, Alutiiq hunted sea mammals and fished, primarily salmon and herring. Scholars are unsure of the size of the Alutiiq population at the time of Russian contact, with estimates ranging from as low as 8,000 to as high as 30,000. Alutiiq lived in nearly 100 territorially based sociopolitical groups in seasonal encampments. Alutiiq consolidated their encampments during the winter, resulting in villages ranging from 100 to 1,000 individuals. Similarly to the Aleuts, Alutiiq society was probably matrilineal, but included recognized gender roles for men as women and women as men. Alutiiq recognized older heads of households as a type of nobility, while most younger members of society were commoners and formed the majority of the labor force. Women and children captured in battle lived as slaves and could be killed or traded by their owners.[6]

The Yupiit (also called Bering Sea Eskimos) lived in the coastal regions of western central Alaska and adapted to the greatest variety of environments among Alaska Natives, and as a consequence are some of the most culturally diverse of Alaska's Indigenous peoples. Those

[4] Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 20-25.
[5] For more on Aleut society, see: Katherine L. Reedy-Maschner, *Aleut Identities: Tradition and Modernity in an Indigenous Fishery* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), chapter 2; and William Laughlin, *Aleuts: Survivors of the Bering Land Bridge* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1980).
[6] For more on Alutiiq society, see: *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People*, ed. Aron Crowell, Amy Steffian, and Gordon L. Pullar (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2001); and Sonja Luehrmann, *Alutiiq Villages under Russian and U.S. Rule* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2008).

living in the Bering Sea focused primarily on hunting large sea mammals and maintained contact with Siberian reindeer herders called Chukchi. Other Yupiit, such as those from Nelson Island, developed an expertise in making nets used to capture herring. The oldest Yupiit sites in Alaska are on the north side of the Alaska Peninsula and are nearly 9,000 years old. Yupiit lived in approximately thirty-five settlements ranging in population from 100 to 600 residents depending on the availability of fish or, in the case of those in the Bering Sea, whales and walrus. At contact, the Yupiit population numbered about 19,500. Bering Sea Yupiit organized their society patrilineally, with marriages often designed to strengthen ties between different clans. On mainland Alaska, however, Yupiits often organized based upon matrilineal lines even though men held a slightly higher status in their communities, especially if they could achieve the status of *nugalpiag*, or "good provider." Wealth played more significantly into status among the Bering Sea Yupiit, while on the mainland such distinctions were less important than a community-based ethos that honored elders as critical to society's welfare. Warfare was common with all Alaska Native groups and, for the Yupiit of the Bering Sea, with the Asian Chukchi. Yupiit contact with Russian representatives occurred rather late, not until the nineteenth century, and because most Yupiit territory was bereft of resources desired by Americans, interactions with U.S. citizens remained minimal until the twentieth century.[7]

The final members of the Eska-Aleutian language family are the Iñupiat (Northern Eskimos), who lived in Alaska's far north and at the time of contact formed some of the largest Alaska Native communities. Evidence of humans living in the Iñupiat region date back nearly 10,000 years, but it appears those now recognized as Iñupiat occupied the region about 3,500 years ago. At the time of contact with Europeans in the nineteenth century, the Iñupiat

[7] For more on Yupiit society, see: Ann Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo Essays: Yup'ik Lives and How We See Them* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), especially chapters 2 and 7.

population was about 10,000. Iñupiat lived in a number of different settlement types. Some, such as those on the northern coast, were essentially permanent, while those living farther south were the most nomadic of Alaska's Indigenous peoples, moving camp several times a year. Iñupiat subsisted primarily by means of a mix of hunting caribou and fishing salmon. For those living on the coast, marine mammals were also of great importance. Iñupiat society was bilateral. That is, Iñupiat valued male and female kinship equally. Iñupiat considered strangers enemies who could be killed if they did not quickly establish kinship ties, such as trading partnerships or adoption. Although slavery did not exist among the Iñupiat, wealth differences did. That being said, checks existed to ensure the wellbeing of all members of a community, such as the distribution of food to those in need. Nonetheless, competition among groups resulted in well-defined, and defended, territorial borders. While incidental contact between Europeans and Iñupiat occurred early in the nineteenth century, it was not until American whalers passed through the Bering Strait in pursuit of bowhead whales in the 1850s that substantial contact occurred.[8]

Trade with other Alaska Natives and Indigenous Siberians was important for Eska-Aleutian peoples. Trade with Indigenous Siberians reflected the close genetic and cultural ties between Eska-Aleutians and Siberian peoples such as the Chukchi. In fact, the sale of Alaska separated the inhabitants of Little Diomede Island from kin living on Big Diomede Island. Even throughout portions of the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union signed treaties that allowed Indigenous Americans and Russians from the islands to travel back and forth to visit family members divided from one another by the imposition of international boundaries.[9]

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[8] For more on Iñupiat society, see: Ernest S. Burch, *Social Life in Northwest Alaska: The Structure of Iñupiaq Eskimos Nations* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2006).

[9] Roger Menadelook, "A Group of Alaskan Eskimos Receive Greetings and Sample the Hospitality of Soviet Russia," MS 0004-13-005, Menadelook, Roger, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

The two Na-Dene groups, the Athabascans and Tlingit and Haida, are more closely related to the Native American groups of the continental United States and Canadian First Nations. The Athabascans, also called Alaska's Interior Indians, lived in the vast region stretching from the Brooks Mountain Range in the north to the Alaska Range in the south. They are related to First Nations peoples in the Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories, and British Columbia, as well as the Navajo and Apache of the U.S. southwest. Athabascans may have been among Alaska's first residents, with archeological evidence suggesting their occupation of sites along the Tanana and Nenana rivers up to 11,500 years ago. At the time of contact, Athabascans lived in dispersed bands of fifteen to seventy-five individuals spread throughout Alaska's interior and are estimated to have totaled about 11,000 individuals. The largest groups lived near rivers with abundant salmon runs, while smaller groups living in upland regions depended on moose and caribou. Most Athabascans lived a semi-nomadic life, usually occupying several seasonal camps during the warmer months and returning to established winter villages during the colder months. Some Athabascan groups, however, lived in virtually permanent villages of two or three families, with men going on extended hunting trips to secure food and other resources, such as furs. Athabascans divided into clans based on matrilineal descent, but were often led by men who excelled at providing for their families and clans. These men exercised little formal authority, though. Rather, they led based upon kinship ties and their generosity in redistributing wealth through potlatches, or ceremonial feasts honoring life, death, and other important social events and during which those sponsoring the potlatch gave gifts to those in attendance.[10] As with most other Alaska Native groups, slavery existed among Athabascans in the form of women

[10] For more on the potlatch, see: Sally Snyder, "Quest for the Sacred in Northern Puget Sound: An Interpretation of the Potlatch," *Ethnology* 14, no. 2 (April 1975). For an in-depth exploration of the potlatch in Alaska, see: Sergei Kan, *Symbolic Immortality: The Tlingit Potlatch of the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

and children taken in raids against enemies. Because most Athabascans lived in Alaska's interior, significant contact with Europeans did occur until the mid-nineteenth century.[11]

The Tlingit and Haida (or Southeast Indians), while culturally very similar, speak different languages and have distinct ethnic identities. They lived in the southeastern region of Alaska and are closely related to First Nations peoples living along the coast of British Columbia and coastal Native Americans in present-day Washington state. In fact, by the 1850s Alaskan Tlingit and Haida roamed the entire Northwest Pacific coast and even took part in the 1855-56 "Indian War" in western Washington.[12] Evidence indicates that the earliest Tlingit probably established themselves in southeastern Alaska between 2,000 and 4,000 years ago. The Haida, however, may have arrived in the area a mere 200 years before European contact. Nonetheless, by contact, both cultures lived in relatively permanent settlements (which sometimes included palisades), depended largely on salmon and hunting deer, and had created highly stratified societies. In total, at contact the Tlingit population numbered about 15,000 and the Haida about 1,800. Tlingit society was comprised of thirteen groups often mistakenly referred to as tribes. Each group lacked internal political unity, but the members did enjoy social and ceremonial unity, including intermarriage and peace. Tlingit and Haida groups made war upon and took slaves from other Tlingit and Haida groups. Tlingit and Haida also recognized two matrilineal moieties; marriage between members from the same moiety was considered taboo. Each moiety was further divided into clans; there were about eighty Tlingit and ten Haida clans. The Tlingit and Haida first encountered Europeans in the late eighteenth century. Although the Tlingit and

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[11] For more on Athabascan society, see: William Simeone, *Rifles, Blankets, and Beads: Identity, History, and the Northern Athabaskan Potlatch* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); and William Simeone, *A History of Alaskan Athabaskans* (Anchorage: Alaska Historical Commission, 1982).
[12] Lissa K. Wadewitz, "Rethinking the 'Indian War': Northern Indians and Intra-Native Politics in the Western Canada-U.S. Borderlands," *Western Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2019).

Haida allowed Russians to build settlements in southeastern Alaska, most prominently at Sitka, conflict between the groups was common and Russia failed to ever exercise any kind of significant military or political control over the Tlingit or Haida.[13]

Humans had lived in Alaska for thousands of years by the time the first Russian-sponsored hunters and explorers arrived. Alaska Natives had created sophisticated societies that expertly took advantage of the land's resources, as well as those of the surrounding seas. As with other Indigenous people the world over, however, contact with Europeans and their ideas drastically affected Native societies in Alaska. In particular, Alaska Natives had to learn how to live and negotiate with imperial representatives with vastly different worldviews and different expectations for Alaska itself.

Russian America

The Russian Empire spread east throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, largely in pursuit of profits garnered from the hunting of furbearing mammals.[14] Despite an abundance of natural resources, Russia lacked significant deposits of precious metals and thus easy access to hard currency. But many furbearing animals lived within and adjacent to the early Moscovite state and quickly formed the foundation of medieval Russian wealth. Moscovy undertook eastward imperial expansion largely to secure access to Siberia's furbearers.[15] The eastern Russian Empire was built upon the need to turn animal furs into currency.

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[13] For more on Tlingit society, see: Andrei Val'terovich Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America, 1741-1867*, trans. Richard L. Bland and Katerina G. Solovjova (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); and Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), chapter 1.

[14] Much of the following discussion is derived from Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[15] Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (New York: Longman, 2001), 34-35.

By 1697, Russians had reached the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Pacific Ocean. The ocean, however, did not stop Russian expansion for long. At the time, Russian officials were not concerned with settling new lands, but in making them profitable. As a consequence, the region's furbearers were quickly hunted to the edge of extinction as Russian hunters, called *promyshlenniki*, spread east. The rapid disappearance of furbearers in Siberia forced the hunters onto the Pacific, where, by 1743, *promyshlenniki* first came upon the Aleutian Islands and immediately set to killing thousands of sea otters, fur seals, and sea lions. Again, the rapid disappearance of furbearing mammals encouraged continued Russian expansion eastward, where they encountered Aleut villages. Continuing a practice begun in Siberia, Russians forced Aleuts to hunt against their will by taking women and children hostage. Aleut communities that refused to cooperate quickly found their small island villages easily surrounded, cut off, and destroyed by Russian ships and men with firearms.

As hunters decimated sea mammal populations, the *promyshlenniki* continued their push east and managed to bring many Alutiiq communities under Russian control as well. Again, isolated villages were little match for Russian guns and disease. In 1799, the Russian American Company (RAC) received its charter from the Russian government as well as a monopoly over the resources of Russia's North American possessions. That Russia had to model the RAC on the Hudson's Bay Company demonstrates Russia's late arrival to the club of overseas empires. In 1808, recognizing the near eradication of furbearers in the Aleutians and along the southern coast of Alaska, the RAC moved the Russian capital of North America to Novo-Arkhanel'sk, or Sitka, an island far to the east just off the Alaskan panhandle. There, the RAC encountered the Tlingit and Haida, who largely succeeded in stopping the advance of the Russian Empire. With their more structured and unified societies, mainland villages could not be so easily isolated, and with

access to guns provided by British, Spanish, and American traders, the Tlingit and Haida forced the RAC to pragmatically, if not officially, recognize Indigenous power in southeastern Alaska for the remainder of the Russian period.

Imperial Russia never managed to effectively exploit the vast resources of Russian America, as Alaska was called during its years as a Russian colony. While the pattern of possession in Russian America closely mirrored similar processes in Siberia, its distance from St. Petersburg placed Russian America not only on the periphery of the Russian Empire, but also in the Russian imperial imagination. The distance from St. Petersburg to Sitka is nearly 10,000

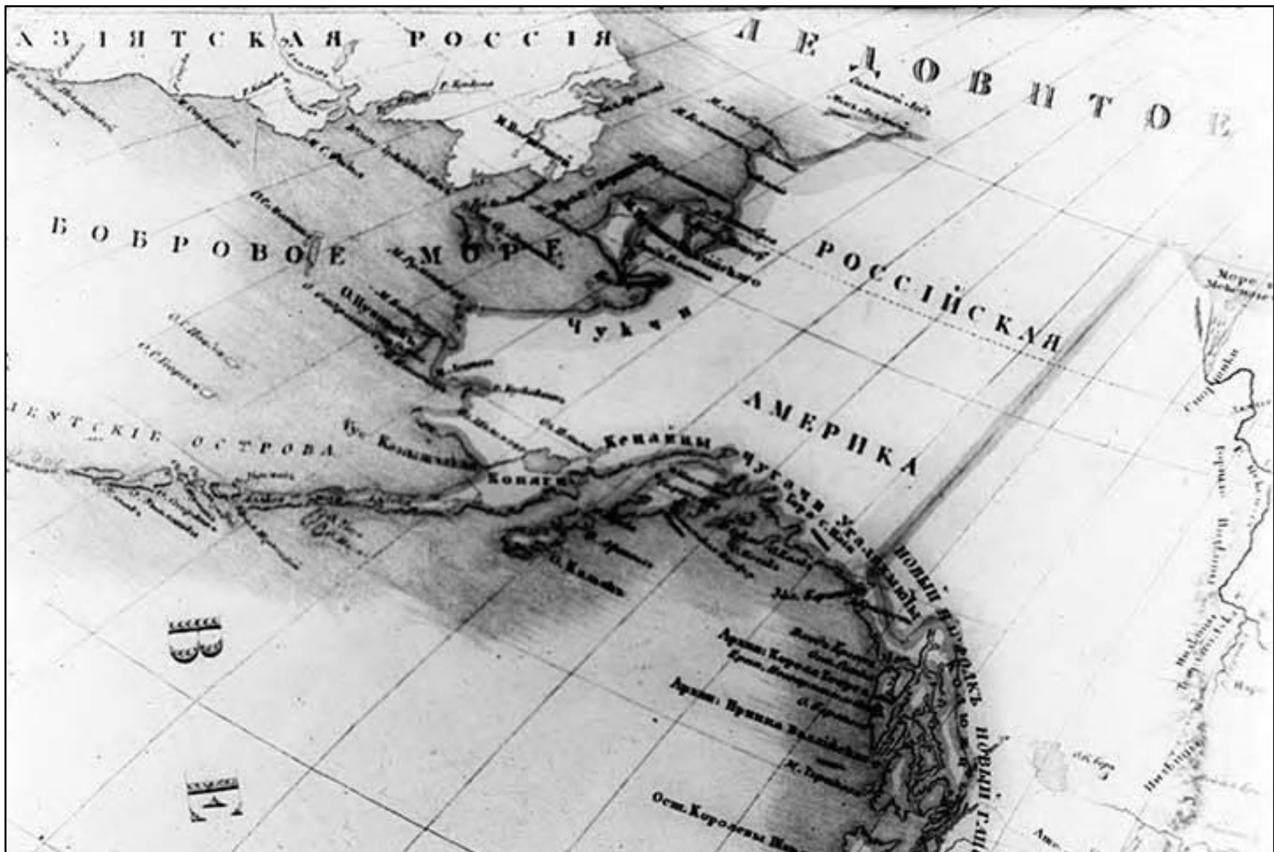

Fig. 1-1 An undated Russian map of Alaska. “Asian Russia” is located in the upper left of the map and Russian America in the center. The “Beaver Sea” separates the two. Note that while the coast of Alaska is fairly detailed and includes the names of settlements, the interior is blank. “Russian language map of Alaska.” ASL-P20-314, Alaska Purchase Centennial Collection, ca. 1764-1967, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections. https://vilda.alaska.edu/digital/collection/cdmg21/id/21791

miles when traveling east across Siberia. Russian officials could more easily reach Russian America after 1801, when the Russian Navy began its circumnavigation voyages.[16] The ocean served as a highway rather than a barrier. Nonetheless, Russian vessels still had to travel across the Atlantic Ocean, around the tip of South America, and up the coasts of South and North America to reach Sitka, a voyage of approximately 17,000 miles! The expenditures such voyages necessitated called into question the profitability of Russian America.

While Russian possession of American colonies concerned other European leaders, particularly the Spanish, Russian America received only sporadic attention from the tsars. More pressing matters of European politics, particularly conflicts in the Black Sea region and Caucasus as well as the repression of revolutionary movements, drew the attention of St. Petersberg.[17] While the fur trade had proved profitable for a number of decades, by the 1850s many within the upper echelons of Russian society and government believed Russian America had become too great an economic and political liability to maintain.[18] Two well-positioned Russians in particular, Count Nikolai Muraviev-Amurskii and Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, Tsar Alexander II's brother, advocated the sale of Russian America to the United States in the 1850s.

In March 1853, Muraviev-Amurskii submitted a report to the Tsar in which he claimed complete U.S. dominance of North America was only a matter of time. "Due to the present amazing development of railroads," he wrote, "the United States will soon spread over all North America. We must face the fact that we will have to cede our North American possessions to

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[16] Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47-51.
[17] Andrei V. Grinev, "Russia's Emperors and Russian America (for the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Romanov Dynasty)," *Russian Studies in History* 54, no. 1 (2015), 28.
[18] For a fuller discussion of Russian motivations to sell Alaska, see: Vinkovetsky, *Russian America* and Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, *Russko-Amerikanskie otnosheniia i prodazha Aliaski, 1834-1867* [Russian-American Relations and the Sale of Alaska, 1834-1867] (Moscow: Nauka, 1990).

them.” If Russia accepted the inevitability of U.S. domination of the continent, however, Muraviev-Amurskii suggested that “we might receive other advantages from the Americans.” The specific advantage Muraviev-Amurskii envisioned was a scenario in which Russia dominated Asia’s Pacific coast while the United States controlled North America’s Pacific coast, thus removing British access to and competition in the Pacific Ocean and Asian markets.[19]

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the greatest rival of both the United States and Russia was Great Britain. British fears of Russian power generated by its tremendous territorial size and simply waiting to be unleashed eventually led to the Crimean War. Britain and its allies won the war and attempted, unsuccessfully, to neuter Russia’s potential great power potential.[20] British influence in the United States remained so significant during the nineteenth century, that the historian A. G. Hopkins recently went so far as to argue the United States lacked full practical independence until the Civil War.[21] It made sense in the minds of Russian and American leaders to work in concert to impair the furtherance of British power.

Of greater influence than Muraviev-Amurskii was Grand Duke Konstantin, who foresaw Russian exploitation of East Asian resources and markets as more promising than the potentialities of North America. In 1857, he wrote to the Russian Foreign Minister Aleksandr Gorchakov: “I think we would do well to take advantage of the excess money at the present time in the Treasury of the United States of America and sell them our North American colonies.”[22] Konstantin believed the RAC, which administered Russia’s North American colonies in a

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[19] In Hallie M. McPherson, “The Interest of William Mckendree Gwin in the Purchase of Alaska,” *Pacific Historical Review* 3, no. 1 (1934), 30.
[20] Norman Rich, *Why the Crimean War: A Cautionary Tale* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 201.
[21] A. G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 694-695.
[22] In Oleh W. Gerus, “The Russian Withdrawal from Alaska: The Decision to Sell,” *Revista de Historia de América* 75/76 (1973), 165.

manner similar to the Hudson's Bay Company in British Columbia, was little more than a monopolistic parasite that had failed in its duties to secure wealth for the empire and train sailors for the Russian Navy. As the head of the Russian Department of the Navy, Konstantin used the official naval publication, *Morskoi Sbornik*, to denigrate the Russian American Company's management of the American colony. For example, an article in 1862 declared, "Regarding industry, it may be said that it has been, with the exception of the fur industry, little developed under the influence of the Russian-American Company." The journal unfavorably compared Russian America to the state of California, which "is progressing every year with more and more trade, industry, agriculture, and the rapid development of cattle breeding, precisely because no measures can stop the entrepreneurship of citizens, because every one of them knows they are working for themselves, for their own good." Additionally, the writer of the article claimed that the RAC had "killed our merchant shipping in the Pacific Ocean."[23] Such claims expressed Konstantin's belief that Russian America's failure to develop sizeable industry, agriculture, or a Russian population was the result of the RAC's monopolistic hold on the territory. Breaking the RAC's monopoly was one solution to these problems, but rather than adapt to the unique conditions of possessing and administering an overseas imperialist possession, Konstantin preferred to rid the empire of any overseas complications by selling Russia America to the United States.

Such early expressions of Russian willingness to sell the colony to the United States lend credence to the later claim of the U.S. minister to Russia, Cassius M. Clay, who in congratulating Seward after the purchase of Alaska, wrote that he had been told as early as 1863, "that the Emperor Nicholas was willing to give us Russian America if we would close up our coast

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[23] "Obzor russkikh kolonii v cev. amerike," [Overview of the Russian Colonies in North America], *Morskoi Sbornik*, vol. 62, no. 1 (1862), 138. The translation is my own.

possessions to 54°40′." Clay went on to blame Southern slave owners for delaying the purchase, who "fearing this new accession of 'free soil,' yielded the point and let England into the great ocean."[24] In crediting the sectional conflict with impeding U.S. expansion in the years prior to the Civil War, Clay adroitly explained why American politicians missed the opportunity to purchase Alaska years earlier.

Testimony from another Russian source further indicates that the advent of the Civil War scuttled an earlier effort to purchase Russian America initiated by U.S. officials. In January 1860, Baron Edouard de Stoeckl, serving as the Russian minister to the United States, penned a letter to Gorchakov in which he described being approached, in an unofficial capacity, by Senator William M. Gwin of California, who inquired as to Russia's willingness to sell its American possessions.[25] According to de Stoeckl, Gwin stated that he had conferred with President James Buchanan regarding the possibility of the United States purchasing Russian America and found the President receptive to the idea and willing to offer $5 million for Russia's North American lands. De Stoeckl then met with Assistant Secretary of State John Appleton to further ascertain the level of U.S. interest in purchasing the Russian colony. Appleton told de Stoeckl that Buchanan "thought the acquisition of our colonies would be very profitable for the

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[24] *House Ex. Doc. 177*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess., 12. The line of latitude 54°40′ was the southern boundary of Russian America as defined in the Russo-American Treaty of 1824 and the Anglo-Russian Treaty of 1825.

[25] Gwin began advocating for the purchase of Alaska as early as 1854. During and after the Civil War he schemed for an independent Republic of the Pacific including California, Oregon, and Mexico's Pacific possessions. It is possible Gwin imagined that republic stretching through British Columbia and into Alaska. See, Rachel St. John, "The Unpredictable America of William Gwin: Expansion, Secession, and the Unstable Borders of Nineteenth-Century North America," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, no. 1 (March 2016).

states situated upon the Pacific," but asked that all discussions be kept secret unless the Russian government was, in fact, interested in selling the territory to the United States.[26]

De Stoeckl urged St. Petersburg to sell Russian America to the United States because he believed the territory remained too desolate and too far from St. Petersburg to ever be worthwhile to Russia. Additionally, the colony was indefensible against "any maritime power with whom we shall be at war." De Stoeckl reminded Gorchakov that the only reason Great Britain had not captured Russian America during the Crimean War was that the belligerents declared their North American territories neutral during the conflict. On the other hand, de Stoeckl argued, "If the United States should become the owner of our possessions, British Oregon would be crowded on the northern side and the southern side by the Americans and escape with difficulty from the aggressions of the latter."[27] Similar to Muraviev-Amurskii, de Stoeckl viewed the potential sale of Russian America as a means by which Russia could rid itself of a burdensome colony, increase the goodwill that existed between Russia and the United States, and strike a blow at Great Britain's political and economic empire. De Stoeckl's timing, however, was unfortunate. While there is no explicit evidence that the Civil War prevented these early negotiations from bearing fruit, such a conclusion seems undeniable. After the Civil War, however, sensing that Northern Republicans had begun to seek new avenues for U.S. expansion, de Stoeckl offered the territory to Seward.

Russia failed to secure and exploit Russian America because it lacked imperial flexibility. The drive for profit, mercantilist rather than capitalist in Russia's case, had been at the core of Russia's eastward expansion beginning in the seventeenth century. Russian strategy depended on

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[26] "Baron Stoeckl to Prince Gorchakov (Translation); 23 December 1859/4 January 1860," *Pacific Historical Review* 3, no. 1 (1934), 84-87.
[27] "Baron Stoeckl to Prince Gorchakov."

subduing Indigenous populations in order to harness their labor. The RAC's inability to break the spirit of the Tlingit and Haida, combined with Russia's precarious position in Europe, doomed Russia's North American venture to failure. Rather than adapt to changing circumstances, Russian leaders decided to unload the burdens of Russian America by selling the colony to the United States. While also lacking a clear imperialist vision, American leaders proved more flexible in both their imagining of Alaska's potential as well as implementing plans to exploit that potential.

The Purchase of Alaska

Slavery proved the greatest hindrance to the continued growth of the U.S. empire during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Especially after the war with Mexico, Whigs, and after the demise of that political party, Republicans, feared that slavery would accompany U.S. territorial growth in the West. To be sure, most Republicans did not imagine an empire of equality in the West. Rather, Republicans sought to keep Western lands free of African American labor, free or slave, so that white Americans might spread across the continent.[28] The end of the Civil War unshackled Republican expansionists. Not only did the Civil War save the Union, it determined which imperial vision would dominate the rest of the century; the U.S. empire would be one of industrial free labor rather than one of agricultural slavery.

In 1867 the United States possessed few politicians as experienced and shrewd as Secretary of State William Seward. Like many of his fellow Republicans, Seward had blocked territorial expansion efforts prior to the Civil War because he vigorously opposed slavery.

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[28] Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 277-280; Richard W. Etulain, *Beyond the Missouri: The Story of the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 213-214; and William S. Kiser, *Coast-to-Coast Empire: Manifest Destiny and the New Mexico Borderlands* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 111-117.

Nonetheless, even during the years in which he campaigned against territorial expansion, Seward recognized the importance of laying the foundation for a later U.S. economic empire in the northern Pacific. In 1852, Seward encouraged the Senate to finance an expedition of Arctic exploration for the furtherance of whaling. Not only would the knowledge gained prove important to the New England whaling fleet that worked the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean, but it would also lay "the foundations of empire … for Young America."[29] Slavery, and the war fought to end it, delayed Seward's imperial hopes.

Once the Civil War and the Thirteenth Amendment settled the question of slavery, however, Seward and other Republicans quickly took up the reins of expansion once again.[30] The purchase of Alaska represented the first step toward Seward's goal of an Artic empire. Thus, it did not take long for both Russia and the United States to return to the issue of purchasing Russian America. After a short series of negotiations in March 1867, Russia sold its North American territories to the United States for $7.2 million.

By 1867, purchasing land from other sovereign states was a tried-and-true strategy of U.S. expansion. Most famously, during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory for $15 million. In 1819, Spain ceded East Florida to the United States, as well as giving up claims to lands in West Florida, in exchange for the United States assuming responsibility for paying $5 million worth of claims settlers in the region had leveled against Spain. At the conclusion of the Mexican War, the United States paid $15 million for the lands the United States seized during the conflict. And in 1854, the United States paid Mexico $10 million for a narrow strip of land in present-day southern Arizona to facilitate the

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[29] William H. Seward, *Commerce in the Pacific Ocean: Speech of William H. Seward in the Senate of the United States, July 29, 1852* (Washington D.C.: Buell & Blanchard, 1852), 3.
[30] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1988; repr., 2002), 495.

Fig. 1-2 A print of the painting by Emanuel Leutze showing the Alaska Purchase. William Seward is shown seated to the left of the globe and Eduard de Stoeckl rests his hand on the globe. *Signing of Treaty of Cessation, March 30, 1867.* ASL-P20-181, Alaska Purchase Centennial Collection, ca. 1764-1967, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections. https://vilda.alaska.edu/digital/collection/cdmg21/id/9752

construction of a hoped-for transcontinental railroad through the region. Purchasing land from other countries fit well within the economic framework of the nineteenth-century U.S. government, in which federal income derived primarily from tariffs and land sales. In essence, the United States government operated like a private land speculator, purchasing land cheaply from foreign governments in the hope that the land could then be resold to private citizens at a profit.[31]

[31] This type of land purchase differs significantly from the concept of the "market for sovereign control," in which land can be exchanged between states at the behest of the people who inhabit the land and for whose loyalty governments compete. Such a concept, while perhaps not totally inappropriate for consideration in the nineteenth century, seems to be far more relevant in the post-World War II,

Seward imagined Alaska differently, however. True, purchasing the land from Russia was consistent with prior U.S. land acquisitions, but the idea of white Americans settling in Alaska, to say nothing of eventual statehood, was far from Seward's mind. Seward envisioned profits in Alaska. Concerns of the whaling industry first piqued Seward's interest in Alaska, as did later petitions from Pacific Northwest fishermen.[32] The United States needed political sovereignty in Alaska in order to control its resources, not provide an outlet for settler colonialism.

Secretary Seward and de Stoeckl began the final talks for Alaska the night of March 29. The session ran until four in the morning on March 30. Historians have pointed to these late-night negotiations as proof that Seward recognized that the purchase would be unpopular and attempted to buy Alaska with as little public attention as possible.[33] Actually, Seward knew that the Senate would adjourn at noon on March 30 after a session of only two hours and hoped to have the treaty ratified before the Congressional break. Rather than demonstrating a fear that obtaining Alaska would be unpopular, the timing and brevity of the negotiations indicate that Seward believed the purchase would receive wide-spread support. That Seward, a former senator, believed the treaty could be introduced and ratified in such a short session shows extreme confidence, even overconfidence, on his part. The Senate's schedule was too crowded,

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decolonized world. See: Joseph Blocher and Mitu Gulati, "A Market for Sovereign Control," *Duke Law Journal* 66, no. 4 (January 2017).

[32] Walter Stahr, *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 482-483. For the growth of the whaling industry in the Bering Sea region, see: Demuth, *Floating Coast.*

[33] For examples of the standard telling of the tale see Frank A. Golder, "The Purchase of Alaska," *American Historical Review* 25, no. 3 (1920); and Foster Rhea Dulles, *Russia and America: Pacific Neighbors* (New York: American Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1946).

however, and the treaty never made it to the floor. President Johnson called an executive session beginning April 1 to consider, among other things, the treaty to purchase Alaska.[34]

Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts championed the purchase treaty in the Senate. Comprising the only significant discussion of the purchase on the Senate floor, Sumner delivered a three-hour speech in which he outlined five reasons why the United States should purchase Alaska, all of which stressed the imperial nature and benefits of the purchase.[35] The first benefit provided by the purchase of Alaska was the growth of American commercial interests on the Pacific coast, both domestic and foreign. Sumner lauded Alaska's natural resources, including fur, fish, timber, coal, copper, iron, silver, lead, gold, and ice, all of which, he predicted, would enrich U.S. citizens.[36] The addition of Alaskan harbors would "extend the coasting trade of California, Oregon, and Washington northward," argued Sumner. But of even greater consequence was that the purchase of Alaska "extends the base of commerce with China and Japan." Specifically, Sumner noted that a sea voyage from San Francisco to Hong Kong, via the Sandwich Islands (Hawai'i), was over one thousand miles longer than the same trip via the

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[34] See Paul Sothe Holbo, *Tarnished Expansion: The Alaska Scandal, the Press, and Congress, 1867-1871* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 7-9. Holbo's study is more concerned with the allegations of corruption leveled at Congress by newspapers such as the *New York Tribune* than with the popularity of the purchase, but he provides a concise and easy to understand summary of the chronology of the purchase.

[35] It was in this speech that Sumner became the first to recommend the name Alaska for the territory, taken from an Indigenous word for the Alaskan Peninsula and meaning "great land." Charles Sumner, *Speech on the Cession of Russian America to the United States* (Washington DC: Congressional Globe Press, 1867), 48.

[36] Sumner's prediction of wealth generated from natural resources was accurate. Beyond the well-known stories of Alaskan gold, Norman Saul has demonstrated that profits from seal fur hunting on the Pribilof Islands alone had, by 1887, recouped the entire purchase price of Alaska. Additionally, as Stephen Haycox has shown, Alaska's canned salmon industry provided seventy-five percent of territorial Alaska's revenue until 1940. Norman E. Saul, "A Diplomatic Failure and an Ecological Disaster: The United States, Russia, and the North Pacific Fur Seals, 1867-1914," in *Russkoe Otkrytie Ameriki* [Russian Discovery of America] ed. A. O. Chubarian (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002), 255-291; and Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 2d ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), 260.

Aleutians.[37] Decades before U.S. political leaders justified the imperialist seizure of the Philippines by pointing to Asian markets, they imagined Alaska as an entrepot to the Asian market.

Sumner's second reason for buying Alaska was what he called extension of the domain. Comparing the United States to the European empires of France, Spain, Russia, and Great Britain, Sumner argued that it was natural that, "a nation seeks an outlying territory."[38] Nations naturally sought greatness in the establishment of empires.[39] Thus, the drive for empire was what marked the great nations of the world, and the United States, in order to be fully accepted into the fraternity of great nations, needed the empire Alaska made manifest.

Third, Sumner argued that it was the duty of Americans to spread republican institutions. The United States endeavored toward empire, as did all great nations in the nineteenth century, and Alaska was vital in realizing that empire. "The present Treaty is a visible step in the occupation of the whole North American continent," said Sumner. "By it we dismiss one more monarch from this continent. One by one they have retired; first France; then Spain; then France again; and now Russia; all giving away to that absorbing Unity which is declared in the national motto, *E pluribus unum*." Sumner's rejection of monarchy, though, represented not a rejection of empire, but an imperial adaptation—the creation of an imperial republic, though Sumner never used the term. This American republican empire "was to be a support for mankind." Sumner proclaimed that "the Republic is something more than a local policy; it is a general principle, not to be forgotten at any time, especially when the opportunity is presented of bringing an immense region within its influence." The U.S. imperial republic, furthered by the purchase of Alaska, in

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[37] Sumner, *Speech on the Cession of Russian America to the United States*, 12.
[38] Sumner, *Speech on the Cession of Russian America to the United States*, 12.
[39] For more on this topic, see Hopkins, *American Empire*, chapter 2.

the minds of its architects, was different than previous empires. Rather than an expression of "kingly power," the United States ruled "in the name of Human Rights."[40] This dedication to imperial republicanism demanded that the United States annex Alaska.

The fourth reason to buy Alaska, argued Sumner, was that if the United States did not buy Alaska, Great Britain would. Citing an article in the *British Colonist*, a newspaper printed in Victoria, British Columbia, Sumner informed the Senate that British leaders believed "the Russian possessions were destined to round and complete the domain of Great Britain on this continent."[41] Sumner also quoted a pamphlet written by A. K. Roche, of Quebec, who, "after describing Russian America as 'richer in resources and capabilities than it has hitherto been allowed to be either by the English who shamefully gave it up, or by the Russians who cunningly obtained it,' the author urges an expedition for its conquest and annexation."[42] While neither of these sources reflected official British policy, they sounded an alarm in the minds of American leaders. If, however, the United States took possession of Alaska, the interior of British Columbia would be "comparatively useless to England."[43] The resources of British Columbia held value only if they could reach the Pacific through Russian territory. Alaska, then, held the key to control of the northern Pacific and perhaps all North America. Either the United States or Great Britain would acquire Alaska, and with it regional dominance of the entire North American northwest as well as the Pacific Ocean between North America and Asia.

Sumner's final reason to buy Alaska was the United States' traditional friendship with Russia. While the idea of Russia as the United States' most constant ally seems odd in the twenty-first century, in the middle of the nineteenth century this most amiable of relationships

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[40] Sumner, *Speech on the Cession of Russian America to the United States*, 13.
[41] Sumner, *Speech on the Cession of Russian America to the United States*, 14.
[42] Sumner, *Speech on the Cession of Russian America to the United States*, 14.
[43] Sumner, *Speech on the Cession of Russian America to the United States*, 13.

was an accepted truth.[44] Sumner described the two countries as, "Sharers of a common glory in a great act of Emancipation, they also share together the opposition or antipathy of other nations … At all events, no coldness or unkindness has interfered at any time with their good relations."[45] As the two newest powers on the global stage, the United States and Russia were united by the ostracization heaped upon them by Europe's old powers. The purchase of Alaska was simply a natural outgrowth of the bond between the United States and Russia and would further cement the alliance at the expense of Great Britain, the greatest rival of both young powers.

Sumner used a variety of arguments to urge the Senate to ratify the treaty securing Alaska for the United States. He appealed to republicanism and liberty to sway those who could only imagine U.S. aggrandizement as a continuation of prior land annexations. But Sumner placed imperialist arguments in the positions of honor in his argument. First, he made bald appeals to the wealth promised by natural resources as well as Alaska's position in expanding U.S. trade with Asia. Alaska's surplus natural resources could then be sold in the newly opened Asian markets. In the last position, Sumner argued that purchasing Alaska would act as a barrier to British imperialism in North America. The United States would fill the void left by Britain, emulating British imperialist policies in North America and, potentially, beyond. Sumner made no mention of white settlement of Alaska, however. Neither did the many newspapers and magazines that voiced their support of the purchase.

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[44] For more on the early friendship between the United States and Russia, see Norman E. Saul's volumes, *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763-1867* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); and *Concord and Conflict: The United States and Russia, 1867-1914* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

[45] Sumner, *Speech on the Cession of Russian America to the United States*, 15.

Almost immediately upon learning of the proposed purchase, newspapers took note of the commercial benefits the new territory promised. The *Charleston Daily News* (South Carolina) mentioned Alaska's valuable fisheries in its April 1 report.[46] In its first report of the purchase, the *Bangor Daily Whig* (Maine) also noted the value of Alaska's fisheries and added to that Alaska's furs.[47] Such reports neither endorsed nor condemned the purchase, but they do reveal how Americans valued Alaska in the nineteenth century.

Other papers demonstrated a keener grasp of Alaska's significance, sounding very much like Sumner in the process. The *Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, South Carolina) argued that the fisheries and fur were "vastly in excess of the sum agreed upon as the purchase money." The purchase, its editors argued, also demonstrated the great friendship that existed between the United States and Russia and made the continued possession of British Columbia by England untenable. The *Phoenix* concluded that as a result of the purchase, Great Britain's interests were best served by withdrawing "gracefully from a continent where her institutions are out of place and where her intrigues can only bring trouble upon her colonies and humiliation to her Government at home."[48] The *Daily Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), among the most ardent supporters of the purchase, also praised Seward for outmaneuvering England, calling the treaty "the distinguishing and crowning achievement of Mr. Seward's foreign policy." Further, the editors speculated that $70 million in precious metals might be found under Mount St. Elias alone.[49] Great Britain's exit from North America and imperialist ambitions went hand-in-hand for many Americans.

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[46] "Washington News," *Charleston Daily News* (South Carolina), 1 April 1867.
[47] "Washington," *Bangor Daily News* (Maine), 1 April 1867.
[48] "Acquisition of Russian America," *Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, South Carolina), 4 April 1867.
[49] "Russo-American Purchase—the Climax of Mr. Seward's Foreign Policy," *Daily Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), 3 April 1867.

In the end, such arguments proved persuasive. On April 9, the Senate overwhelmingly ratified the treaty of purchase by a vote of 37-2.[50] News of the treaty's ratification generated generally positive reactions in the nation's press, which largely supported Sumner's and Seward's imperialist vision. Philadelphia's *Daily Evening Telegraph* said that in light of Alaska's many natural resources, the price of $7 million made it "a remarkably cheap purchase." All the territory needed, claimed the *Evening Telegraph*, were the "active brains and eager hands … capital and freedom and civilization of the United States" and it would be transformed into "a mine of wealth."[51] The *Daily Argus* (Rock Island, Illinois) called the purchase "the most important international event affecting this continent which has occurred in many years," and predicted that Alaska's navigation and fisheries would become "essential interests to the states of the Pacific."[52] Whether mineral or animal, the wealth of Alaska's natural resources justified its purchase.

The purchase of Alaska seemed to herald future imperialist land acquisitions. In San Francisco, the *Daily Alta California*, which proposed that the new territory be called Alexander in honor of the Russian tsar, predicted that "British America" would be the next territory annexed by the United States.[53] The *Charleston Daily News*, which had cautiously reported the valuable fisheries of Alaska when news of the purchase first became public, continued praising Alaska's natural wealth, but added that the purchase would force Canada and Mexico to join the Union. The acquisition of Alaska destined Seward for "diplomatic immortality" and "provided a fine pinnacle from which the American Eagle can, when the days of good feeling come back,

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[50] U.S. Congress, *Senate Exec. Journal*, 40th Cong., Special sess. (9 April 1867), 675-676.
[51] "The Resources and Future of Russian America," *Daily Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia,) 10 April 1867.
[52] "The Russian Treaty," *Daily Argus* (Rock Island, Illinois), 11 April 1867.
[53] "The Ratification of the Russian Treaty," *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), 11 April 1867.

'spread itself' over the immense country that will then lie peacefully beneath the shadow of its wings."[54] Imperialism, then, promised to enrich the country and its citizens, restoring relationships and communities destroyed by years of Civil War.

The purchase of Russian America did more than guarantee new North American territory, however. Specifically referencing the "distance of about 400 miles" between Washington Territory and Alaska, the *Daily Alta California* boldly declared that this territorial gap "makes a precedent for annexing and acquiring islands and parts of continents in any part of the world, and in either the Northern or the Southern hemisphere." And what lands should the United States consider acquiring? The *Alta California* suggested "a slice of Japan or China, an island or two in the West Indies, or any good thing in the way of a land speculation that may be lying round loose anywhere."[55] The editors of the *Alta California* did not specify whether or not white Americans would settle these new U.S. lands in Asia, but it is difficult to imagine any realistic expectation among leading Americans that Asian colonies would be populated by white settlers. Perhaps the editors imagined U.S. colonies in China similar to Hong Kong, which Britain had controlled since 1841. The purchase of Alaska signaled a shift away from settler expansion to an almost exclusively profit-driven imperialist ideology.

In May, *The Galaxy*, the first magazine to address the acquisition of Alaska, unabashedly celebrated the purchase. Those who opposed Alaska, it chided, "have been parading their ignorance of that region." Timber, gold, copper, iron, coal, ice, furs, and fish would greatly enrich America. The land's many fine harbors would allow the American whaling fleet in the Pacific to double in size and encourage growing trade with Asia. The growth of the Pacific fleet would also allow for better training of the United States Navy. While Russia had been incapable

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[54] "The Russian Treaty," *Charleston Daily News* (South Carolina), 12 April 1867.
[55] "The Ratification of the Russian Treaty," *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), 11 April 1867.

of properly exploiting its North American colony, adventurous Americans would no doubt prove the purchase to have been a bargain.[56]

In August, the *American Phrenological Journal* sought to provide an accurate and scientific report of the territory. After describing Alaska's climate and geography, the journal reported, "There is no doubt but that nearly the entire southern half of the territory can be made to yield a considerable quantity of bread products." Combined with Alaska's mineral wealth, furs, and fisheries, this proved the newly acquired land's value. The journal closed by predicting a future in which the United States empire dominated North America and beyond:

> When the empire of the Pacific arrives at its full stature, and San Francisco becomes the commercial emporium of the West; when a busy, thriving, vigorous, and intelligent Yankee population shall inhabit the whole coast from Lower California to Vancouver's Island, then these now desolate regions of Russian America will become favorite summer resorts, and will be known as the Vale of Chamount.[57]

While the journal's hope that Alaska might prove agriculturally viable would seem to suggest a belief that the region could support a significant white population, its references to Alaska as a summer resort indicate otherwise. At best, Alaska might be able to feed vacationers, but Alaska could not support significant white settlement north of Vancouver Island.

Even though the United States took possession of Alaska in October 1867, the House did not approve the appropriation bill until July 14, 1868. Many historians point to this lapse of more than a year between the Senate's ratification of the treaty and the House's appropriation of the

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[56] G.E. Pond, "Russian America," *The Galaxy: A Magazine of Entertaining Reading*, 1 May 1867, 104-110.

[57] "Our New Possessions," *American Phrenological Journal and Life Illustrated* 46, no. 2 (August 1867), 68-69. The Vale of Chamount is a reference to the poem *Mont Blanc*, by nineteenth-century poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, about an idyllic valley in southern France.

money as proof that the Alaska purchase remained unpopular with the American public.[58] In actuality, the passage of time had nothing to do with Alaska's popularity, which remained high, particularly because of the imperialist implications of its strategic commercial location. "The ultimate struggle for the command of the commerce and exchanges of the world is to be decided mainly upon the Pacific, and the acquisition of Alaska … has immensely strengthened our position on that ocean," the *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin* concluded.[59]

Two issues unrelated to Alaska caused the appropriation delay. First, the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson understandably consumed a great deal of the House's time and slowed all work in the lower house. Second, the 1867 Alaska negotiations, treaty signing, and ratification all occurred without the president or the Senate consulting with the House, upsetting many representatives. In essence, members of the House wanted to act as more than a rubber stamp to the acquisition of Alaska. They sought to exert the authority of the House of Representatives and ensure their involvement in future imperial land-grabs from the earliest stages. The delay in appropriations resulted not because of a lack of Alaskan popularity or because the House reflected an anti-imperialist streak in the American people, but primarily because Congressmen wanted to make a statement about their role in the financial dealings of the United States.

A few Congressmen attempted to assert the House's authority by altering the language of the treaty. Some wanted to withhold $500,000 pending adjudication of the claims of American citizens against the Russian government. Others tried to add language stating the president must

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[58] For examples, see Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft: History of Alaska, 1730-1885*, vol. XXXIII (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 1886); Henry W. Clark, *History of Alaska* (New York: Macmillan, 1930); Reinhard H. Luthin, "The Sale of Alaska," in *Alaska and Its History*, ed. Morgan B. Sherwood (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967); and John M. Taylor, *William Henry Seward: Lincoln's Right Hand* (New York: HarpersCollins, 1991).
[59] "Hon. R. J. Walker," *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, 13 February 1868.

receive the consent of the whole Congress before any treaty could go into effect. Another proposal reinforced the House's authority to decide the correctness of any appropriations, regardless of the president's or Senate's actions. All efforts, however, acknowledged that the appropriation should be made and Alaska should be purchased. The debate focused on political turf, not Alaska or imperialism. In the end, the treaty remained unchanged and the House approved the appropriation 113-43 with 44 abstentions. Even if every one of those abstaining from the vote had voted against appropriation the bill still would have easily passed 113-87.[60] While far from unanimous, the debates and votes demonstrate how quickly imperialist ideas had gained legitimacy in the United States.

When the House of Representatives took up the treaty's appropriation, Nathaniel P. Banks, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, described Alaska's significance in words reminiscent of Sumner. Banks, however, expressed more sensitivity to the foreign relations variables inherent in Alaska than had Sumner. Banks noted Alaska's discontiguous position but argued that the territory was "contiguous to territory long claimed and unwisely surrendered by us."[61] The allusion to U.S. acquiescence to the loss of Oregon north of 49 degrees and Great Britain's accompanying North American expansion is a key point in Banks' speech. "There had never been, by any nation, a more unnecessary surrender of territory," said Banks, who argued that the United States had gained title to the land between Washington Territory and Alaska in the 1814 Treaty of Ghent, but through lack of resolve eventually surrendered the land to Great Britain, to the United States' detriment and Britain's benefit. "The policy of England was wiser," continued Banks; "[Oregon] gave to her the possession on the Pacific, and in a similar manner out of a trading-post in India, she has created an empire of a hundred million

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[60] U. S. Congress, *Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess. (14 July 1868).
[61] *Appendix to Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess. (30 June 1868), 386.

people."[62] Banks' implication is clear; the United States should have pressed its rights to all of Oregon, the surrender of which unnecessarily allowed an imperial rival access to the Pacific Ocean. The failure to hold the land for future settlement was not important; the ceded land negatively affected U.S. trade. Imperialist ambitions shaped Banks' argument.

Additionally, it is important to note that Banks justified Alaskan expansion by tying the region to an ahistorical idea of continental manifest destiny that he presented as existing in a mythical U.S. past.[63] By arguing that the Treaty of Ghent gave the United States possession of the territory north of 49 degrees, Banks both harkened back to the Louisiana Purchase and placed Alaska within the context of a naturalized continental expansion that included Louisiana and the Mexican Cession. Thus, with a rhetorical sleight-of-hand, Banks suggested that the acquisition of Alaska was no different than any previous land acquisition, despite the fact that British Columbia stood in the way and the only practical way to reach Alaska was by ship. The success and importance of such a maneuver become more apparent when it is recalled that as Congress was ratifying the treaty and appropriating the money to buy Alaska, it was simultaneously rejecting the purchase of the Virgin Islands. While the Virgin Islands might be important in guarding U.S. interests in the Caribbean, they were not part of North America and, perhaps more importantly, offered no direct means to earn a profit. Additionally, the British position in the Pacific Northwest was far weaker than in the Caribbean and offered the United States an opportunity to expel Great Britain from North America.

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[62] *Appendix to Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess. (30 June 1868), 386.

[63] For more on the contested and constructed nature of manifest destiny during the nineteenth century, see Thomas Richards, Jr., *Breakaway Americas: The Unmanifest Future of the Jacksonian United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020); and Andrew C. Isenberg and Thomas Richards, Jr., "Alternative Wests: Rethinking Manifest Destiny," *Pacific Historical Review* 86, no. 1 (2017).

British Columbia was only valuable because of Alaska. Banks noted that the former Governor-in-Chief of the Hudson's Bay Company, George Simpson, had said that without access to the Pacific through the southernmost extension of Russian America, allowed by a lease with the Russian government, "the British possessions on the Pacific would be comparatively worthless."[64] The mere possession of Alaska, then, would secure Britain's vital conduit to the Pacific. This also implied that Britain's other western possessions along the Pacific coast were valueless by themselves; Alaska was the key to accessing the north Pacific, and by extension the entirety of British Columbia. If Britain could secure Russian America, Banks and those like him believed it was only a matter of time until the British began extending their reach farther down the coast into Washington, Oregon, and California. On the other hand, the frailty of the British position without Russian America suggested that Britain might easily be pushed out of British Columbia. Securing Alaska, argued the region's promoters, ensured the eventual absorption of British Columbia and would correct the mistakes of 1846 that continued to threaten U.S. imperialist designs in the Pacific Northwest, if not all North America. Without question, these types of calculations included ideas of white settlers in Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia. They did not include, however, plans for white settlement in Alaska.

Indeed, as David Shi and Richard Neunherz have documented, some British leaders harbored very real and well-founded fears that the United States might gain control of the entire Pacific coast between its northern border and Alaska.[65] Banks seized upon this British

[64] *Appendix to Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess. (30 June 1868), 386.

[65] For discussions of British fears that the acquisition of Alaska might lead to U.S. annexation of British America as well as the purchase's role in quickening the process of Canadian confederation, see: David E. Shi, "Seward's Attempt to Annex British Columbia, 1865-1869," *Pacific Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (1978); Richard E. Neunherz, "'Hemmed In': Reactions in British Columbia to the Purchase of Russian America," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (1989); Ian N. Higginson, "Poetry and Alaska: William Seward's Alaskan Purchase and Bret Harte's 'An Arctic Vision'," *Arctic* 50, no. 4 (1997); Diddy R. M.

discomfort, using the words of another English authority, this time Lord Milton, to justify U.S. efforts to acquire British territory. According to Banks, Lord Milton had "declared that 'the time had arrived when it is necessary for the English Government to consider whether it wished to keep the Pacific colonies in the present state of loyalty … There was every year a great influx of Americans into the colonies, and there was a growing desire on the part of the colonists to join the United States.'"[66] If the British colonists on the Pacific wanted to join themselves to the United States, then Great Britain had no legitimate right to prevent them from doing so.[67] And this pressure, Banks reminded his fellow congressmen, was merely, "the effect upon the British colonies of a contiguous southern American position." He then asked, "What will that influence be when the occupation is north as well as south of the British possessions?" Banks did not leave the answer open to speculation: "The silent and irresistible influence of the American people will control the Pacific coast from the southern limit of California to Point Barrow on the Arctic ocean."[68]

Control of the Pacific was fine, but why did it matter so? Because, argued Banks, the Atlantic no longer functioned as the foundation of world power. "The control of the world

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Hitchins, "An Alaskan Perspective: The Relationship between the US and Canada in the Arctic," *International Journal* 66, no. 4 (2011); and Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*.

[66] *Appendix to Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess. (30 June 1868), 387. Such fears of Americanization by infiltration were well-founded. Mexico had lost Texas, and eventually all of its possessions north of the Rio Grande, because it had encouraged such policies. See: David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), chapter 12; Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), chapter 2; and Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 72-74

[67] British Columbia did not join the Canadian confederation until 1871. Canada only secured British Columbia's acquiescence to confederation by promising British Columbia a railroad link and by conceding unique powers to the province in its relations with its Indigenous population. Arielle Rose Gorin, "Cascadian Crossings: The Battle for the Pacific Northwest Borderlands after the Oregon Treaty" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2016), 224-225.

[68] *Appendix to Cong. Globe*, 388.

hitherto has been in European hands, because Europe was sovereign of this great sea," Banks said, but the Pacific would be "the theater of the triumphs of civilization in the future … It is there that the institutions of this world will be fashioned and its destinies decided." Control of the Pacific was not merely a national project, argued Banks, but civilizational: "If this transfer is successful, it will no longer be an European civilization or an European destiny that controls us. It will be a higher civilization and a nobler destiny. It may be an American civilization, an American destiny."[69] United States control of the Pacific Ocean would ring the death knell of the European empires, especially the British Empire, that had dominated so much of the world during the preceding centuries, and usher in the "higher civilization" of the U.S. imperial republic.

Prior to the purchase of Alaska, the United States could exercise great power within its limited regional sphere, but not beyond. Being a land-based empire limited the country's reach in the imperially driven, globalizing world of the nineteenth century.[70] Remaining merely a continental empire would doom the United States to perpetual second-class status. The Civil War had demonstrated the United States' great power potential. To achieve that potential, however, required expansion across oceans, not in hopes of creating new settler colonies, but to secure the resources and trade partners necessary for industrial and economic growth. The British Empire provided the model, with its mixture of settler, trade, and resource colonies.[71] American leaders understood that the only way to compete with, and one day surpass, Britain was to emulate British imperial practices. Banks' obsession with Great Britain reflects this understanding.

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[69] *Appendix to Cong. Globe*, 388.

[70] For more on empires as the driving force behind globalization, see: Hopkins, *American Empire*. Hopkins first addresses this topic on page 6, but it is one of the key arguments of the entire book.

[71] P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2015*, 3d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 58-61.

Alaska was the key to it all, the necessary first step by which U.S. commercial trade in the Pacific Ocean would reorder the world's power structures. "By the possession of Alaska on the North, with the Aleutian Islands in the center and … with amicable relations of commerce and trade with the government of the Sandwich Islands," Banks proclaimed, "we have in our grasp the control of the Pacific ocean, and may make this great theater of action for the future whatever we may choose it shall be." Banks continued to hammer his point home: "But it is indispensable that we shall possess these islands [the Aleutians], this intermediate communication between the two continents, this draw-bridge between America and Asia, these stepping stones across the Pacific ocean." Failure to secure this future, to acquiesce to European power once again, threatened the United States' republican mission. "Instead of giving new light and leading to new thought other nations," said Banks, "we lose our own, and are followers rather than guides."[72] Thus, the freedom and wellbeing of the world depended on the expansion of U.S. imperialism into Alaska.

Of course, Congressional support for the purchase of Alaska was not unanimous. While the key issue in the House appropriation debate centered around whether Johnson and the Senate should have consulted with the House prior to ratifying the purchase treaty, those who opposed the purchase critiqued the empire manifested by the purchase of Alaska. Congressman Jehu Baker of Illinois denounced the purchase as an un-American step toward empire. "Russian America means British America," said Baker, "and the logic of that will be a southern counterpoise, composed of the West Indies, Central America, and Mexico." The United States' continued republican existence, implored Baker, depended upon avoiding "the superficial

[72] *Appendix to Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess. (30 June 1868), 388.

vulgarity of confounding greatness with physical dimension of empire."[73] The acquisition of Alaska represented, in Baker's telling, little more than imperial hubris.

Baker was not alone among Congressional opponents to the purchase in opposing the empire Alaska precipitated. Speaking the day after Banks, Congressman Samuel Shellabarger of Ohio denounced the empire he feared the purchase of Alaska would initiate. While Banks had argued that Alaska was "substantially contiguous" to the United States, Shellabarger reminded Congress that purchasing Alaska would be "the first example in the history of the Republic where we have sought to acquire foreign territory not contiguous to our own Republic." Shellabarger described the United States as, "stretching as it does from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and almost almighty in its natural resources and in all its elements of power," while remaining merely a republican nation-state. But in purchasing Alaska, the United States prepared "to step for the first time upon the policy of acquiring possessions across the world far remote, and of creating a system of foreign colonies." Further, Shellabarger predicted, quite accurately as it turned out, that Alaska would be only the first step. Specifically referring to Banks' speech, Shellabarger declared that Alaska introduced "a policy which, it was said on yesterday by the chairman, is to soon bring us the Sandwich islands, and ultimately all other countries we may deem we want." Shellabarger viewed Alaska and Hawai'i as foreign and incapable of assimilating those necessary to remove their foreignness—white Americans. Acquiring lands for the expansion of white settlers was acceptable; acquiring lands for reasons of profit required adapting the practices of U.S. empire to something new.

The imperial future Shellabarger foresaw was not the benevolent empire of Sumner and Banks, introducing republicanism and U.S. civilization to the global masses, but one that

[73] *Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess. (18 January 1868), 608-609.

resembled existing European empires; land- and money-hungry leviathans that provided wealth in the short term but promised destruction in the end. "I fear this system of foreign colonial possessions upon which we here enter will be against us," lamented Shellabarger. He continued, "This it will be I venture to put the prediction down."[74] While Banks had pointed to an imagined continental past to justify the purchase of Alaska, Shellabarger argued against the purchase by predicting an imperial future in which the United States would be hamstrung by a collection of territorial possessions scattered around the world. Alaska's geographic novelty, continental yet non-contiguous, allowed U.S. leaders to simultaneously imagine Alaska as an example of nineteenth-century continental empire or an expression of future overseas imperialism.

Congressman Hiram Price of Iowa argued that the purchase of Alaska destroyed the very republican institutions that Sumner and Banks claimed the U.S. empire would export around the world. Price, like other opponents to the purchase in the House, believed that Johnson and the Senate should have consulted the lower house during the treaty negotiations and ratifications hearings, despite there being no Constitutional imperative to do so. By forcing Alaska upon the American people, without consulting the only directly elected representatives of the people, Johnson and the Senate had assigned the country's "purse-strings to a few individuals, and thus centralize the power in a few men who are responsible to the people only at great distances and at long intervals." Invoking Americans' traditional disdain of monarchy, Price lamented that in the future, "All the people will have to do will be to meekly bow their necks to the yoke and their backs to the burden, record the edicts of their masters, obey their behests, and from the fruits of their toil fill the coffers of their lords and masters to be squandered as fancy or pleasure may dictate."[75] Price wondered what was to prevent these new American oligarchs from continuing

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[74] *Appendix to Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess. (1 July 1868), 377.
[75] *Appendix to Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess. (1 July 1868), 381.

down the imperialist road Alaska paved. “If these parties who make this requisition upon us have the authority to bind us by a bargain for Walrussia, they have the same authority to compel us to pay for old Russia and the balance of the world,” argued Price.[76] A U.S. empire would not be a republican empire; it would locate power solely in the hands of the President and Senate, to the detriment of the American people, who would have to bear the financial burden of funding acts of imperialism that would not benefit them.[77]

Despite such opposition, however, the purchase of Alaska enjoyed significant support. For many Americans, perhaps even most, that support was first located in an acceptance of American continental expansion.[78] Alaska’s North Americanness made its acquisition seem to fit within the framework of the United States’ traditional continental expansion. But Alaska was not contiguous, and this incongruity drew attention. Even when commentators used continental expansion to justify the purchase, Americans recognized that Alaska signaled the beginning of overseas imperialism. For both friends and foes of the purchase, Alaska indicated a clear turn toward U.S. overseas empire predicated on profit rather than settlement.

Alaska’s disconnectedness could not be ignored. For some of the country’s leaders, Alaska’s continental nature outweighed its discontiguousness, promising that the United States would eventually annex Canada, securing the country’s control of the north Pacific coast. Those who viewed the purchase in such light based their hopes on imperialism rather than settler

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[76] *Appendix to Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess. (1 July 1868), 382.
[77] Neither Russia nor the United States consulted Alaska Natives concerning the land sale. Discussions of the region’s Indigenous inhabitants were few, and when they did occur were couched in racist language, either blatant, such as when the pro-purchase *Daily Arkansas Gazette* referred to Alaska’s “blubber-eating inhabitants,” or more subtle, as when the anti-purchase *Harper’s Weekly* lamented that half of Alaska’s population was “Esquimaux” and that the “absorption of still another race does not seem to us to tend to strength but to weakness.” “Telegraphic Dispatches,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock), 12 April 1867; and “The Russian Treaty,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 13 April 1867.
[78] See: Hill, “The Myth of Seward’s Folly.”

expansion. For others, however, Alaska's geographic position clearly signaled and justified U.S. expansion beyond the continent. As Canada stubbornly refused to submit to the United States' supposed manifest destiny, the perception of Alaska as an American island in the Pacific Northwest continued to grow. By the close of the nineteenth century, American policymakers lumped-in Alaska with the territories newly acquired from Spain, perceiving of the land as a virtual, if not literal, overseas possession vital to the maintenance of the United States' expanding Pacific commercial empire.

Initially, U.S. leaders understood that the purchase of Alaska opened the path toward overseas empire. Once that empire was realized, a new generation of policy- and opinion-makers used Alaska's distinctively continental yet simultaneously discontiguous geography to both normalize and criticize overseas empire. They did this by describing Alaska as both overseas and continental, thus serving to bridge the ideological gap between Louisiana and the Philippines.[79]

More importantly, though, Alaska signaled the adaptive nature of U.S. empire. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the expansion of white settlement underlay all concepts of U.S. expansion. Such settlement may have lay generations in the future, but there was no doubt that Americans understood expansion in terms of an ever-expanding white population. In Alaska, however, U.S. leaders dropped this vision of the future. At most, Alaska might help drive Great Britain off of North America, but economic factors predominated amongst those who wished to add British Columbia as a U.S. possession. Alaska held no promise of settlement. Instead, officials believed Alaska would provide convenient harbors for U.S. commercial vessels and, more importantly, a wealth of natural resources guaranteed to enrich

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[79] Michael A. Hill, "Imperial Stepping Stone: Bridging Continental and Overseas Empire in Alaska," *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 1 (2020).

American investors. To stretch into the Far North, the very justifications of U.S. empire had to adapt to a new reality. Moving forward, profit would drive U.S. imperialist expansion.

Jefferson Columbus Davis was born in 1828 in Clark County, Indiana. In 1847, at the age of nineteen, Davis enlisted in the 3rd Indiana Volunteers to fight Mexicans. Davis found that military life suited him and remained in the Army following the end of the Mexican War. In April 1861, Davis was a lieutenant in the garrison at Fort Sumter when Confederate forces bombarded the fort and started the Civil War. Following the surrender of the fort, Davis found himself quickly promoted to colonel and placed in command of the 22nd Indiana Infantry. Promoted to brevet brigadier general in early 1862, Davis' star was on the rise. In September 1862, however, Davis and his superior, Major General William Nelson, exchanged insults and Davis shot and killed Nelson. Although briefly confined, no charges were ever filed against Davis for Nelson's murder; Davis was too skilled a commander to be punished. The incident did, however, stain Davis' reputation and stall his career. Davis served ably for the remainder of the Civil War, leading troops at Kennesaw Mountain, the Battle of Atlanta, and Sherman's March to the Sea. After the Civil War, Davis was returned to the rank of colonel and received command of the 23rd Infantry Regiment in the Pacific Northwest. In October 1867, Davis travelled to Alaska as the first commander of the Army's new Department of Alaska, a position he held until August 1870. Neither the Russian garrison nor Alaska impressed Davis. His description of the Russian bungling of the transfer ceremony symbolically summed up the Russian experience in North America: "then amid, the firing of guns and beating of drums the Russian flag was hauled down; at least the attempt was made to lower it but it caught and was torn in two it required the aid of some three or four Russian soldiers before it came down."[1]

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[1] Jefferson Columbus Davis to M., October 21, 1867, MS 0122, folder 10, Alaska Native Rights and History Collection, 1741-1990. Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

Much to Davis' chagrin, problems in Alaska extended beyond clumsy Russian soldiers. Davis' letters home mattered because they represented the earliest impressions of Alaska from a well-placed American government official and helped shape early opinions, transforming Alaska from a land of opportunity to a disappointing, and perhaps embarrassing, mistake. Davis did not write of the wealth waiting to offer itself up to Yankee ingenuity, as newspaper editors had in the spring of 1867. Instead, Davis reported on the harrowing voyage just to get to Alaska, the filthy inherited Russian settlements, weather that seemed to include only rain and snow, infertile ground capable of growing only potatoes, a lack of beef and dairy products, and the disgusting local game that all tasted like oily fish. Davis described the local Tlingit and Haida as friendly and more attractive than any Native Americans he had before seen, but he also decried the manner in which they painted and pierced their bodies as well as what he considered to be their unhygienic ways.[2] Although profit motives had inspired the purchase of Alaska, in the years immediately following the purchase, reports from Americans like Davis dampened the enthusiasm for Alaska. American leaders had believed U.S. vigor would overcome any obstacles in Alaska and pry untold wealth from the ground and ice. It turned out that Alaska was really far away, really big, and really unknown; as a consequence the U.S. government quickly fell into a pattern of ignoring its newest possession.

Another high-ranking military official had similar impressions of Alaska. Admiral George Emmons commanded the USS Ossipee, which carried the U.S. delegation to Alaska for the transfer ceremony. Like Davis, Emmons reported the difficulty of lowering the Russian flag. Evidently, not only was the flag eventually torn in two, but the Russian soldier who disentangled

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[2] Jefferson Columbus Davis to M., October 21, 1867, MS 0122, folder 10, Alaska Native Rights and History Collection, 1741-1990. Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections; and Jefferson Columbus Davis to unknown, November 7, 1867, MS 0122, folder 10, Alaska Native Rights and History Collection, 1741-1990. Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

the flag threw it from on high down onto the Russian bayonets. More so than Davis, and not surprising for a Navy man, Emmons especially noted Alaska's terrible weather. Dreary rain, sudden storms and gales, rough seas, and unexplained darkness worried Emmons to no end. Indeed, Emmons reported that on 27 October, the Ossipee was saved only by "the aid of a kind providence which has always aided, without which she would probably have gone down." Emmons also reported that coal sold for an unfathomable amount in Alaska—$38 per ton.[3] In 1867, coal sold for less than $5 per ton in Philadelphia and Baltimore.[4] Not only was it an unpleasant place, traveling to and remaining in Alaska seemed cost-prohibitive to development.

Although Davis' and Emmons' letters reflected their experiences in Alaska, they were, in truth, far from enlightening. These military officers' reports, and others like them, checked American enthusiasm for the Far North, but they were far from authoritative. Emmons departed Alaskan waters on 2 November, hardly enough time to truly develop an accurate picture of Alaska, and Davis, much like his Russian predecessors, rarely traveled far beyond Sitka. When the United States purchased Alaska from imperial Russia in 1867, it inherited little effective control of the territory. Political claims to a large chunk of North America notwithstanding, Russian power on the ground rarely extended much beyond the palisades of the Russian America Company's coastal trading outposts. Russian authorities, and by extension American authorities, knew almost nothing of Alaska's interior. Despite the fact that the treaty of sale transferred nearly 600,000 square miles of territory from a Eurasian empire to an American one, control of the vast majority of Alaska remained beyond the reach of either.

[3] George F. Emmons, "Alaska Transfer Ceremonies," MS 0049-02-004, Emmons, George Foster. Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[4] *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1906* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907), 568.

Russian leaders had always conceived of their North American colony primarily as a mercantilist storehouse of natural resources—primarily furs—for the Russian Empire and the Russian America Company. Through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries, while some Russian subjects did settle in the new imperial lands, an effort to incorporate—but not assimilate—newly conquered or annexed peoples had been the key to spreading the Russian empire. For the United States, on the other hand, the expansion of the white population into areas perceived of as unpopulated or unexploited had been at the forefront of continental imperial expansion, even if that expansion had occurred in fits and starts and had been deeply enmeshed with pursuit of profitable natural resources. Few Americans, however, had ever imagined Alaska capable of sustaining a large white population. Alaska was too far away and the climate made it impossible to sustain the agriculture necessary for white settlement. Nonetheless, American leaders had also believed that Alaska's resources justified the purchase. Russian leaders had been satisfied to harvest Alaska's furs and, to lesser degrees, whales and walrus ivory; this policy required few Russian officials and workers and little knowledge of the interior.[5] While Americans believed Alaska still possessed valuable furs, they also believed Russia had failed to fully appreciate Alaska's other natural resources such as coal, timber, salmon, and gold. After all, if Russians could not even lower a flag, how could they be expected to take full advantage of Alaska's wealth?

By the time of Alaska's purchase, U.S. colonization had come to depend on mineral rushes to lure settlers to the West.[6] Unlike in the continental United States, however, for much of

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[5] For more on the targets of Russian hunting in the North Pacific, see: Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).

[6] See, Kent Curtis, "Producing a Gold Rush: National Ambitions and the Northern Rocky Mountains, 1853-1863," *Western Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 2009).

the nineteenth century access to and control of Alaska's interior, where many of the region's most valuable resources could be found, remained well beyond the reach of the government's ability to assert even a modicum of authority. Geography and climate hampered Americans' ability to penetrate Alaska's interior, but ignorance was an even greater problem. Americans could not control and exploit Alaska because they did not know it.

Control depended on knowledge—knowledge of the land and its inhabitants. The only way to gain such knowledge, to make Alaska legible to politicians, bureaucrats, and investors thousands of miles away, was to make the region's human and physical geography legible through the creation of maps and by conducting censuses. The government needed policies and expeditions that extended U.S. control beyond federal fortifications. Early reports such as Davis' and Emmons' may have diminished enthusiasm for Alaska, but did not completely quash it. Americans were certain that Alaskan riches awaited the bold. The question was not whether or not Alaska possessed enough natural resources, the question was where to find them.

Less than a decade after the purchase, reports of gold in the Far North began reaching the United States. More than anything else, gold enticed white Americans to travel to the North in significant numbers. The influx of gold hunters and other resource seekers demanded that the U.S. government make Alaska legible—and therefore manipulable and valuable—not just to political leaders in Washington, but also to the capitalists and business investors found in urban boardrooms throughout the national metropole. As the political scientist James C. Scott reminds readers repeatedly in his classic work, *Seeing Like a State*, the state's purpose for mapping an area's geography and human population is to present complex local conditions in a simplified manner so that state agents with no local expertise can make decisions about how to best exploit

that area's resources, including the people who live there.[7] In Alaska, instead of encouraging policies to make the land legible for settlers or prospectors, gold encouraged the government to make the land legible for industry. Importantly, although Alaska lacked a significant white population until World War II, the labor shortages that plagued industry in the West were less acute in Alaska. As in the West, Alaska lacked laborers. Unlike the West, however, the lack of expectation, or indeed desire, for white settlers allowed industry managers to confront labor shortages in a different way. Businesses could hire white experts and foremen in small numbers who would then oversee non-white workers shipped in to perform unskilled work. Alaska's isolation removed whatever semblance of power these laborers may have been able to exercise on the mainland. Keeping Alaska's white population small allowed extractive industries to better exploit their non-white laborers.

The U.S. government had used mapping and censuses as repertoires of control prior to Alaska, but never in so explicitly imperialist a manner. While mapping facilitated any number of endeavors, from mining to railroad construction to strategies of Indigenous containment, white settlement remained, ultimately, the foundational motive for most mapping expeditions on the mainland. Even commercially motivated mapping exercises, such as those for railroads, held out the promise of future settlement. Similarly, before the government extended the census to Alaska, statehood justified all prior censuses, whether counting the population of existing states or states in embryo. In either case, statehood entailed white settlement. Prior to the purchase of Alaska, the gathering of geographic and demographic knowledge simplified complex local conditions in order to encourage settlement.

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[7] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), especially part I.

In Alaska, however, the collection of such knowledge served the search for profits, and nearly nothing else. The tools of U.S. continental empire could work in Alaska, but because American lawmakers did not yet envision Alaska as a place where a significant white population could ever take root, the precise purpose the tools served needed adaptation. Mapping in Alaska took place, but at a much slower rate and for far different reasons than on the mainland. Similarly, censuses could help politicians in Washington better understand Alaska's population, but not as waypoints toward eventual statehood. In both cases, mapping and the census served novel purposes in Alaska. Instead of helping to create a country of white settlers, in Alaska mapping and censuses strengthened imperialist colonialism.

Alaska's Physical Geography

Maps are representative simplifications, rather than neutral depictions, of a world far too large for any individual to see in its entirety. As the rhetorician Timothy Barney argues, the function of maps is the "charting of political space," and the space depicted on maps "is not a *given*, but has to be actively *written*." He goes on to argue, "Those with the power (and vision) to fill in the blank pages are presented with a momentous opportunity to write the world."[8] Maps are an important act of imagination, vital for turning political claims into lived realities. It is important to note, however, as the sociologist Michael Biggs does, that maps and cartography are not a "ruse of power," but instead represent a "peculiarly modern form of power—the territorial state." As the geographer Alan M. MacEachren puts it, "What we see when looking at a map is not the world, but an abstract representation that we find convenient to use in place of the world. When we build these abstract representations … we are not *revealing* knowledge as much as we are

[8] Timothy Barney, *Mapping the Cold War: Cartography and the Framing of America's International Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 1-2. Emphasis in the original.

creating it."[9] Maps help people make sense of the world around them, but creating maps also involves making choices about what to include and exclude, what needs to be represented and what does not. Therefore, maps reflect much of their creators' views of the world, or at least that part of the world represented in the maps.[10]

While Russian development in North America was uneven at best, the Russian government and the RAC created many maps of the Alaskan coast to improve their ability to wring a profit from the land as well as legitimize their possession of it. Russia's operations in North America may not have served as a model of efficiency, but Russian America existed to create profit, and just as in the later American years, Russia needed to know what it claimed to control. Often, non-Russian Europeans headed up these voyages of discovery because Russia lacked the trained specialists needed to map and document discoveries.[11] Perhaps the most famous of these early Russian-sponsored explorers was Vitus Bering, a Danish cartographer who

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[9] Alan M. MacEachren, *How Maps Work: Representation, Visualization, and Design* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), v. Emphasis in the original.

[10] For more on maps, their production, and their power to shape perceptions, see: Edward W. Soja, "The Socio-Spatial Dialectic," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 70, no. 2 (June 1980); Anti Randviir, "Spatialization of Knowledge: Cartographic Roots of Globalization," *Semiotica* 150, no. 1/4 (August 2004); Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, "Rethinking Maps," *Progress in Human Geography* 31, no. 3 (2007); Graham Huggan, "Decolonizing the Map: Post-Colonialism, Post-Structuralism and the Cartographic Connection," *Ariel: A Review Of International English Literature* 20, no. 4 (October 1989); Raymond B. Craib, "Cartography and Decolonization," in *Decolonizing the Map: Cartopgraphy from Colony to Nation*, ed. James R. Akerman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Lesley B. Cormack, "Geography and the State in Elizabethan England," in *Geography and Empire*, ed. Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994); Jeffery Alan Erbig, Jr., *Where Caciques and Mapmakers Met: Border Making in Eighteenth-Century South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Michael Biggs, "Putting the State on the Map: Cartography, Territory, and European State Formation," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 2 (April 1999); Stephen Bocking, "A Disciplined Geography: Aviation, Science, and the Cold War in Northern Canada, 1945-1960," *Technology and Culture* 50, no. 2 (April 2009); John R. Hébert, "Soldier-Engineers in the Geographic Understanding of the Southwestern Frontier: An Afterthought," in *Mapping and Empire: Soldier-Engineers on the Southwestern Frontier*, ed. Dennis Reinhartz and Gerald D. Saxon (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

[11] Alexey Postnikov and Marvin Falk, *Exploring and Mapping Alaska: The Russian America Era, 1741-1750*, trans. Lydia Black (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2015), 25-28.

led two expeditions into the north Pacific and for whom the Bering Strait is named. Bering's voyages, each lasting several years during the 1730s and 1740s, sought to determine if Asia and North America were connected and to search for sources of natural wealth, including precious metals, furbearing animals, and Indigenous populations who could be coerced into paying tribute to St. Petersburg or hunting furbearers for the Russian state.[12] While Bering died in late 1741 on an island between Attu and Kamchatka now named in his honor, his expeditions proved that Asia and America were, in fact, not connected and gave Russia, at least in the minds of many Europeans, claim to Alaska through the right of discovery.[13]

James Cook's much trumpeted circumnavigation of the globe, financed by Great Britain, included passing through the north Pacific and the Aleutian Islands in 1778. The appearance of a British explorer in waters Russia considered its own motivated Russian leaders to cement their claims to Alaska by sending out another expedition, led by Englishman Joseph Billings. While Bering's expeditions had focused primarily on producing knowledge, Russia intended Billings' voyage to cement its claims to the lands and waters of the north Pacific. The Billings expedition successfully demonstrated Russian sovereignty in North America, as did later U.S. mapping expeditions in Alaska.[14]

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[12] Jones, *Empire of Extinction*, 34-43.
[13] For more on how Europeans understood claims to American lands, see Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995; repr., 1997).
[14] Jones, *Empire of Extinction*, 145.

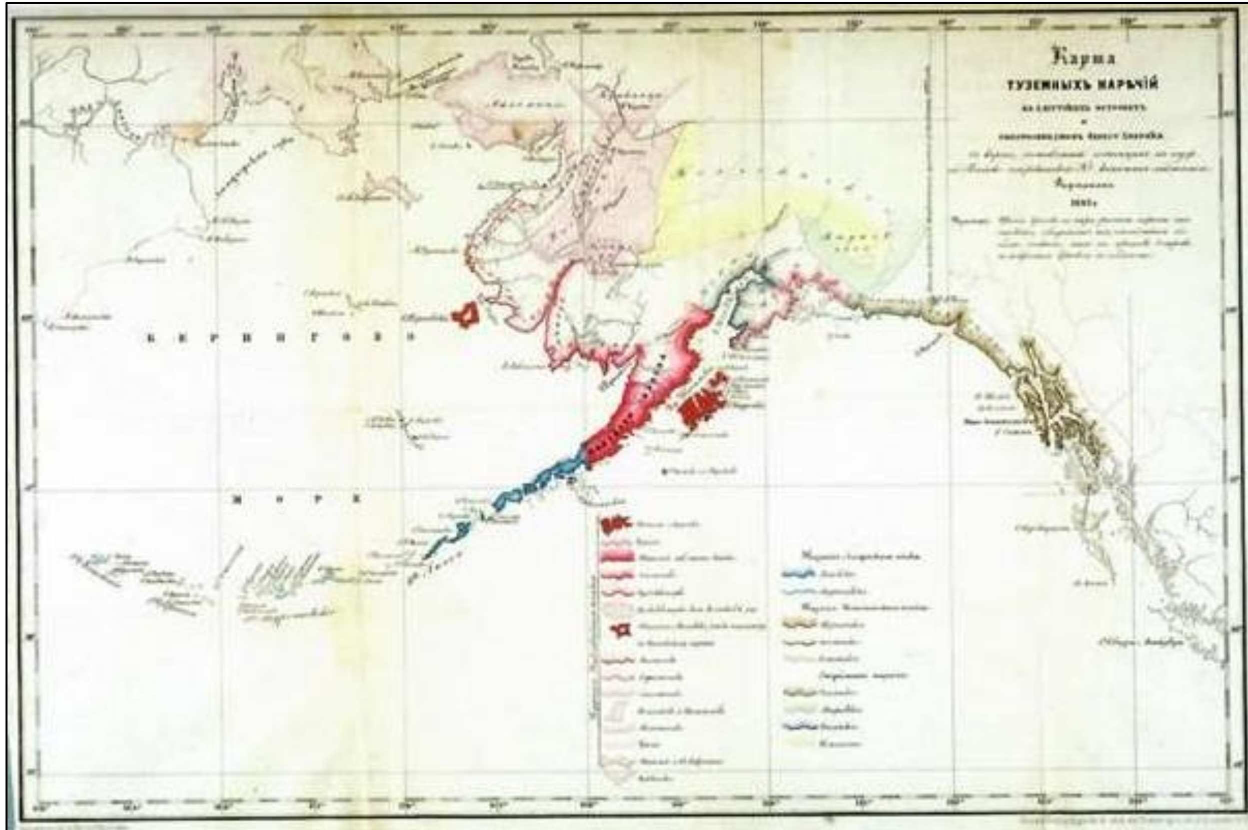

Fig. 2-1 Russian map of the Indigenous people inhabiting the Aleutian Islands and northwest coast of America, 1863. Rare Book A0502. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Russian authority and knowledge never penetrated deeply into North America. This failure must certainly be recognized as playing a significant factor in Russia's failure to better exploit Alaska's natural resources for profit. By the middle of the nineteenth century such a lack of initiative proved key in Russia's decision to sell Alaska to the United States. That being said, Russian authorities did a good job of mapping Alaska's coastline as well as using those maps to express knowledge of the area's Indigenous peoples. For example, one 1863 map not only accurately depicts southwestern Alaska, but also reveals a familiarity with at least five different Indigenous languages and a number of dialects (Fig. 2-1). The interior of the map is blank; indeed, it is left completely unfinished, indicating how little Russian authorities actually knew of most of the lands they claimed. Nonetheless, the map also demonstrates that after the purchase of

Alaska, U.S. officials did have a foundation of knowledge upon which to build. After the initial disappointments of occupation, however, American leaders did little building. Something more enticing than furs was needed to motivate the expenditure the collection of knowledge requires. In Alaska, that enticement was gold.

After the War for Independence, the fledgling U.S. government's most significant source of potential wealth was the lands of the West. The government had to turn those lands into a commodity so that they might fulfill their role as the government's wealth generator. To do so, surveyors had to first measure and map the federal government's western lands. The Land Ordinance of 1785 established the method of surveying, mapping, and selling U.S. federal land, beginning the practice of mapping grids of square plots distributed in increments of land divisible by forty acres. It also helped establish the mythical belief held by many Americans of virgin western lands upon which wealth, freedom, and democracy—often viewed as being largely the same things—could prosper.[15] The Homestead Act of 1862, making Western lands cheaper and easier for American settlers to obtain, reaffirmed the mythology. Scholars, government officials, and popular culture have often credited the promise of free (or nearly free) Western land with pulling white American settlement across the continent. That speculation, rather than an impulse for liberty, frequently preceded urban settlement is often ignored.[16]

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[15] This idea is most famously expressed in, Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frotnier in American History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (1894). Turner's so-called frontier thesis retained much influence well into the twentieth century. In 1983, Surveyor General Bernard W. Hostrop described the rectangular survey system as, "typically, and yet somewhat uniquely, a record of the American frontier spirit blended with the concept of government for the people." In C. Albert White, *A History of the Rectangular Survey System* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), v.
[16] Andro Linklater, *Measuring America: How the United States Was Shaped by the Greatest Land Sale in History* (New York: Plume, 2003), 174.

Even though private business desires to invest capital and extract natural resources from Alaska increased the need to map Alaska, it was the government that shouldered the burden of that mapping. Mapping Alaska was too expensive a proposition for any private company to fully undertake.[17] This is not to say that no privately-funded mapping of Alaska took place; the efforts of the Western Union Telegraph expedition between 1865 and 1867 produced the most well-known private cartography project in Alaska.[18] But government agents mapped, at least initially, the vast majority of the United States, and military officers trained at the Military Academy at West Point in European cartographic techniques led many of these mapping expeditions.[19] Similarly, early efforts to map Alaska depended upon military leadership ordered by civilian government officials to make the United States' northernmost colony legible so that its resources could be better exploited by private business and capital.

Nearly twenty years after the United States purchased Alaska, its interior remained largely a mystery. In 1885, the U.S. Army ordered Lieutenant Henry T. Allen to lead an exploration of Alaska along the Copper and Yukon Rivers. The expedition included a total of three white soldiers (including Allen) and seven or eight Alaska Natives. According to an Army official, the expedition's eighteen- to twenty-four-month mission was, "the exploration of a large portion of Alaska hitherto unknown, for the purpose of possessing some definite information concerning it." Mapping would make Alaska legible to those unfamiliar with the territory, which

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[17] Perhaps the best example of a study exploring the role of the U.S. government in funding, both directly and indirectly, colossal projects for the benefit of private business in the United States is Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).
[18] For more on Western Union's attempt to complete the so-called Russian-American Telegraph, see: Rosemary Neering, *Continental Dash: The Russian-American Telegraph* (Ganges, BC: Horsdal & Schubart, 1989).
[19] Ralph E. Ehrenberg, "U.S. Army Military Mapping of the American Southwest During the Nineteenth Century," in *Mapping and Empire: Soldier-Engineers on the Southwestern Frontier*, ed. Dennis Reinhartz and Gerald D. Saxon (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 83-86.

essentially meant everyone except the local Indigenous population. "The exploration," the Army representative continued, "will enable correct charts and maps of the territory to be made, showing the course of the two great rivers, which are little more than guessed at on the maps in existence."[20] Allen and his compatriots helped Alaska to take shape in the minds of U.S. government and business leaders thousands of miles away who never personally visited Alaska, but who nonetheless sought to exploit the region's resources.

Allen was an ambitious young officer who long hoped to explore Alaska. In 1883, he wrote, "I am willing to forego almost any benefit that I might receive by going East for an attempt at exploration in Alaska."[21] The Allen expedition began by traveling up the Copper River, located in southeast Alaska. The river had defeated previous Russian and American efforts to chart its course; General Nelson Miles had authorized expeditions each of the prior two years which had failed miserably.[22] In fact, Allen's first mission in Alaska was to travel to the Copper River and find the 1884 expedition under the leadership of Lieutenant William Abercrombie which was overdue to return.[23] The Abercrombie expedition had penetrated Alaska a mere sixty miles before glaciers and marshes derailed it. Consequently, General-in-Chief of the Army Philip Sheridan had so little faith in the 1885 Allen expedition that he initially refused to authorize it. Sheridan relented, but only on the condition that the Department of Alaska supply the expedition from stores already on hand rather than spend additional money.[24] Allen proved

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[20] "To Explore Alaska," 1885, MS 0076, box 1, folder 3, Lt. Henry T. Allen Papers, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[21] Henry T. Allen to J. D. Johnson, 10 January 1883, MS 0076, box 1, folder 1, Lt. Henry T. Allen Papers, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[22] For a brief narrative of all these expeditions, see Walter R. Borneman, *Alaska: Saga of a Bold Land* (New York: Perennial, 2003), 135-144.
[23] Henry T. Allen to J. D. J., 28 September 1884, MS 0076, box 1, folder 1, Lt. Henry T. Allen Papers, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[24] Telegram from P. H. Sheridan to John Pope, 23 January 1885, MS 0076, box 1, folder 3, Lt. Henry T. Allen Papers, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections; Telegram from P. H. Sheridan to John

far more successful than his predecessors, covering more than 1,500 miles in five months. Whether or not the expedition specifically helped Allen's career, it nonetheless signaled his competence as an Army officer. He served in the Army until 1923, fought in the Spanish-American War and World War I, and obtained the rank of major general. But Allen's Alaska expedition, called by Miles the greatest American exploration since Lewis and Clark, may have been his greatest accomplishment.[25]

Allen's remembrances of Alaska cast it as a nearly uninhabitable region, unsuitable for white settlement but brimming with valuable natural resources. In 1927, Allen reflected back on the expedition he led in Alaska, noting that in 1885, "there was not a cow, horse or pig within the confines of Alaska … and it was not until twelve years later that any white man entered the Copper River Basin." While the introduction of a rail line connecting Fairbanks to the southern coast made agriculture more feasible, the territory's value lay primarily in its natural resources. Specifically, Allen mentioned gold, coal, salmon, and furs, all of which he valued in the tens-of-millions of dollars. The consequence, Allen wrote, was that, "Alaska becomes continually more important in the economic welfare of our nation."[26] Allen's 1885 mapping expedition, and others that followed, began the process of slowly opening Alaska not so much to settlement, but to investment by resource extraction industries.

Allen's report also served to set minds at ease concerning Alaska's Indigenous population. An 1885 report from the Adjutant General's Office cited Allen as saying, "all the Indian villages whence trouble can arise are on the coast, and are accordingly at the mercy of a

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Pope, 24 January 1885, MS 0076, box 1, folder 3, Lt. Henry T. Allen Papers, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections; and Telegram from P. H. Sheridan to John Pope, 25 January 1885, MS 0076, box 1, folder 3, Lt. Henry T. Allen Papers, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[25] Borneman, *Alaska*, 143.
[26] "Alaska," 28 April 1927, MS 0076, box 1, folder 7, Lt. Henry T. Allen Papers, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

Fig. 2-2 Lt. Henry T. Allen (center) with Private Fred Fickett (left) and Sergeant Cady Robertson (right, the name Robinson in the photo is an error) in 1885 during the Copper and Yukon Rivers Expedition. UAA-HMC-0108-series8b-1. Fred Wildon Fickett Papers,1877-1906. Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage.

man-of-war with a weak armament. The interior Indians … need not be considered."[27] Not only did Allen's exploration of Alaska seem to confirm the abundance of natural wealth awaiting exploitation by white initiative, its negation of Indigenous Alaskans also served to set the minds of investors at ease. According to Allen, one lightly armed Naval vessel could control coastal Indigenous peoples, the only Alaska Natives who might trouble business in Alaska. Thus, thirteen years before the Spanish-American War, Allen's report served to begin acclimating U.S. leaders to the thought that even in a land in which white Americans lacked any kind of significant on-the-ground presence, technology, manifested in Naval warships, might serve to project U.S. power well beyond its continental borders.

Not only did American leaders lack information about many of Alaska's inhabitants and natural resources, they were uncertain about where the boundary between Alaska and British Columbia actually was. At the end of the nineteenth century, the prolific American journalist and traveler Eliza Scidmore wrote, "there has been complete indifference to the unsettled Alaska

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[27] "Lieutenant Allen's Reconnoissance to aid Lieutenant Abererombie" July 1885, MS 0076, box 2, folder 2, Lt. Henry T. Allen Papers, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

boundary line on the part of the United States." Only "miners' yarns" concerning Canadian "aggressions" forced U.S. government officials to seek a resolution to the boundary issue.[28] In short, fears that Canadians might have their eyes set on Alaska's natural wealth—meaning the United States' natural wealth—motivated efforts to actually make the district legible to elected officials and government bureaucrats.

The lack of a clearly defined border between Alaska and Canada had long been a problem. Writing in the early twentieth century, Asa C. Baldwin, the leader of several expeditions to survey the Alaska-Canada border, declared that for all of the Russian period and most of the U.S. period, "Alaska's boundary existed only on paper and remained so until the discovery of gold and the growing knowledge of the territory's potential wealth made it imperative that the position of the line should be visibly marked on the ground."[29] Although Baldwin stated this in a seemingly natural, self-explanatory, manner, it actually makes clear one of the key differences between pre-modern and modern empires, namely that modern imperialist states exist primarily for the generation of private wealth. While pre-modern empires extracted tribute from peripheral areas, the justification for their existence often lay in other concerns, such as creating buffer zones to protect the imperial metropole. Modern empires, on the other hand, while often seizing lands for security reasons, found their justification in wealth. The modern imperial state spent great sums of money to annex and make legible lands and people not to enrich the state itself, but bankers, capitalists, and investors.[30]

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[28] Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore, "The Alaska Boundary Question," MS 0004-11-018, Scidmore, Eliza Ruhamah, 1856-1928, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[29] "The International Ascent of Mount Saint Elias" Asa C. Baldwin, MS 0036, box 1, folder 3-2, Asa Columbus Baldwin Papers, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[30] For an examination of how the late nineteenth-century U.S. government subsidized imperial expansion by enriching individual bankers, capitalists, and investors, see: White, *Railroaded.*

Nonetheless, the kind of thinking encapsulated in Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis—that American democracy depended for renewal upon a steady stream of white agricultural settlers moving west—firmly rooted itself in the minds of many American leaders. In 1898, Congress extended the Homestead Act to Alaska. Enacted in 1862, five years before the purchase of Alaska, the Homestead Act did not originally apply to Alaska. That it took thirty-one years to extend the Act to Alaska after the purchase is indicative of Americans' belief that Alaska was unsuitable for white settlement. By 1898, however, gold had lured tens of thousands of people to Alaska. White Americans arriving in significant numbers in Alaska for the first time brought agricultural expectations with them. One booster at the time, C. R. Tuttle, argued that British representatives of the Hudson's Bay Company had spread lies for three generations, calling Alaska a barren wasteland in order to secure a monopoly on the Northland's furs for London. Then, claiming that "altitude far more than latitude governs thermal conditions of the Arctic zone," Tuttle suggested that Alaska's climate and soil "await the directing touch of man to yield cereals and cattle sufficient to glut all the bread and meat markets of the earth."[31] Such boosterism encouraged fantasies of agricultural settlement, especially in Alaska's southern valleys.[32] As the U.S. military was conquering new island territories in the Pacific and Caribbean, Congress extended the Homestead Act to Alaska in response to claims that Alaska represented a continuation of the agricultural West.

Some members of Congress understood that Alaska, while Western and continental, represented a different kind of U.S. territorial aggrandizement, though, and policies fit for

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[31] C. R. Tuttle, *The Golden North: A Vast Country of Inexhaustable Gold Fields, and a Land of Illimitable Cereal and Stock Raising Capabilities* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1897), 9.

[32] For more on the agricultural fantasies that gripped Alaskans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see: James R. Shortridge, "The Alaskan Agricultural Empire: An American Agrarian Vision, 1898-1929," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (October 1978).

continental expansion needed alteration in order to work in the imperialist conditions of the Far North. Senator John L. Wilson of Washington clearly recognized that the promises of agricultural self-sufficiency that underlay the Homestead Act did not apply to Alaska. "We are trying to deal with Alaska as is if it were an agricultural district, which is far removed from the fact," he argued.[33] The original Homestead Act, passed in 1862, made no provision for Alaska, still a Russian territory at the time. But even a revised Homestead Act for Alaska did little to encourage actual settlement. The 1898 Act granted only eighty acres to homesteaders, as opposed to the 160 acres homesteaders on the mainland received. The reduced acreage suggests that settlers were not the true target of the Alaskan Homestead Act. Instead, the Act attempted to create an environment amenable to investment in Alaska. The Act protected salmon cannery interests by removing shoreline sites from homesteading and prioritized railroad rights-of-way over private land ownership. The Homestead Act in Alaska also allowed individuals or corporations to claim an unspecified amount of land, in addition to the initial eighty acres, for $2.50 an acre, as long as the claimant submitted proof that the land was "needed in the prosecution of such trade, manufacture, or other productive industry."[34] Additionally, the Act granted Canadians mining rights equal to those of U.S. citizens and exempted all goods—such as gold—acquired in Alaska and then shipped to Canada from taxation in return for a similar guarantee from the Canadian government. Finally, the 1898 Alaska Homestead Act made no provisions for surveying Alaska. The Act required claimants to survey and map their own homesteads, something clearly beyond the capabilities of most settlers. Corporations, on the other hand, could afford to both buy additional land and hire the professional surveyors the Act

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[33] In Ernest Gruening, *The State of Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1968), 107.
[34] An Act Extending the homestead laws and providing for the right of way for railroads in the District of Alaska, and for other purposes, *Public Acts of the Fifty-Fifth Congress of the United States*, 55th Cong., 2nd sess., chap. 299, 1898, 413.

required. Mapping promised to make Alaska legible and, in turn, profitable. Surveying made lands suitable for permanent settlement. That the Alaskan Homestead Act encouraged industry at the expense of settlement represented a novel adaptation.

The Alaskan Homestead Act was not the first piece of pro-industry land legislation. The historian Andrew Isenberg has called the slew of federal laws passed to encourage development of the West's natural resources "industrial versions of the Homestead Act." Such laws include the Pacific Railway Act (1862), the Mineral Resources Act (1866), the General Mining Law (1872), the Timber and Stone Act (1877), and the Desert Lands Act (1877). "These laws and others like them," writes Isenberg, "funneled natural resources from western public lands into the control of industrial entrepreneurs."[35] In this Isenberg is absolutely correct, and such laws may have served as precedents for the Alaskan Homestead Act. In the West, however, Congress grafted these laws onto an already existing Homestead Act. In the West, Americans expected settlers to settle on lands in the public domain, as evidenced by the Homestead Act of 1862. Congress and the courts had to work to keep lands with choice natural resources out of the hands of settlers. In Alaska, Congress had no need to resort to such chicanery. Alaskans could not vote in national elections and because no one imagined the possibility of Alaskan statehood, no one worried about a future in which Alaskans might voice their displeasure with their votes. The Alaskan Homestead Act was never about settling white Americans in Alaska. It actually made permanent white settlement in Alaska more difficult while protecting Alaskan resources for industrial development.

Alaska presented daunting challenges to the small teams government officials tasked with mapping portions of the vast possession, such as the border with Canada. The 1912 report of Asa

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[35] Andrew C. Isenberg, *Mining California: An Ecological History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 14.

C. Baldwin related the efforts of his four-man team to survey the Alaska-Canada border from Mount Natazhat to Mount St. Elias, an eighty-five-mile stretch just north of the Alaskan panhandle. Baldwin's report tells of 150-pound packs the men of the expedition carried on their backs as they trudged through deep snow, traversing rugged mountain passes, and "a cement of ice which could not be broken" and prevented the party from placing signals and taking accurate readings. At one point, a horse fell off a bluff to its death. The surveying party endured a three-day delay while Baldwin suffered from "snow-blindness," during which time he reported he could "see nothing at all." And all this occurred before the party even left previously mapped territory. In unmapped territory, the horses carrying the expedition's supplies became almost as much a hindrance as a help. Three horses nearly drowned when they broke through the ice while crossing a lake. The men in the party had to chop trails and footholds so that the horses could ascend and descend glaciers, where another horse died anyway. The horses regularly slipped into "streams of slush or melting ice," from which they could only be extricated by being hitched to the other horses and dragged out. The survey team had been in the field nearly two months before any "important work" could be completed, and that was just recovering the triangulation stations of boundary expeditions from previous years. And then Mount Katmai erupted in volcanic activity, delaying the party an additional week. As a consequence, the surveying team nearly ran out of food. Even after the expedition had completed its work for the season, torrential rains washed out the rail lines and further delayed the party's return to the mainland United

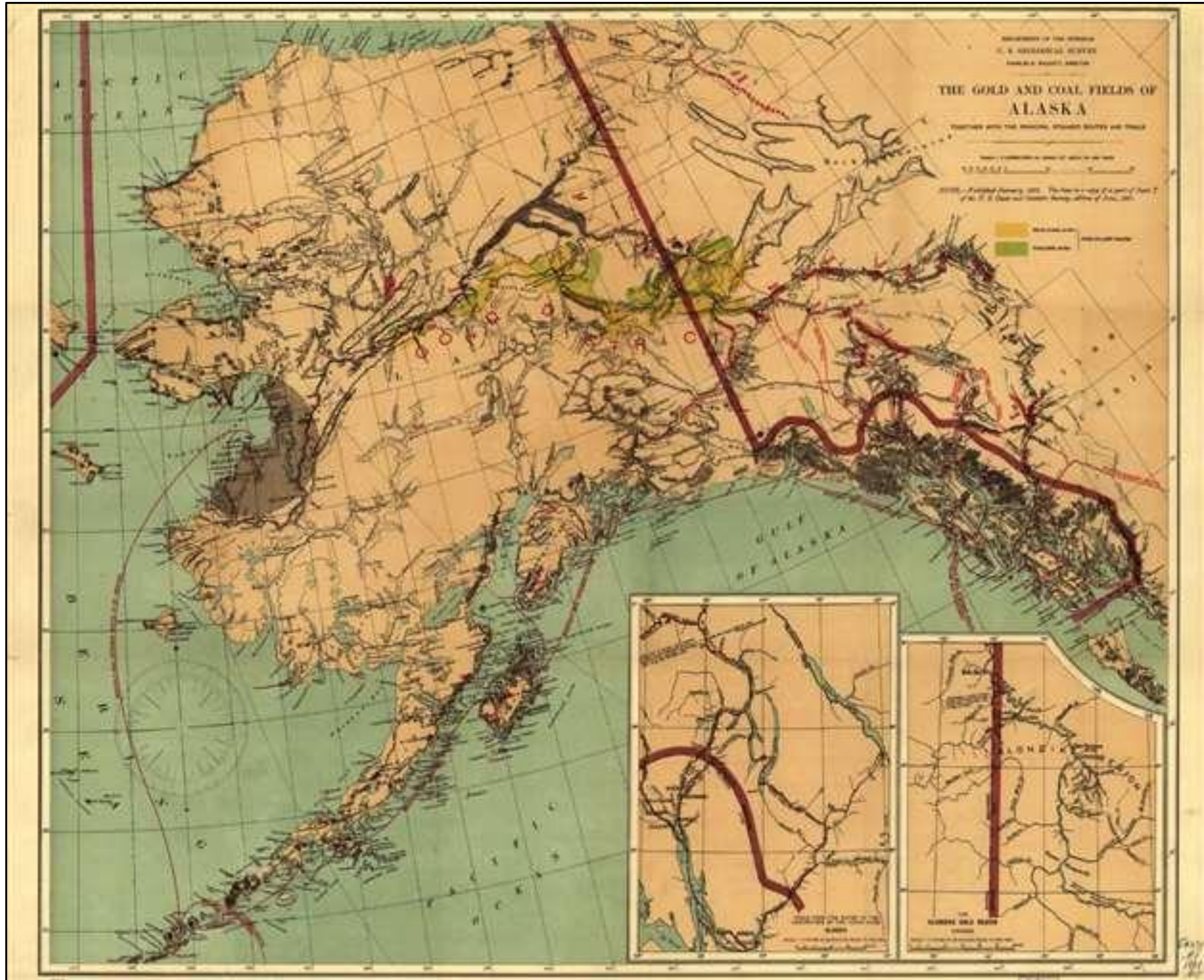

Fig. 2-3 An 1898 map of the Alaska gold and coalfields. Note that the Klondike receives a specially detailed pullout section. While clearly labeled as part of Canada, the special attention the region receives on a map of Alaska is an indication of what people truly valued in the area and may help to explain why Canadian authorities worried that an influx of Americans in a region so close to the U.S. border might lead the United States to annex Dawson and the surrounding land. U.S. Geological Survey. *The Gold and Coal Fields of Alaska: Together with the Principal Steamer Routes and Trails.* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Geological Survey, 1898). Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/2006629762/.

States. Surveyors and cartographers faced very real, often life threatening, challenges in Alaska.[36]

Even so, the white Americans who did settle in Alaska during the gold rush years complained to Congress about the failure to survey Alaska. In 1905, Alaska's residents appealed

[36] "Report: Season—1912. Alaska Boundary Survey, 141st Meridian from Mt. Natazhat to Mt. St. Elias," MS 0036, box 1, folder 1-1, Asa Columbus Baldwin Papers, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

to government officials in Washington to survey the "vast and fertile valleys of southern and central Alaska, to the end that homesteaders … may occupy and improve the public domains of Alaska on terms of equality with homesteaders on the public domains elsewhere in the United States."[37] In a nation-state based upon the equality of all citizens, such a demand seems reasonable. But the Homestead Act in Alaska was not a Turnerian mechanism for extending U.S. democracy and welcoming new states into the Union. Rather, Congress passed the Act to encourage absentee investment in Alaska. Massachusetts Representative William Moody concisely summarized the Act's imperialist purpose, arguing, "We are beginning to practice now upon the government of colonies."[38]

Alaskans continued to complain, but little changed over the years. American politicians, officials, and bureaucrats paid lip service to the necessity of mapping Alaska, but actual government mapping efforts proceeded at a painfully slow pace. In 1939, Ernest Gruening, the Director of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions, under whose authority Alaska fell, complained that "At the current rate of appropriation, even reconnaissance topographic maps of the remaining surveyed areas will not be available for many score, possibly a few hundred, years."[39] Gruening's prediction that the mapping of Alaska might not be completed for a hundred years turned out to be near the mark.

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[37] "A Memorial on Needed Legislation by Sixty Thousand Americans in Alaska," 20 November 1905, MS 0232, box 2, folder 1, Governor A. P. Swineford Papers, 1869-1916, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections. The sixty thousand Americans referred to in the memorial included 30,000 Alaska Natives, most of whom were not U.S. citizens and had little interest in homesteading.
[38] In Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 2d ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), 230-231.
[39] "Brief memorandum on the need for mapping in Alaska," 13 May 1939, box 15, folder 198, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Even today, in 2021, Alaska has yet to be fully mapped. Requested by the state in 2011 and begun in 2012, the Alaska Mapping Initiative (AMI) is a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) program that aims to bring "Alaska topographic map and digital map data quality in line with the conterminous United States."[40] The USGS met most AMI goals by 2020, according to an organizational representative. However, Alaska is still not mapped at the 1:24,000 specifications at which the continental United States is mapped, and such precise maps of Alaska will not be available for eight or nine years.[41] Alaska's geographic distance from the contiguous States, extreme climate, and sparse population are largely to blame for the incomplete surveying and mapping of Alaska more than 150 years after its purchase and more than sixty years after it obtained statehood. But the failure to make Alaska completely legible to the federal government through mapping suggests that, despite statehood, Alaska remains a peripheral, colonial possession of the United States, valuable more for its resources and geostrategic position than as a place for American settlement.

Alaska's Human Geography

Like mapping, counting the population is a means of making a state more legible to its leaders. While often presented as intimately tied to organizing nation-states, powerful rulers and states had used censuses for millennia before the appearance of the modern nation-state.[42] Even the

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[40] "Alaska Mapping: Modernizing Alaska Mapping," accessed 24 November 2020, https://www.usgs.gov/core-science-systems/ngp/user-engagement-office/alaska-mapping-initiative
[41] Tracy Fuller, e-mail message to author, 2 December 2020.
[42] Modern nation-states have regularized and utilized censuses in ways that earlier empires did not, but this does not mean the census is a purely modern repertoire of control. Indeed, the most famous census may be the Biblical reference to the Roman census of Judea, told as part of the story of the birth of Jesus. For an example of recent scholarship linking the census to modern nation-states, see: Kaat Louckx, "The Nation-State in Its State-Istics (Belgium, 1864-1947)," *Nations and Nationalism* 23, no. 3 (2017). For a discussion of imperial censuses, see the repeated references in Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

simplest of censuses give leaders a better understanding of a state's capabilities. Censuses provide leaders valuable information for tax and military purposes, demographic health (a state whose population is growing is generally recognized as healthy), and point to geographic areas of potential military conflict, either with internal dissidents or external rivals.

Early U.S. leaders recognized the value of the census; the Constitution made the United States the first modern state to mandate and conduct regular censuses. Over the years, the U.S. Census has provided a wealth of statistical information to leaders and researchers. Beyond the mere enumeration of the U.S. population, the Census has counted everything from farm animals, to pickup trucks, to factories. Nonetheless, the decennial census mandated by the Constitution exists for only one purpose: Congressional apportionment.[43] The Census is a political tool.

Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution directs that a census "of the several States which may be included within this Union" be conducted every ten years. The population of any U.S. territory other than the "several States," therefore, need not be counted. Because the Constitution clearly states that the decennial census exists to determine Congressional apportionment, the country's early leaders envisioned the decennial census, limited in scope and purpose, as an instrument of an emerging nation-state. Nonetheless, Article 1, Section 2, by excluding Native Americans from the Census, and therefore representation and taxation, clearly marked them as non-citizens living outside the U.S. nation and state. Article 1, Section 8, the so-called Commerce Clause, likewise did so, as did Chief Justice John Marshall's famous 1831 ruling in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, that Native American tribes are "domestic dependent

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[43] Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution originally tied direct taxes to the census as well. As Margo Anderson has shown however, the United States only ordered direct taxation three times (1798, the War of 1812, and the Civil War) and during the Civil War, "the income tax showed itself to be a powerful revenue generator, the direct tax a feeble one." Eventually, the 16th Amendment decoupled taxation and the census by authorizing a nationwide income tax irrespective of the census. Quote, Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History*, 2d ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 72.

nations." Therefore, additional population counting, such as in the territories or of non-citizens unrepresented in Congress, lacking a Constitutional mandate inherently possessed an imperial nature.[44] The Constitutionally mandated decennial census was intended as a vital determinate in the governing of the North American nation-state called the United States. Unmandated, but simultaneously conducted, territorial censuses made the nation-state's peripheral empire legible in the metropole.

Prior to the censuses in Alaska, territorial censuses, while not Constitutionally mandated, did have the expansion of the nation-state as their justification. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 created an imperial infrastructure with the eventual of goal of national incorporation and set the standard by which all future territories campaigned for statehood. According to the Ordinance, Congress would appoint governors and judges in territories until such time as it saw fit to welcome those territories into the Union as states. Officials used censuses to mark territories' journey along the path to statehood. When five thousand free male inhabitants lived in a territory, those men could elect a representative legislature, although the appointed governor could veto any laws passed by the legislature. Once sixty thousand free inhabitants lived in a territory it could become a state.[45] Before the federal government began conducting censuses in Alaska, all censuses aligned with ideas of statehood and eventual equality.

The federal government conducted four censuses in Alaska before bestowing territorial status, and the promise of statehood, on the land and its inhabitants. When the United States

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[44] The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 conferred U.S. citizenship upon all Native Americans born within the United States' borders, thereby removing, at least partially, the imperial nature of the counting of Native Americans by the decennial Census.
[45] United States, Charles Thomson, United States Continental Congress, and Continental Congress Broadside Collection. *An ordinance for the government of the territory of the United States, North-west of the river Ohio*. (New York: s.n, 1787). Retrieved from the Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/item/ 90898154/.

purchased Alaska in 1867, the Russian government provided a rough count of the region's inhabitants. Because Russian officials had failed to extend their power and authority into Alaska's interior, American government officials realized the obvious shortcomings of the count. While Russian maps portrayed all Alaska to be Russian, their inability to account for most of the territory's population suggested the weakness of Russian claims of ownership. Neither the Russian government nor the Russian American Company placed an emphasis on settling Alaska with ethnic Russians. As a result, in 1839 the European population of Russian America tallied only 652.[46] At no time did more than seven hundred Russians call Russian America home. The total number of European residents (including, for example, Finns and Germans working for the Russian American Company in addition to Russians) in Russian America never topped nine hundred. Russian officials estimated the Indigenous population of the colony to be more than forty-five thousand, including some thirty-six thousand "independent natives" who lived beyond the control of the Russian government and the Russian American Company.[47] The treaty of purchase guaranteed that the inhabitants of Russian America, "with the exception of the uncivilized tribes, shall be admitted to the enjoyment of all the rights, advantages and immunities of citizens of the United States."[48] Few ethnic Russians chose to remain in the new U.S. colony, however, opting to return home instead. Russian America was not a settler colony.

Although the U.S. government conducted an official decennial census in 1870, three years after the purchase, Alaska was excluded from the census. Before the lure of gold, too few

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[46] Ferdinand Petrovich Wrangell and Karl-Ernst Baer, *Russian America Statistical and Ethnographic Information*, ed. Richard A. Pierce, trans. Mary Sadouski (Kingston, Canada: Limestone Press, 1980), 5.
[47] Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 36, 90, and 131.
[48] Treaty Concerning the Cession of the Russian Possessions in North America by His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias to the United States of America. (Washington D.C., 1867). Retrieved from the Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/item/08018459/.

white Americans lived in Alaska to suggest the need for a census of the region. The 1880 Census did include Alaska. Even so, all involved with the 1880 Alaska census recognized that the official count failed to adequately include significant portions of the district's interior population. Not until 1890, and thereafter, did anything approaching an accurate count of the people living in Alaska become available to U.S. leaders. It is unsurprising that so long as Alaska remained illegible to the United States' leaders, development of the district remained unenthusiastic as well.

Even though the United States purchased Alaska in 1867, the 1870 Census did not count the district's population. Counting the population of the United States' periphery had always been difficult, but Alaska's discontiguous geography allowed American leaders to imagine it as an overseas colony peopled primarily by non-whites and therefore not in need of counting. Nonetheless, the Army could have easily counted Alaska's white population in 1870, as it consisted almost entirely of U.S. Army soldiers and a handful of civilians living in just a few towns and forts. But the white people who did live in Alaska could not vote in national elections. Instead, Washington treated Alaska's residents, Indigenous and white, as colonial subjects of so little value that they did not need to be counted in the 1870 decennial census. The situation was unlikely to change until a way could be found to make money in Alaska. As the historian Stephen Haycox writes, "Would-be settlers did not go to Sitka or Alaska just to be there; they went to make money."[49] In 1870, a way to make money in Alaska was waiting to be found. Therefore, U.S. leaders imagined Alaska as a non-white space. With no perceived future including white Americans, U.S. leaders initially saw no reason to extend government apparatuses to the Far North.

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[49] Haycox, *Alaska*, 190-191.

Eventually, though, U.S. leaders realized that Alaska's unique geographic and political statuses provided an interesting opportunity. While there remained no Constitutional directive to count Alaska's population, no prohibition against doing so existed either. An experimental colonial census could be conducted in Alaska at Congress' will and in 1880 Congress ordered one done to coincide with the decennial census. To oversee the census in Alaska, the Census Office turned to Ivan Petroff, a Russian-born scoundrel who seemed to always land on his feet. How, exactly, Petroff came to be in Alaska is unclear. What is clear, is that he chose to remain in Alaska after the United States purchased the land from Russia. He joined and deserted from the U.S. Army at least three times between 1867 and 1874. After his final desertion in 1874, Petroff began working for Hubert Howe Bancroft, one of the nineteenth century's leading historians of the North American West. In fact, scholars have long accepted that Petroff conducted the research for and wrote the majority of Bancroft's *History of Alaska, 1730-1885* using a number of forged documents as sources. Nonetheless, Bancroft recommended Petroff to the Census Office as the only man capable of conducting a census in Alaska.[50]

Whatever his foibles, Petroff probably did as good a job on the 1880 Census of Alaska as was possible at the time. In 1880, Petroff counted a white population of merely 430 in Alaska. He also reported a population of 31,240 Alaska Natives and 1,756 Creoles.[51] Because the census was colonial, errors had fewer consequences than for a count of the states' populations or even

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[50] Although a fascinating borderlands character, Petroff has avoided significant scholarly attention. For more on his life and career in Alaska, see: Terrence Cole, "Klondike Literature," *Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2008); Richard A. Pierce, "New Light on Ivan Petroff, Historian of Alaska," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 1968); and William Alfred Morris, "The Origin and Authorship of the Bancroft Pacific States Publications: A History of a History—I," *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 4, no. 4 (December 1903).

[51] Ivan Petroff, *Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 33. It has been argued that the Alaska Native population of Alaska at the time was perhaps double that counted and reported by Petroff. See: Haycox, *Alaska*, 191.

Fig. 2-4 Ivan Petroff included this map of Alaska in his 1880 Census of Alaska. Notice that the lands north of the Yukon River remain largely blank. The combination of map and census help demonstrate that the two methods of imperial knowledge collection served complimentary functions. UAF-M0280, Rare Maps Collection. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

for contiguous territories imagined as future states. The purpose of the Alaska census was to provide Washington with a general feel for the district, not enumerate Congressional representation.

The 1880 Census of Alaska sought to do more than simply count the region's populace; the federal government intended it as an inventory of the Alaska's natural resources. [52] The emphasis placed on natural resources demanded "specialists," and despite his many personal

[52] Morgan B. Sherwood, "Ivan Petroff and the Far North," *Journal of the West* 2, no. 3 (July 1963), 306.

flaws, including a seeming inability to consistently tell the truth, Petroff qualified as the best Alaska specialist in the United States. It is worth noting that the leading expert on Alaska in the United States was a Russian expatriate of questionable character. After thirteen years as a U.S. possession, Alaska remained not only peripheral to the geographic United States, but also peripheral to the imagined United States of the country's leaders.

Petroff's enumeration of Alaska Natives is worthy of special note. The Constitution, in addition to failing to mandate a census of populations living outside the states, specifically stated that Indigenous people "not paying taxes" need not be counted. Petroff, though, did count a significant number of Alaska Natives; in fact most of his time and effort went to counting a population living outside any state and not paying taxes, and which the Constitution thus sought to make twice invisible.

That he no doubt undercounted Alaska's indigenous population might seem to leave Petroff and his census open to skepticism. Petroff himself admitted that, "The immense extent of country contained in the district made it impossible for me to visit every section in person, even in two summers."[53] Petroff attempted to ascertain the population of regions he could not visit himself through reports received from non-Census personnel, but the point of counting Alaska's Native population was never to obtain a completely reliable report. Such accuracy was only needed in the metropole; in the imperial periphery what the U.S. government needed was not a fully accurate count, but a sense of the difficulties entailed in taming the edges of the empire. Petroff's revelation that Alaska Natives outnumbered the district's whites by *at least* a ratio of 72 to 1 was all the information Washington needed. In 1880, for the first time the census

[53] Petroff, *Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska*, v.

simultaneously fulfilled its Constitutional mandate while also gathering detailed information about an overseas colony no one believed destined for statehood.

Moreover, Petroff importantly classified a relatively large portion of the population as Creole, a category unique in all U.S. Censuses to this one report. The historian Paul Schor argues that Alaska's population "seemed so distinctive that Petroff created original categories to classify the natives and especially those of mixed birth, whom he counted as 'Creoles.'"[54] While it is true that Petroff used the category of Creole to classify Alaska Natives with one white parent and one Indigenous parent, and that this category had never before appeared in the U.S. Census, he did not create the category. Instead, he borrowed it from Russia.

Beginning in the sixteenth century, as Russian *promyshlenniki*, spread east across Siberia they married and produced children with the Indigenous women they encountered.[55] When *promyshlenniki* arrived in North America they continued this nearly two hundred-year-old practice, even receiving encouragement to do so from St. Petersburg. In the late eighteenth century, the Russian government created a new estate for the offspring of the unions of Russian men and Alaskan Native women—*kreoly*, Anglicized as Creoles.[56] Nowhere else in the Russian

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[54] Paul Schor, *Counting Americans: How the US Census Classified the Nation*, trans. Lys Ann Weiss (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 122.

[55] Russians did not have a monopoly on such behavior. For instance, French Voyageurs acted similarly in North America. See, Jacqueline Peterson, "Many Roads to Red River: Métis Genesis in the Great Lakes Region, 1680-1815," in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, ed. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985). For a comparison of the Métis population of Canada and the Tejano population of Texas, and the responses of the Anglo-rooted governments of Canada and the United States to these "mixed-race remnants of the French and Spanish colonial systems," see Andrew R. Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North American Frontier, 1875-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), especially chapter 3.

[56] A complex and ever evolving system of social hierarchy existed within the Russian Empire. Individuals, sometimes based upon heredity and other times based upon personal choice, were organized into estates, which defined every person's duties and protections within the Empire. The number of estates was too great to count, as new estates continuously emerged to fill new needs within Russian society. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to say that estates were largely based upon social standing (for

Empire did a similar estate exist; it was absolutely unique to Russian America. The exact reasoning for the formal introduction of the Creole estate remains unclear, but it did serve a clear purpose. In addition to forming an important part of the colonial workforce, Russian leaders hoped that Creoles would serve as intermediaries between European Russians and Indigenous North Americans (whom Russians simply called Americans). Russian authorities counted on Creoles to anchor the few ethnic Russians who traveled to North America to the colony, as well as to form the foundation of a self-reproducing population loyal to St. Petersburg. The hope was not that the colony's Indigenous population might disappear, but rather that, with the help of Creoles, Russia's American subjects might come to embrace their unique position within the Russian Empire.[57]

Petroff, as a Russian, viewed Creoles not as a problematic ethnic group, but as a vital Alaskan population. On the other hand, the United States government, including the Census Office, struggled to make sense of mixed-race individuals throughout the country. Every U.S. census has identified people according to race. The Constitution demanded racial categorization by ordering the counting of all "free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons." In the United States, slaves were only black. Thus, the Constitution's coded language, demanding that slaves be counted in order that each be recognized as three-fifths of a person, ensured that early censuses would, at the least, differentiate between white and black Americans. Indeed, the first census, in 1790, divided the U.S. population into three general categories: 1) free whites; 2) all other free persons; and 3) enslaved persons (understood to mean only African Americans). The Census

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example, the nobility), profession, and education. See: Gregory L. Freeze, "The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 1 (February 1986).

[57] For more on Russian Creoles, see: Gwenn A. Miller, *Kodiak Kreol: Communities of Empire in Early Russian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

introduced the category of mulatto in 1850, and until 1920 used various racial classifications including mulatto, quadroon, and octoroon.[58] All of these categories, however, applied only to people of African descent. Petroff's imperial Russian experience made it quite clear in his mind, however, that in Alaska the differentiation between Indigenous individuals and Creoles mattered, as did differentiating between the various Native people themselves.

A white-black dichotomy has long dominated ideas of race in the United States. The American Studies scholar Heidi Ardizzone has written that American racialist discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "presumed and required two clearly discrete racial classes—Black and White."[59] This black-white racial dichotomy has dominated U.S. racial thought while simultaneously obstructing the reality of tremendous racial and ethnic diversity and complexity in the United States. Alaska's climatic hostility to white and black Americans in the late nineteenth century demonstrated that imperial growth not only disrupted traditional American understandings of race, it threatened to reveal those understandings as constructed on a parochial worldview. Petroff had lived in Alaska for a number of years. His 1880 Alaska Census revealed that, whereas whiteness might be an assumed category of strength in the States, in Alaska, after more than a decade of U.S. possession, it was anything but.

It seems likely, however, that where and with whom many Creoles lived made their eventual erasure by the U.S. government possible. The Census Office had assigned Petroff an impossible task—to single-handedly count every person living within Alaska's borders—as Petroff himself freely admitted. In many locales, Petroff relied on reports from merchants and traders. Wherever possible, however, he obtained records from the "various parishes and

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[58] See: Schor, *Counting Americans*, especially parts 2 and 3.
[59] Heidi Ardizzone, "Red Blooded Americans: Mulattoes and the Melting Pot in U.S. Racialist and Nationalist Discourse, 1890-1930" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1997), 16.

missions of the Russian church."[60] While Petroff did not specify in which villages he relied on church records, an 1878 collection of Russian Orthodox census records of Aleut villages in the Aleutian Islands and Unalaska are representative of the type of records Petroff would have received. Other than a few priests and their immediate families, no ethnic Russians appear in these counts; almost the entire population is divided into Creole and Aleut. Usually, the records only give the names of the male heads of households, with women identified by their relation to a man as either his wife, mother, or sister. The census records also group children by sex and rarely identifies them by name—"3 boys" or "2 daughters," for example. Additionally, the proliferation of Russian names in the records, is noteworthy. Regardless of whether an individual was Creole or Aleut, all the names in the records are Russian. This naming practice is actually unsurprising. When an individual is baptized into the Orthodox Church, whether as a child or a convert, it is a nearly universal practice for that individual to be given or take the name of an Orthodox saint. These are Orthodox Church records, recording the names of members of Orthodox parishes. Therefore, the appearance of Russian names is not extraordinary. Indeed, only the appearance of an Indigenous name would be surprising.[61]

This set of Church records suggests that by 1878, eleven years after the purchase of Alaska, many, if not most, Creoles lived among and were members of Indigenous Alaskan communities. This is rather remarkable. Imperial Russian policy specifically educated and trained Creoles for "'Russian' jobs" within the framework of the Russian American Company.[62] Creole boys became navigators, medical apprentices, company clerks, metal workers,

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[60] Petroff, *Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska*, v.
[61] "Census of Unalaska and Aleutian Villages, 1878," MS 0004-11-014, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[62] Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 79.

bricklayers, and even priests. Creole girls learned the Russian “domestic arts.”[63] After the Russian departure, most Creoles chose to remain in the land of their births, but either felt they could not live among white Americans or found themselves rejected by white Americans. Either way, it appears that many Creoles ended up living among their Indigenous kin, where the Church, and for a time the government, continued to differentiate them from Alaska Natives. Nonetheless, living among Natives made it easier for the U.S. government to eventually erase the distinctiveness of Alaskan Creoles from the vision of officials. Additionally, Creoles’ Indigenous relatives lived lives closely tied to Russian practices, having at least nominally converted to Orthodox Christianity and having taken or been given Russian names. Thus, the fact that Creoles had Russian names failed to whiten or differentiate them, in the eyes of U.S. government officials, from Alaska Natives, many of whom also had Russian names. Eventually, this combination of shared living space and shared names encouraged Census officials, and by extension the entire U.S. government, to flatten the unique racial and ethnic distinctiveness found in Alaska in favor of a bifurcated racial system more closely aligned with that constructed on the mainland.

In the summary of his 1880 count, Petroff divided the district’s population into white, Creole, Aleut, Athabaskan, Eskimo, Thlinket [sic], and Hyda [sic].[64] In sum, these divisions demonstrate that Petroff understood Alaska as a racially and ethnically diverse space in which Native peoples wielded significant cultural and political power and influence. The technology of U.S. Naval power may have allowed the United States government to assert its prerogative along the shoreline, but that power was both fleeting and limited, in that it existed only when a vessel was on site and could not extend into Alaska’s interior. The power exercised by some Alaska

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[63] Miller, *Kodiak Kreol*, 128-129.
[64] Petroff, *Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska*, 33.

Native groups made racial and ethnic differentiation important. On the other hand, while the official 1880 decennial Census, which did not include Alaska in its official totals, differentiated among Native American nations within the borders of the contiguous states, it collapsed all Indigenous peoples into the single category of Indian in the aggregate summary. Additionally, the 1880 Census recognized a mere 66,407 Native Americans.[65] There is no question that more Native Americans lived within the United States than this. Census officials were not trying to somehow obscure the number of Native Americans living in the United States. Rather, government officials viewed Native Americans, especially those not paying taxes, as insignificant non-citizens and therefore not worthy of differentiation. In Alaska, on the other hand, Indigenous people, despite not paying taxes, remained important to U.S. officials because their overwhelming numbers demanded that they be taken seriously.

By 1890, views of Alaska's population began to change. As on the mainland, the differentiation between Alaska Natives groups disappeared. Petroff, though still involved with the Census in Alaska, was no longer solely and uniquely responsible for counting Alaska's residents. The 1890 Census praised Petroff, "who, with the greatest of difficulty, succeeded in obtaining at least a partial enumeration," of Alaska's population in 1880. Nonetheless, the Eleventh Census described the Tenth as, "more of the nature of a reconnaissance" and claimed the 1890 effort represented, "the first detailed enumeration of Alaska."[66] In particular, the 1890 Census claimed much greater accuracy in its count of Alaska Natives, having avoided previous wild estimations and exaggerations as well as the "unconscious duplication" of counting mobile Native villages more than once that had resulted in overcounting Indigenous Alaskans in

[65] *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 3.
[66] *Report on the Population and Resources of Alaska at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), xi.

previous Russian and American censuses. This self-assured approach allowed government officials to take heart in the 1890 numbers, which showed that the demographic balance of power in Alaska might be changing.

In taking a more active role in coordinating the census in Alaska, the Census Office noted that, "the same distinction as to race, color, and nativity was observed as has been adopted for the general census of the United States."[67] Accordingly, the official population of Alaska in 1890 reported 4,208 whites; 1,823 mixed; 23,531 Indians; 2,288 Mongolians; and 112 others.[68] Alaska Natives still formed a majority of the district's population, but that majority had shrunk significantly since 1880, down from a 72-1 advantage over whites, to 5.5-1. This apparent contraction of the Native Alaskan population and the growth of the white population encouraged Census officials to collapse all of Alaska's Indigenous population into one category (Indians), as in the United States.

Still, the presence of Creoles represented a significant demographic difficulty in Alaska for Census officials. They seemed almost apologetic in describing why this divergent category remained in the Alaska count. The "mixed Indians," related the officials of the 1890 Census, "were a privileged class under the Russian regime, vested with certain rights denied even to natives of Russia." Their privileged position had carried over to their new status as Americans, warned Census officials, who noted that "they [Creoles] are the only people now remaining of the original inhabitants of the country to whom the clause of the treaty with Russia conferring the rights of citizenship could at that time apply."[69] Unlike mixed-race Native Americans in the continental United States, whom the government uncomplicatedly described as Indians (unless

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[67] *Report on the Population and Resources of Alaska at the Eleventh Census*, xi.
[68] *Report on the Population and Resources of Alaska at the Eleventh Census*, 3.
[69] *Report on the Population and Resources of Alaska at the Eleventh Census*, xi.

they renounced tribal affiliation), Alaskan Creoles enjoyed one final privilege from the Russian era—the right to claim U.S. citizenship. Protected by a treaty U.S. leaders had signed with one of the country's chief nineteenth-century allies, this privilege could not be simply ignored.

In their discussion of the status of Alaskan Creoles, Census officials also, probably unconsciously, took note that all Alaskan residents existed in a state of legal limbo. Census officials warned that the right of Creoles to claim U.S. citizenship, "may be of some importance when Congress sees fit to settle the political status of the people of Alaska."[70] Not only was the political status of Creoles unclear, the status of all people in Alaska was unclear. Previous U.S. imperial expansion had not prepared U.S. leaders to rule on the status of those Americas who lived in a noncontiguous colony. While California, Oregon, and Nevada had previously represented a block of noncontiguous states, they were, nonetheless, contiguous in that they abetted territories claimed by the United States. Alaska was, and remains, a geopolitical island, however. In 1890, twenty-three years after its purchase, Alaska had still not been organized as a territory, and the more than six thousand inhabitants who could claim U.S. citizenship (whites and Creoles) still lacked any form of Congressional representation.[71] In a colony in which white Americans lacked demographic, economic, or political dominance, Congress, by refusing to grant territorial status to Alaska, created a precedent that would be extended to the insular possessions taken less than a decade later.

In 1880, Alaska's total enumerated population came to 33,426. The 1890 Census counted 32,052 people living in Alaska. In 1900, the Census officially reported that 63,592 people lived in Alaska and boasted of the "introduction of a new and large element attracted from the United

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[70] *Report on the Population and Resources of Alaska at the Eleventh Census*, xi.

[71] Although much of the Louisiana Purchase remained unorganized for a long time, an expectation of *eventual* statehood, even if only at some far distant time, existed for those lands, unlike with Alaska in 1890.

States and elsewhere by the recently discovered gold fields."[72] Census officials understood exactly why Alaska's population had nearly doubled since the last census—gold fever. The Census noted that more than seven thousand Alaskans, nearly twenty-three percent of the population, worked in the mining industry. The lure of gold drew people to Alaska as never before, but it fit well within ideas of Alaska as a colony valued for its natural resources above all else.

Solidifying conceptions of Alaska as a colony fit for resource extraction but not permanent white settlement, the 1900 Census noted that more than 23,000 Alaskans, just over seventy percent of the district's workforce, worked in mining, hunting and trapping, or fishing. Additionally, only 3,628 non-Native women lived in Alaska. Although the Census did not speak to its significance, the Census did point out that only 187 women worked as servants or waiters, what might considered traditional female roles. The remaining women worked in the male-dominated extractive industries, mostly as hunters, trappers, or fishers. While Census officials did specifically mention the "disproportion of the sexes" in Alaska, they made no comment regarding the fact that the vast majority of non-Indigenous women who lived in Alaska apparently did so in violation of the era's vocational gender norms.[73] Nonetheless, anyone who cared to look would undoubtedly have noticed that Alaska lacked the femininity many believed settlement required; the district had too few women, and those it did have were too masculine.

Representations of Alaska's Indigenous population continued to change in 1900 as well. In 1880, Petroff signaled the importance of Alaska Natives by specifying five Indigenous groups as well as Creoles. The 1890 Census pointed to a declining appreciation of Alaska Natives'

[72] *Census Reports Volume II: Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900: Population: Part II* (Washington D.C.: United States Census Office, 1902), ccxiv.
[73] *Census Reports Volume II: Twelfth Census of the United States*, ccxv-ccxvi.

significance by recognizing only Indians and mixed Indians (Creoles), who government officials noted occupied a unique position by virtue of the treaty with Russia. By 1900, even that distinction disappeared. Not only did the Twelfth Census collapse Creoles into the category of Indian, it collapsed Indians into the category of Colored, along with Negroes, Chinese, and Japanese.[74] In fact, the Census better identified Alaska's foreign-born population—differentiating amongst Chinese, Canadian, Swedish, Norwegian, German, Irish, English, and Finish—than it did the district's Indigenous population. It was not that the population of Alaska Natives had declined, in fact it had officially risen to 29,536 people. Instead, Alaska's increased white population signaled the decline of the relative importance of Alaska Natives to Washington officials. For the first time, Alaska Natives no longer represented the majority of Alaska's population. The 30,493 white Alaskans formed a plurality, and while the lack of an Alaskan agricultural base meant that U.S. leaders still did not envision Alaska as a place for significant white settlement, this numerical advantage, however slim, did signal to Washington, and to Alaskans themselves, that significant changes were on the horizon.[75] Now that white Americans comprised the largest racial group in Alaska, the United States needed to once again exercise the flexibility that made U.S. imperial success possible.

In addition to making the Alaskan colony legible to government officials in Washington, mapping expeditions and census takers also made the empire visible to Indigenous populations, for whom claims made thousands of miles away had little, if any, day-to-day meaning. Cartographers and census officials did not cow autonomous Native peoples into submission, but

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[74] It is worth noting, for comparison, that in Indian Territory, present-day Oklahoma, the 1900 Census differentiated among five Native American nations—Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole—as well as seven Native American reservations—Modoc, Ottawa, Peoria, Quapaw, Seneca, Shawnee, and Wyandotte. *Census Reports, Volume I, Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900: Population, Part I* (Washington D.C.: United States Census Office, 1901), 47.
[75] *Census Reports Volume II: Twelfth Census of the United States*, ccxv-ccxvi.

they did alert those people to the reality that a rival power claimed to rule the land and the people. Thus, Indigenous Alaskans began to craft or implement strategies and practices designed to take advantage of U.S. government policies for their own purposes. For example, in 1881, Ivan Petroff, while collecting data for the 1880 Census of Alaska, visited an Alaska Native village on Hinchinbrook Island in Prince William Sound. Petroff reported that he was "the first government officer who had ever visited this locality," and as a result, the villagers brought a serious complaint to him. These Inuit villagers complained to Petroff that Tlingits had "invaded" their traditional hunting grounds and "refuse to listen to any remonstrances on the part of the Innuits [sic] on the strength of their superiority in numbers and warlike attributes." Petroff alerted the Treasury Department, responsible at this time for governing Alaska, recommending that a revenue cutter be sent to the area to confine the Inuit and Tlingit to their respective territories.[76] This encounter demonstrates that even when practical U.S. control was limited, the arrival of advance government officials alerted Native peoples to the desire of U.S. leaders to exert power in a region. Native peoples could turn that desire to their own advantage, directing the expression of U.S. power to suit their own ends. Eventually, Alaska Natives translated these experiences into a land settlement of their own design that dwarfed all other agreements between the U.S. government and Indigenous people in the United States (see chapter 5).

Insular Alaska

The 1910 Census drastically changed how Americans conceived of Alaska's colonial status. Most significantly, the Thirteenth Census revealed that, for the first time, white Americans formed an actual majority of Alaska's population. The Alaskan gold rushes had largely played themselves out; the district's population had risen to only 64,356, an increase of fewer than one

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[76] Ivan Petroff to the Secretary of the Treasury, 13 February 1882, MS 0004-33-009, Petroff, Ivan b. 1842, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

thousand residents. White Alaskans in 1910, however, numbered 36,400, an increase of nearly six thousand, while the Indigenous population had officially declined by just over four thousand, to 25,331. Thus, whites in Alaska comprised almost fifty-seven percent of the district's population.[77] The slow increase of the white population reinforced ideas that Alaska could not support a sizable white population, but the significant growth of Alaska's white population relative to the district's other groups, particularly Alaska Natives, did signal a reconfiguring of ideas concerning Alaska's colonial status. It was one thing to deny territorial status, with its implications of eventual statehood and full citizenship rights, to colonies populated primarily by non-white people. By 1910, Alaska's population may have been too small to justify statehood, but Congress found it difficult to deny the district's majority white population the *promise* of full citizenship rights that accompanied territorial status.

More than just the Census drove promises of Alaskan territorial status. Beginning in 1901, the Supreme Court began handing down its decisions in the *Insular Cases*.[78] At their root, many of the *Insular Cases* concerned tariff disputes in the United States' many overseas possessions during the first decades of the twentieth century. In one of the first and most important of the cases, *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901), the Supreme Court ruled that some territories were incorporated into the United States and protected by the full weight of the Constitution, while other territories were unincorporated and Congress faced no constitutional restraints in

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[77] *Reports of the the Thirteenth Census: Population, 1910*, vol. I (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 125.

[78] The exact number of cases comprising the *Insular Cases* is disputed by legal historians and range from as few as six to over thirty. The number of cases classified as *Insular* is immaterial to this study, however, as there is no debate concerning the inclusion of the several key cases concerning Alaska and the Doctrine of Incorporation. Those cases are: *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901), *Dorr v. United States* (1904), and *Rassmussen v. United States* (1905). For more on the *Insular Cases*, see: Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); and Juan R. Torruella, "Ruling America's Colonies: The *Insular Cases*," *Yale Law & Policy Review* 32 (2013).

governing those territories. In fact, Congress could go so far as to "deprive such territory of representative government if it is considered just to do so."[79] This decision is one of the most significant in United States history. It created the Doctrine of Incorporation, an imperial innovation giving Congress near *carte blanche* to enact any law it sees fit in the country's overseas territories.[80] Several years later, in *Dorr v. United States*, the Supreme Court ruled that "in the absence of a statute of Congress expressly conferring the right," Constitutional protections—the right to a jury trial, for example—do not apply to American subjects in unincorporated territories.[81] What could be more imperial? Those living in unincorporated territories live under the authority of the United States with no promise of local representative government, to say nothing of representation in Washington, potentially governed by the whim of Congress, with absolutely no guaranteed protections against tyranny.

Incorporation, which includes promises of Constitutional protections and *temporary* Congressional oversight, represents a significant upgrade over unincorporated status. According to the Supreme Court, incorporated territories are those destined for statehood; in particular, the Court eventually singled out Alaska and Hawai'i. On the other hand, unincorporated territories lack any promise of eventual statehood. Although the Supreme Court invented these categories *ex nihilo*, it did not describe what criteria made a territory incorporated or unincorporated.

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[79] *Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 244 (1901).
[80] The Doctrine of Incorporation is still the law of the land in the United States. Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Marianas all remain unincorporated territories. Presently, and curiously, the only U.S. incorporated territory is Palmyra Atoll, an uninhabited, four-square-mile collection of reefs, submerged sand flats, and dry land in the middle of the Pacific Ocean which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
[81] *Dorr v. United States*, 195 U.S. 138 (1904). This ruling still has implications for Americans living in unincorporated territories today. For example, Puerto Ricans are not U.S. citizens by virtue of the Constitution, but through Congressional legislation, the Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917, and are not guaranteed full Constitutional protection unless they are on the U.S. mainland. *Balzac v. Porto Rico*, 258 U.S. 298 (1922).

Congress could, apparently, keep a territory in an unincorporated status for as long as its members saw fit. As the legal scholar Bartholomew H. Sparrow writes, "With the decisions in the *Insular Cases* … Congress's territorial authority was no longer to be just temporary. New territories might never become states if Congress did not want them to be."[82] In creating the categories of incorporated and unincorporated territories, the Supreme Court successfully removed the greatest limitation to U.S. expansion—race—from the equation.[83] The U.S. empire could expand without concerns that too many non-white people might become citizens and voters. Empire was unshackled.

Alaska, to all appearances, was as unincorporated as any of the United States' newest territories. Although Congress granted Alaska a civilian government in 1884, it also withheld actual territorial status. In today's parlance, Alaska appeared to be an organized unincorporated territory. The Supreme Court decided otherwise in *Rassmussen v. United States* (1905). After this decision, the Supreme Court would decide on future *Insular Cases*, but never again would the Doctrine of Incorporation have to withstand a challenge.[84]

Alaskan district authorities convicted Fred Rassmussen of operating a brothel and subsequently fined him $500. Rassmussen appealed, arguing that the jury that convicted him was comprised of only six people, as was the law for misdemeanor trials in Alaska, and thus violated his Sixth Amendment rights.[85] The question was, did the Sixth Amendment apply to those living in the Far North? Alaska's incorporation status would decide issue. Rassmussen's lawyers argued that the Treaty of Cession between the United States and Russia, in granting citizenship

[82] Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire*, 6.
[83] Eric T. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 197.
[84] Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire*, 189.
[85] The following descriptions and quotes come from *Rassmussen v. United States*, 197 U.S. 516.

to Russians who decided to remain in Alaska, amounted to an act of incorporation, even though no such doctrine existed in 1867. Assistant Attorney General Charles Robb argued for the government that while the treaty had granted citizenship to "the civilized inhabitants of the Territory … it will hardly be contended that it was thereby intended to extend all the provisions of the Constitution to this barren and desolate region, peopled as it was by savages and an alien race, wholly out of sympathy with our customs and institutions." Robb understood that full Constitutional protections extended only to those living in incorporated territories. Incorporation equaled a promise of future statehood. Certainly Congress had not extended a promise of statehood to a barren wasteland in which only a few hundred white inhabitants lived.

The question, Justice Edward Douglass White wrote in his majority decision, was whether Alaska was "held under the sovereignty of the United States as a possession or a dependency." In answering this question, White applied a retroactive continuity (retcon) to the Doctrine of Incorporation, the Philippines, and Alaska. The Philippines was unincorporated, said White, because the treaty between the United States and Spain, "carefully refrained" from incorporation. On the other hand, the treaty with Russia used "the formula employed from the beginning to express the purpose to incorporate acquired territory in the United States." Therefore, Alaska was a possession (incorporated) and the Philippines a dependency (unincorporated).

Upon reflection, one can only conclude that White's logic was spurious, at best. How could William Seward write and the Senate ratify a treaty that followed "the formula employed from the beginning" to incorporate territories, when incorporation was only established in 1901, thirty-four years after the purchase? How could the treaty with Spain, signed in 1898, carefully refrain from incorporating the Philippines three years before the doctrine came into existence?

To buttress his point about the Philippines, White pointed to the Philippine Organic Act of 1902, which rejected section 1891 of the Revised Statutes of 1878, which declared that the Constitution "shall have the same force and effect within all the organized Territories, and in every Territory hereafter organized."[86] Congress' choice not to extend the Constitution to the Philippines represented a conscious decision not to incorporate the Philippines. Justice White was correct, but failed to mention that Congress' decision to not extend the Constitution to the Philippines was in direct response to the *Insular* rulings in 1901. Once incorporation became a doctrine with which Congress had to contend, that body began acting so as to take advantage of unincorporation. One might assume that if the Doctrine of Incorporation appeared in 1883, the year before Congress organized a civilian government in Alaska, Congress would have excluded the Constitution from the Far North as well.

But in fact, Congress had done just that in section 1891 of the Revised Statutes of 1878 in two ways. First, the section applied the Constitution only to organized territories. While the Alaska Organic Act of 1884 had created a civilian government in Alaska, it had not created a territory, but rather a district. Alaska was not, from Congress' perspective, organized. But just in case that was too opaque, section 1891 then listed every territory to which Congress intended it to apply. The section named every U.S. territory except Alaska. If Justice White had honestly applied his logic to Alaska, he would have concluded that Congress did not incorporate Alaska, just as it had not incorporated the Philippines, and refused to extend the promise of full citizenship and statehood to Alaska. Although White never said so, what made the difference in deciding the incorporation statuses of Alaska and the Philippines was not diplomatic treaties, but racial demographics.

[86] Section 1891, Revised Statutes of 1878.

In 1903, the United States government undertook a census in the Philippines, as mandated by the 1902 Organic Act. The census revealed that 7.6 million Filipinos, with 6.9 million classified as brown, called the islands home.[87] The Census Bureau published the results in early 1905, before the Supreme Court heard the arguments of *Rassmussen v. United States*. Although the Philippines possessed tremendous ethnic diversity, as far as U.S. leaders were concerned, the racial makeup of the islands was simply and overwhelmingly non-white. Declaring the Philippines unincorporated followed naturally.

Although Alaska's population at the time of *Rassmussen v. United States* was far smaller (63,592), the racial situation there was a bit more complex in the minds of Washington officials. Not only did white Americans make up a larger percentage of Alaska's population, more white people actually lived in Alaska (30,493) than all of the Philippines (14,271). Moreover, the evolution and eventual official erasure of Creoles in Alaska must have helped Justice White reach his conclusion. Although only several hundred Russians lived in Alaska at the time of the purchase, far too few to legitimately justify incorporation, the Creole population, to whom the promise of citizenship had also originally applied, numbered 1,756 in 1880 and might have served to inflate, in White's mind, the numbers of potential citizens in Alaska.

The 1900 Census, however, eliminated the last vestiges of Alaskan Creole citizenship, collapsing them into the Indian category, and therefore obscuring, if not erasing, Creole claims to U.S. citizenship. In 1900, and therefore in 1905 when the Court ruled in *Rassmussen v. United States*, Native Americans and Alaska Natives were not U.S. citizens. Justice White's argument regarding promised citizenship did not include Creoles because the Census had rendered them invisible. White's claim that promises of citizenship equaled incorporation may have been

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[87] *Census of the Philippine Islands: Taken under the Direction of the Philippine Commission in the Year 1903*, vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: United States Bureau of the Census, 1905), 14.

bolstered by an arithmetic that included nearly two thousand Creole Alaskans, but he could only have realistically meant it to apply to those legally capable of claiming citizenship, or white Alaskans, in 1905. Because Creoles had ceased to be a legal category by 1900, White's argument that Alaska was incorporated can only be understood as being founded, at its core, upon a promise of citizenship to 430 white people counted in 1880 in a region that was, at the time, home to more than thirty thousand non-whites. It seems unlikely that incorporation, if the concept had existed in 1867, along with its promise of statehood and citizenship, would have been granted based upon such a small white population.

Justice White was not writing in 1867, however. By 1905, the 1900 Census had revealed a plurality of Alaska's residents were white. White retroactively applied the Supreme Court's innovation of incorporation to an ahistorical group of European Russians who, he claimed, were entitled to citizenship, and therefore statehood, by the treaty of purchase. But European Russians almost universally returned to Russia. Creoles were the only Russians of note who remained in Alaska and to whom the promise of citizenship applied. But again, the census had erased their existence. In short, when the Supreme Court invented incorporation in 1901, the doctrine applied to Alaska because whites now formed the largest racial group in the district. By 1910, white Americans formed a majority in Alaska. Demography, combined with the legal innovation of incorporation, demanded that Alaska be organized as a territory and placed on the path to statehood. In 1912, Congress did so.

More than serving as an indicator to Alaska Natives of approaching U.S. power, the Census made Alaska legible to U.S. leaders. Government officials used the changing Census numbers to justify imperialist rule of Alaska. When Alaska Natives formed the majority of the district's population, Washington treated Alaska with indifference. When the Census showed

that white Americans had become the largest ethnic and racial group in Alaska, which simultaneously involved the erasure of historically and culturally important Creoles, the Supreme Court used that demographic preponderance to craft an ahistorical myth of incorporation which justified the creation of the Territory of Alaska. Even then, however, settlers refused to settle in Alaska and government leaders used the territory's stubbornly small population to prolong the promise of full citizenship implied in territoriality until well after World War II (see Chapter 6).

Failing to fully measure and map Alaska, to make it legible to politicians and bureaucrats in Washington, shows that Alaska has always been treated as an overseas colonial possession despite the fact that it is, geographically, North American. While the search for profits encouraged industrial exploitation of the West's natural resources, an expectation and narrative of settlement served to justify westward expansion. That the government failed to enact policies to survey and commoditize Alaska in a manner similar to the contiguous states indicates that U.S. leaders did not perceive of Alaska in the same continental light as the mainland. Certainly, Alaska's climate, challenging topography, and geographic distance from the rest of the country played a role in hampering mapping efforts. But these very reasons also exoticized Alaska, leading Americans to imagine Alaska as a place apart, American but somehow different.

Alaska was not the first U.S. colony imagined in imperialist terms, but it was the first to be thought of almost *exclusively* as imperialist. U.S. leaders intended that Alaska serve solely as a storehouse of valuable natural resources, and not a space that might one day support a large population of white, American settlers. Rather than imagining Alaska as a territory that might serve as a space in which plucky American farmers might better themselves, officials imagined Alaska as a colony awaiting exploitation for the financial betterment of an exclusive group of already wealthy Americans.

3 – Boosting Empire

The closing of the frontier by the Census Office in 1890 troubled many Americans, challenging what it meant to be American as well as throwing into question the very future of the United States.[1] The most famous response was Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, in which he declared that, "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development."[2] Turner believed that the frontier had vitally shaped American democratic institutions and its disappearance threatened the survival of American democracy. Without the frontier, Turner wondered how Americans would manage to continuously reimagine and re-establish liberty and democracy. Similarly, less than a year before his death in 1902, the writer Frank Norris mourned, "Suddenly, we have found that there is no longer any Frontier."[3] Norris, at first glance, railed against a similar decline inaugurated by the disappearance of the frontier. Unlike Turner, however, Norris thought the United States was already adapting to the changing imperial context necessitated by the closing of the frontier. Empire would propel the United States into the twentieth century because, Norris believed, the frontier had never been about democracy, but the need for global Anglo-Saxon imperial conquest. Territorial conquest would not form the basis for twentieth-century empires, though. "The Anglo-Saxon in his course of empire had circled the globe," wrote Norris, and

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[1] The Census Bureau defined the frontier as an area possessing a population density of less than two people per square mile. The closing of the frontier in 1890 took into account population densities in four territories—Utah, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona—but not Alaska. Even in 2019, the U.S. Census Bureau webpage, by using a map visualizing the frontier line, failed to take into account Alaska while including the other continental territories. "Following the Frontier Line, 1790 to 1890," United States Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/001/. Perhaps concerned Americans might have been less alarmed if they had included Alaska in their calculations; in 2018 Alaska still had a population density of only 1.3 people per square mile. "Quick Facts: Alaska," United States Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ak.

[2] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frotnier in American History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (1894), 199.

[3] Frank Norris, "The Frontier Gone at Last," *The World's Work* 3, no. 4 (February 1902), 1728-1729.

there remained no more territory to conquer. To survive, he argued, the Anglo-Saxon empires must turn to commerce. "We are now come into a changed time," he claimed, "and the great word of our century is no longer War but Trade."[4] According to Norris, a bit prematurely no doubt, American commerce had already conquered England, and American imperialism would inevitably "embrace Europe, Asia, and the whole of the Old World."[5] Energetic American adaptation to changing times ensured U.S. dominance of the entire globe.

In their writings about Alaska, John Muir and Jack London gave literary recognition to the reality that the disappearing agricultural frontier described by Turner and Norris had never existed in Alaska and never would exist in Alaska. Unlike Norris, Muir and London did not lay out a program of empire or capitalism in Alaska. Their writings, however, represent a recognition that old ideas of territorial expansion did not apply in Alaska. In describing Alaska, Muir and London unintentionally articulated a new vision of U.S. empire, one that adapted ideas of nature and Indigeneity to open Alaska to global capitalism.

Turner described an American frontier that had ceased to exist early in the nineteenth century, if it had ever existed at all.[6] Turner mythologized U.S. expansion, emphasizing virtuous white agricultural settlers while minimizing miners and other industrial laborers and nearly completely erasing Native Americans. In this, Turner's interpretation drew upon popular myths and cliches, putting into words how Americans at the close of the nineteenth century imagined

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[4] Norris, "The Frontier Gone at Last," 1729.
[5] Norris, "The Frontier Gone at Last," 1730.
[6] For explorations of the complexities of U.S. expansion during the first half of the nineteenth century, see: *A Whole Country in Commotion: The Louisiana Purchase and the American Southwest* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005); Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Bordered State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); and Thomas Richards, Jr., *Breakaway Americas: The Unmanifest Future of the Jacksonian United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020).

their country and its expansion. Frederick Jackson Turner, despite—or perhaps because of—all his inaccuracies and obscurations of real patterns of settlement, represented the old vision of U.S. empire, what Henry Nash Smith called the myth of the garden.[7]

The works of John Muir and Jack London gave voice to the new imperialist vision. Both men spent time in Alaska, and as a result both men knew old visions of American expansion and frontier did not apply to the Far North. While those interested in turning natural wealth into commercial wealth often formed the vanguard of expansion in the contiguous United States, agricultural settlers often did follow fairly close behind and became the foundation for permanent settlement. California, where Muir spent most of his adult life and where London was born and primarily lived, serves as a perfect example. While gold initially drew over 100,000 miners to the territory, agriculture formed the basis upon which statehood was built: by 1884, California produced more wheat than any other state in the country.[8] Alaska, according to Muir and London, was different. Not a place for agriculture, or by extension women or families, U.S. empire in Alaska was explicitly about commercialism made possible by white masculinity.

The closing of the frontier coincided closely with what the literary critic Tom Lutz has called American nervousness, described by late nineteenth and early twentieth century Americans as a disease which afflicted only the well-refined upper classes of the world's most civilized cultures. Whether leading to feelings of "weightlessness" or "excess gravity," increasing urbanization, technological development, and a growing industrial market seem to have caused well-to-do Americans to question their place in the world. While American

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[7] Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), chapter 22. See also Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture*, ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
[8] Andrew C. Isenberg, *Mining California: An Ecological History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 163.

nervousness was seen as proof of the superiority of American civilization, it also posed a threat to the survival of the United States. If left unchecked, its lethargy, asthma, depression, insomnia, despair, or any other number of symptoms, might bring down all Anglo-Saxon culture.[9]

American nervousness initiated a crisis of masculinity at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. In particular, the perception that the closing of the frontier and the decline of agricultural America, when connected to growing urban centers and industrialization, threw into question the constructions that underpinned American masculinity. In a country in which land had so long equaled liberty, and liberty manhood, the increasing reliance on wage labor in urban settings challenged Americans' understandings of both liberty and masculinity.[10] Contemporary commentators believed the decline of American masculinity had consequences beyond traditional gender roles. American culture and civilization were threatened by declining American masculinity, they believed. Alaska, as presented by Muir and London, seemed a cure for such concerns.

For many Americans of the late nineteenth century, reimaging the West mattered tremendously. Vocal Americans like Teddy Roosevelt feared that Americans, in their civilized comfort, might "be content to rot by inches in ignoble ease within our borders."[11] Through frontier literature, American men—with no West left to conquer—might imagine themselves as heroes capable of great masculine deeds and, in their imaginations at least, rediscover the mettle

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[9] Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).
[10] See: E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), especially chapter 10; and Kurt Müller, "The 'Search for Order' and the Crisis of Masculinity: The Naturalist American Novel and the Cultural Anxieties of the 'Strenuous Age.'" *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 55, no. 2 (2007).
[11] Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," in *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1904), 6.

and discipline many believed white Americans needed to survive in a changing world.[12] Thus, in their Alaska stories Muir and London figuratively reinvented and reopened the West.[13] Theirs was not Turner's West of democratic renewal, but rather a West that encouraged masculine renewal for the purpose of commercial gain.

Muir and London informed their American readers that the American frontier remained, the pronouncements of the Census Office and Turner notwithstanding, very much open. The northern frontier remained open to those brave and capable enough to claim it. And because that frontier would never close—indeed, could never close—its tremendous resources were sure to enrich Americans for longer than could be imagined.[14]

Muir and London desired that Americans turn Alaska's natural abundance into financial abundance. In short, they were imperialist boosters. Unlike most earlier boosters, however, Muir and London did not have an urban setting in mind when they promoted Alaska. Usually, boosters anticipated that resource extraction would lead to the urban development and cities needed to process unrefined resources into valuable products. Thus, boosters hoped to cash-in on the urban rushes that turned small hamlets or important geographical locations, such as river confluences, into "great commercial points." As the historian William Cronon argues, boosters were speculators who tied their hopes to "the urban promise—the urban imperative—of frontier

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[12] See Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), especially chapter 1.

[13] For ways in which Western literature reopened and reinvented the West, see: Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 119.

[14] For more on contemporary concerns about masculinity in the United States and the role such concerns played in encouraging U.S. empire, see: Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Tara Kathleen Kelly, *The Hunter Elite: Manly Sport, Hunting Narratives, and American Conservation, 1880-1925* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018); and Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

settlement and investment."[15] Like boosters on the American mainland, Muir and London promoted Alaska as a place in need of financial investment. Unlike earlier boosters, however, Muir and London envisioned investment in Alaska as purely absentee. Alaska was not fit, according to Muir and London, for significant white settlement.

John Muir holds a special place in the hearts of many environmentally conscious people to this day. The historian David Wrobel goes so far as call Muir, "America's most revered and influential naturalist."[16] Each year, devotees of Muir celebrate Earth Day by descending on his former home in California and invoking his name in order to lend legitimacy to disparate environmental protests for solar power, organic gardening, bee preservation, limiting invasive plant species, and proper motor oil disposal.[17] These people celebrate Muir's legacy as a naturalist. One wonders if reflecting on his role as a booster would temper such enthusiasm.

Born in Scotland in 1838, Muir and his family immigrated to the United States in 1849. It was there that he grew to love what he called the "wonderful wilderness" on his family's Wisconsin farm.[18] After studying for a short time at the University of Wisconsin and then traveling through the American South and Latin America, Muir eventually found himself in California's Yosemite Valley. It was in the Sierra Nevada Mountains that Muir rose to prominence as a naturalist and conservationist, and wrote most of the works for which he is primarily remembered.

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[15] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 34.
[16] David M. Wrobel, *Global West, American Frontier: Travel, Empire, and Exceptionalism from Manifest Destiny to the Great Depression* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 94.
[17] Steve Rubenstein, "Crowds celebrate Earth Day at John Muir's historic house in Martinez," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 April 2019. https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Crowds-celebrate-Earth-Day-at-John-Muir-s-13783061.php
[18] John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2012), 43.

Muir's political connections made him one the United States' most influential nature writers. Teddy Roosevelt praised him as, "a man able to influence contemporary thought and action on the subjects to which he had devoted his life. He was a great factor in influencing the thought of California and the thought of the entire country."[19] In 1890, Muir successfully lobbied for the creation of Yosemite Park, and following several days spent in the park with Roosevelt in 1903, convinced the President that the park should be expanded. Muir also played a leading role in the creation of Grand Canyon and Sequoia national parks, as well as founding and serving as the first president of the Sierra Club. Wrobel argues that Muir's impassioned pleas to save Hetch Hetchy Valley from damming mark "the pinnacle of his remarkable career."[20] Although Muir failed to save the valley, the campaign elevated him to the level of sainthood.[21] Muir's personal and political connections secured a platform from which to influence important political figures as well as to shape how Americans came to think of nature and the untrampled wilderness.

The social elites who read Muir's work believed in the objective accuracy of his descriptions of Alaska. Shortly after Muir's death, one eulogizer wrote, "John Muir's place in the literature of our western mountains, trees, and flowers is easily foremost. His gospel of beauty and of joy is destined to become increasingly known as the truth of his message is attested in the experience of all who follow in his footsteps."[22] Another devotee praised Muir's "rare critical faculty."[23] While still alive, one journalist commended Muir's "intrepid spirit" and "genius"

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[19] Theodore Roosevelt, "John Muir: An Appreciation," *Outlook* 109 (Jan 1915), 27.
[20] Wrobel, *Global West, American Frontier*, 95.
[21] Muir is included in the Episcopal Church's canon of saints. See *Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints*, (New York: Church Publishing, 2010), 336-337.
[22] Le Roy Jeffers, "Book Reviews: Alaska Days with John Muir," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (January 1916), 125.
[23] Marion Randall Parsons, "John Muir and the Alaska Book," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (January 1916), 35.

before declaring that "Muir knows the Alaskan glaciers as New York men know Broadway."[24] By casting Muir as nearly a figurative native of Alaska, the journalist positioned Muir's knowledge of Alaska as unassailable. Muir was no mere booster, he was a scientist and therefore beyond reproach.

Jack London wrote for a different crowd. Born in San Francisco in 1876, London grew up poor. He labored in various factories, canneries, and as a sailor all before the age of twenty. After a brief stint at the University of California-Berkeley, London, like so many other poor men of the time, turned his gaze to the North. Hoping to strike it rich, London set out for the Klondike in 1897, where he wrote that, "I found myself."[25] Illness limited London's time in Alaska to eleven months, but the district inspired his most famous works, thereby proving to be an unexpected bonanza. For modern readers, London's experiences as a young man and traveler provided what the literary scholar Lawrence Phillips calls an "exceptional basis from which to explore ideas of empire, class, gender and nationality, and what happens when these are brought face to face with the extremes of colonial practice, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."[26] Like most gold rushers, London failed to dig wealth out of the ground. He did, however, turn his gold rush experience into the foundation of a literary career that generated tremendous wealth.

Of London's popularity during his own lifetime, there can be no doubt. One scholar has called London, "one of the first major celebrity authors of the twentieth century."[27] Another

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[24] "John Muir, Naturalist," *New York Daily Tribune*, 23 February 1908.
[25] Jack London, "Jack London, by Himself," https://americanliterature.com/author/jack-london/short-story/jack-london-by-himself.
[26] Lawrence Phillips, "Colonial Culture in the Pacific in Robert Louis Stevenson and Jack London," *Race & Class* 48, no. 3 (2007), 64.
[27] Jason D. Martinek, *Socialism and Print Culture in America, 1897-1920* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 50.

claims that by 1904 London had "become a full-fledged literary phenomenon, a front-page celebrity, and the highest-paid writer in America."[28] Publishers certainly did pay London. In a letter written in 1903, London claimed *The Saturday Evening Post* paid him three cents per word for the serial rights to *The Call of the Wild*.[29] Coming in at about thirty-two thousand words, this means London earned approximately $960 for the story well before becoming a household name. By 1910, London was one of only eight American writers who commanded $1000 for a completed short story.[30] Apparently, publishers were also "overjoyed" to pay London $750 for short stories he had yet to write.[31] For perspective, $1000 dollars in 1910 is equivalent to more than $27,000 in 2021. In a literary career of less than two decades, London rose from the ranks of rail-riding hobo arrested for vagrancy, to the owner of a 1400-acre ranch in northern California that employed more than fifty people.[32] But London's popularity can be measured in more than just dollars.

Unlike Muir, London's popularity was strongest among the masses, peaking during the first two decades of the twentieth century, when questions of labor unions, wealth redistribution, and agricultural assistance made newspaper headlines and motivated hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of American citizens to question the *laissez faire* status quo. London was among the loudest of those questioning such standards and used his writing to promote his socialist beliefs. In 1895, London described socialism as the "phenomenon of this century. It is a vision of the

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[28] James L. Haley, *Wolf: The Lives of Jack London* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), ix.
[29] Jack London to George P. Brett, 10 March 1903, in *Letters from Jack London*, (New York: Odyssey Press, 1965), 150.
[30] "Rewards of Short Story Writers," *The Writer* XXII, no. 1 (1910), 9.
[31] "High Prices for Short Stories," *The Writer* XXII, no. 1 (1910), 118.
[32] Kenneth Brandt, "The Short, Frantic, Rags-to-Riches Life of Jack London," Smithsonian.com, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/short-heroic-rags-riches-life-jack-london-180961200/ and "Jack London's Beauty Ranch," Jack London State Historic Park, http://jacklondonpark.com/jack-london-beauty-ranch.html.

future, while its agents are actively at work in the present." He went on to call socialism the "obvious step" following capitalism.[33] Consequently, American social and business elites attacked London and his writing. For example, Teddy Roosevelt lambasted London's honesty and manhood, calling London's writing the "sublimity of absurdity" and claiming that London hoped to fool readers into believing he had "met nature in its gentleness and in its fierceness face to face."[34] Roosevelt feared that when combined with his socialist beliefs, London's dishonesty threatened American democracy. After all, London briefly considered running for president, and if American audiences believed his patently absurd fiction, it seemed likely to Roosevelt they would believe London's more pernicious socialist lies.[35]

Taken together, Muir and London reached vast swathes of the American public with their writing. Readers of either writer could hardly help but understand Alaska as a land teeming with valuable natural resources and in need of investment. At the same time, though, readers also learned that Alaska was a rugged land incapable of supporting a large white population and was occupied by Native peoples who had long squandered Alaska's bounty. Muir's and London's Alaska was a space that only white American men could make profitable.

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[33] Jack London, "What Socialism Is," in *The Radical Jack London: Writings on War and Revolution*, ed. Jonah Raskin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 57.
[34] Edward B. Clark, "Roosevelt on the Nature Fakirs," *Everybody's Magazine* 16 (January-June 1907), 771 and 773. See also: Theodore Roosevelt, "Nature Fakers," *Everybody's Magazine* 17 (July-December 1907), 427-430. London did admit: "I confess that my field observations, so far as the text of my own book [*White Fang*] is concerned, are rotten." Jack London to the Editor, *Collier's Weekly*, 22 December 1908, in *Letters from Jack London*, 275.
[35] Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, Revised ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 97. For an overview of socialism in the United States, see Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000). For more on socialism and print culture in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Martinek, *Socialism and Print Culture in America.*

Masculine Alaska

While certain industries profited from Alaska's natural resources, especially gold and salmon, by the end of the nineteenth century Alaska had slipped to the margins of general thought. Public opinion regarding Alaska had shifted from describing it, as one newspaper did in 1867, as "the distinguishing and crowning achievement of Mr. Seward's foreign policy," to the historian Hubert Howe Bancroft's 1885 lament that "the greater portion of Alaska is practically worthless and uninhabitable."[36] Beyond the strategic concerns of a handful of Navy officers, throughout the 1880s and 1890s little about Alaska endeared it to an American public which remained bent on exploiting the natural wealth of the contiguous states and territories as well as filling them with white settlers.[37]

John Muir and Jack London did much to change such opinions. In an age during which the loss of manly vigor threatened, in the minds of many, the survival of the United States, Muir and London presented Alaska as the balm for Americans' troubles. The Census Office may have closed the frontier, but imperialism opened Alaska, and while the district did not simply replicate the circumstances of the American West, it offered many of the same opportunities for masculine renewal.

Muir's first writings about Alaska reached the public in 1879 when he traveled to Alaska to report on the district for the *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin*. Travel writing was in vogue at the time, and the paper's editors intended Muir's letters to sell papers.[38] In these earliest

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[36] "Russo-American Purchase—the Climax of Mr. Seward's Foreign Policy," *Daily Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia) 3 April 1867; and Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft: History of Alaska, 1730-1885*, vol. XXXIII (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 1886), viii.

[37] For more on the Navy's views of Alaska in the late nineteenth century, see Michael A. Hill, "Imperial Stepping Stone: Bridging Continental and Overseas Empire in Alaska," *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 1 (January, 2020), 91-93.

[38] By 1874, Muir had established himself as one of San Francisco's leading journalists. Nicolas Witschi, "John of the Mines: Muir's Picturesque Rewrite of the Gold Rush," *Western American Literature* 34, no.

descriptions of Alaska, Muir began, for the reading public of San Francisco at least, to create an image of Alaska as the remote, wild edge of U.S. empire, controlled but not yet tamed by its masculine American masters. The Wisconsin of Muir's youth may have seemed a wonderful wilderness, but in Alaska Muir found what he called "pure wilderness" untouched by the corrosive effects of humanity.[39]

Muir's Alaska was not a place for the faint of heart. Indeed, in Muir's description the very voyage north challenged all but the hardiest of travelers; the rolling seas caused among the soft, civilized passengers, a sea sickness which inevitably resulted in "a rush to the rail and volcanic activity."[40] Muir described Wrangell, his usual base of operations in southeastern Alaska, as "the roughest place I ever saw," or similarly as "the most inhospitable place at first sight I had ever seen."[41] Camp sites throughout Alaska were "desolate" and "savage."[42] Nor did Muir fail to mention the frigid cold that descends upon Alaska during much of the year, writing of temperatures reaching down to -60° Fahrenheit and warning potential travelers that "winter and summer seem to be the only seasons here. What may fairly be called summer lasts only two or three months, winter nine or ten."[43] Glaciers abounded in Alaska, creating prairies of ice so dangerous one wrong step meant death. "This," wrote Muir, "is the Iceland of Alaska."[44] Compare this to Muir's descriptions of snow in the Sierra Nevadas, which he described as

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3 (Fall 1999), 318. For more on how travel writing aided U.S. empire, see Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), chapter 4.

[39] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 10 and 60.

[40] John Muir, "Victoria, V.I. [Vancouver Island], June 25, 1879," in *Letters from Alaska*, ed. Robert Engberg and Bruce Merrell (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

[41] John Muir, "Notes of a Naturalist," *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin*, 6 September 1879; and Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 15.

[42] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 125 and 215.

[43] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 74.

[44] John Muir, "Notes on the Pacific Coast Glaciers," in *Alaska: Narrative, Glaciers, Natives* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1901), 120.

considerable but nonetheless charming, gentle, and temporary.[45] The message to Muir's readers was clear: Alaska was a land which destroyed the soft but tempered those made of sterner stuff. Only the rarest women and families might find success in Alaska; even the hardiest of men would find the region inhospitable. If a man survived in Alaska, and Muir included himself in this category, he was truly a man fit for the wider world.

Americans learned of a similar Alaska in London's stories, which reflected and strengthened many assumptions his readers had of the region: life in Alaska was difficult and demanding; the terrain was vast beyond comprehension and the weather unforgiving; this was a land in which the slightest weakness was punished with death. But importantly, London's Alaska was also a land waiting to be controlled and tamed. Perhaps most Americans, those weakened by industrial and commercial living, could not handle the extremes of Alaskan life, but the masculine vanguard of imperialism certainly could, and for their struggles they would be richly rewarded.

While Muir and London both reflected on the role of masculinity in Alaska, Muir more often implied its importance, while masculinity formed one of the foundational elements of London's Alaska stories. Those Americans who objected to the United States' acquisition of Alaska had often pointed to the region's distance, isolation, and inhospitable climate in efforts to turn Americans against the purchase. The *New York Daily Tribune*, the most vocal opponent of the purchase, repeatedly referred to Alaska's deserts of snow, inaccessible mountains, frozen rivers, and waste territory. "We may make a treaty with Russia," printed the *Tribune* in April 1867, "but we cannot make a treaty with the North Wind, or the Snow King."[46] London's

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[45] John Muir, *The Mountains of California* (New York: Modern Library, 2001; repr., Originally Published: New York: Century Co., 1894), 28-29.
[46] "What We Get by the Treaty," *New York Daily Tribune*, 11 April 1867.

portrayal of Alaska reflected such impressions of the region. But while London presented Alaska as inhospitable, he also made it clear that American men could conquer Alaska.[47]

London's most famous novel, *The Call of the Wild*, succeeded in presenting the Northland, as London frequently referred to Alaska and the Yukon, as a land that easily destroyed the soft, civilized inhabitants of the Southland. When Buck, the California-born canine protagonist of *The Call of the Wild*, first sets foot on Alaskan soil, he discovers that, "Here was neither peace, nor rest, nor a moment's safety. All was confusion and action, and every moment life and limb were constantly in peril."[48] But the confusion and peril in this passage are not found in the wild; they are found in a bustling port town built solely to facilitate the imperialist exploitation of the Northland's natural resources.

Americans needed to discover an invigorated masculinity to successfully transform the Northland from the barren wasteland Alaska Natives, Russians, and the British had allowed it to remain, into a land that surrendered its resources to the United States. American men in Alaska formed London's imperialist pioneers. Scholars have long noted the significance of gender, particularly masculinity, in London's works, although there is disagreement as to whether London reinforced masculine stereotypes or freed his female characters from the gendered conventions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[49] In London's Alaska stories,

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[47] Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 106-107.

[48] Jack London, "The Call of the Wild," in *Jack London: Novels & Stories* (New York: The Library of America, 1982), 15.

[49] For an interpretation of London's works as confirming masculine stereotypes, see Charles N. Watson Jr., "Sexual Conflict in *The Sea-Wolf*: Further Notes on London's Reading of Kipling and Norris," *Western American Literature* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1976). For an interpretation that sees London's works as emancipating his female characters, see Katie O'Donnell Arosteguy, "'Things Men Must Do': Negotiating American Masculinity in Jack London's *The Valley of the Moon*," *Atenea* 28, no. 1 (June 2008).

though, there is little evidence of female empowerment. Few women appear in London's Alaska stories because women, at least white women, have no place in London's Alaska.

London's works reflect an anxiety caused by the changing conceptions of masculinity brought about by shifting ideas of labor and class.[50] In *The Call of the Wild*, London demonstrated how the Northland might affect the overly civilized and effeminate when the sled dog Dolly "went suddenly mad." She had "never been conspicuous for anything," but the strain of the Northland suddenly became too much for her.[51] Panting, frothing, and snarling, she sought only to mindlessly kill her companions. In the end, François, a French-Canadian mail carrier, had no option but to cleave Dolly's head with an axe. Dolly and her companions, human and canine, were not tourists, a class despised by Muir, but rather workers in the capitalist Northland. The strain of laboring, more than the strain of the wild, is what eventually doomed Dolly. London's message is clear: Alaska is an imperialist outpost, meant only to provide resources for the United States' capitalist engine. The strain that accompanied capitalism, however, meant that Alaska was not a place for women and families, two ingredients vital for settlement and civilization.

Alaska's inability to support white settlers is further demonstrated in *The Call of the Wild* by the characters Mercedes, her husband Charles, and her brother Hal. The story of this "nice family party" takes up a significant amount of space in what is a relatively short novella.[52] Mercedes was the bane of Charles and Hal's Northland lives. While London presented the inexperience of these men as a challenge perhaps too great for any to overcome, the efforts of Charles and Hal to cater to the needs of Mercedes, who "nursed a special grievance—the grievance of sex," ultimately doomed these characters to their deaths.[53] With a sled overloaded

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[50] Arosteguy, "'Things Men Must Do,'" 38.
[51] London, "The Call of the Wild," 28-29.
[52] London, "The Call of the Wild," 46-58.
[53] London, "The Call of the Wild," 53.

by the goods needed to support Mercedes' "pretty and soft lifestyle," Mercedes, Charles, and Hal met their end crashing through the melting ice of an unnamed river. While Charles and Hal may have lacked the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed, or even survive, in the Northland, the story makes it clear that the primary fault for their ill-fated end lay more in Charles and Hal's foolish decision to bring a Southland woman, a symbol of domesticity and settlement, to the imperialist hinterland.

In the novel *White Fang*, described by London as "not a sequel to *The Call of the Wild*. But a companion to [it]," London tackled another aspect of masculinity and Alaska.[54] In this story, White Fang is the half wolf, half dog protagonist. While Buck, in *The Call of the Wild*, journeyed from the civilized to the primeval, White Fang took the opposite journey. Born in the Wild, he was tamed when captured as a pup by Alaska Natives and eventually accompanied his new white owner Weedon Scott, the only human White Fang ever loved, to California. In California, White Fang is introduced to Collie, a domestic sheepdog. Not only does the novel signal White Fang's reconciliation with civilization through the character of Collie, but the reader also learns that despite her role as a working dog, Collie was most fulfilled when she became the mother to White Fang's puppies. One reviewer of *White Fang*, who quite enjoyed the book, took issue with only this part of the novel, in which White Fang becomes "the much hen-pecked spouse of a certain beautiful lady named 'Collie,' and that we confess to a lurking preference for the days when he was called the 'Fighting Wolf,' and was warranted to kill any other dog in the Northland in the first round."[55] The reviewer need not have worried, however. As Collie demonstrated, and as the literary scholar Katie O'Donnell Arosteguy argues, for

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[54] Jack London to George P. Brett, 5 December 1904, in *Letters from Jack London*, 166.
[55] "Jack London: 'White Fang' Is Another Tale of the Primitive Forces of Nature," *New York Times*, 17 November 1906.

London a woman's "only function is to bring her mate's American manhood to fruition."[56] White Fang and Collie created a life and family together in California, but even though Collie was a working dog, there was no place for her in Alaska's harsh environment. Collie was the toughest female character in London's Alaska stories, but even she did not belong in the Northland.

When *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* are read together, the theme of regression followed by renewal rises to the surface. In *The Call of the Wild*, Buck's journey from civilized domestication to the primitive wolf pack leader has been interpreted as a descent into "permanent savagery."[57] For Buck this is certainly the case. But White Fang brings the Alaskan journey full circle. He is born primitive but eventually progresses to civilization. London's Alaska was a place that destroyed the overly civilized elements of American life. But for the United States' masculine elite, regression was only the first half of a journey leading to full masculine vitality. Once freed from civilization's foibles, the men purified by primitiveness were prepared to progress back to civilization in order to lead the country into the future and father the next generation of American men. *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, thus represent one paleo-narrative in which regression eliminates the corrupting influences of civilization allowing for successful white regeneration.[58] For London, it was not enough to prove one's masculinity in Alaska; what separated American masculinity from savagery was the ability of white American men to combine the primitive with the civilized.

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[56] Arosteguy, "'Things Men Must Do,'" 51.
[57] Andrew C. Isenberg, "The Moral Ecology of Wildlife," in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 52.
[58] For more on London and paleo-narratives, see Hsuan L. Hsu, "Paleo-Narratives and White Atavism, 1898-2015," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2019).

Fig. 3-1 John Muir took great pride that Muir Glacier was named in his honor. This image of tourists at Muir Glacier was included in the earliest edition of *Travels in Alaska*. John Muir, *Travels in Alaska* Boston: Moughton Mifflin, 1915).

Compared to London, Muir's concerns about masculinity are more often found between the lines. Nonetheless, Muir addressed one particular question of gender head-on in the recollections of his 1890 trip to Alaska. During this trip, Muir ruminated on his fellow travelers, many of whom he dismissively described as mere women tourists who did little more than make a show of their "ribbons and kodaks."[59] Muir believed that white Americans had something to gain by going to Alaska, but the territory was, to Muir, more than the simple tourist trap an effeminate population threatened to make it.[60] Tourism threatened to bring too many temporary visitors to Alaska, especially women, who would ruin the Alaskan wilderness. In doing so, the

[59] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 260.
[60] Muir never had much use for tourists, once referring to tourists in Yosemite as "sticks of condensed filth." "To Emily Pelton, Yosemite Valley, April 2nd, 1872," in *John Muir: His Life and Letters and Other Writings*, ed. Terry Gifford (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1996), 164.

rugged wilderness that might help shape American masculinity would be lost in favor of an expanding commercialism which already bred nervousness on the mainland.

Other writers confirmed Muir's and London's depictions of the importance of Alaska in reinvigorating American manhood. For example, in 1913, John J. Underwood, who professed to having lived continuously in Alaska for fourteen years, wrote a piece of Alaskan booster literature entitled, *Alaska: An Empire in the Making*. In it, Underwood warned that not everyone was cut out for life in Alaskan. Only the undaunted, courageous, and strong needed to travel to the Alaskan gold fields, but for those hardy few a life of romance awaited.[61] Underwood also claimed American manhood could be refined by big game hunting in Alaska, which he presented as a big game hunter's paradise: "With the exception of the South African veldts, it is the greatest hunting country extant … It matters not what part of Alaska the hunter goes, game in abundance can be found."[62] Underwood encouraged the hunting of moose, caribou, and grizzly bears, among other animals. Although he did not explicitly draw the connection to hunting as a method of testing one's masculinity, it seems certain that many of his readers would have, just as they would likely have noticed that his descriptions recalled those of Muir and London

At the dawn of the twentieth century many Americans feared that industrialization and civilization were stripping their men of the vigor that had driven Anglo-Saxon empire for centuries. The Alaska these Americans read about in the works of Muir and London seemed an antidote for such concerns. In Alaska, Muir and London reassured their readers, American men could rediscover their masculinity and refine the traits that guaranteed the survival of their entire race.

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[61] John J. Underwood, *Alaska: An Empire in the Making* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1913), 227.
[62] Underwood, *Alaska*, 158.

Anglo-Saxon Alaska

According to Muir and London, Alaska's climate and geography would strengthen American masculinity, not it's Indigenous inhabitants. Alaska Natives posed little threat to the progress of white Americans in the Far North. In fact, their failure to properly exploit Alaska's resources demonstrated not only the primitiveness of Alaskan Natives, it also demonstrated their unworthiness to be the masters of the Northland.

From Muir's perspective, Alaska Natives were an impediment to the development of Alaska, one that white Americans could easily overcome. Muir's writings describe Native slaves, witchcraft, polygamy, and warfare. Entire villages easily fell victim to "whiskey storms," which quickly turned any village into an "Indian Sodom."[63] On the other hand, Alaska Natives, if kept sober wrote Muir, possessed a "natural dignity."[64] This dignity, however, was to Muir the innocence of children. On several occasions Muir described Alaska Natives as "children groping in darkness," as demonstrating "childlike attention," or simply as "like children."[65] In Muir's mind, such simplicity was a virtue. Alaska Natives, especially Tlingit, were superior to "other North American Indians in being willing to work," wrote Muir.[66] Their simplicity also gave Alaska Natives a "straightforward way, wholly unlike the vacant, silent, hesitating behavior of most civilized friends."[67] Indeed, Muir was surprised to find that Alaska Natives, "exerted themselves under tedious hardship without flinching for days or weeks at a time; never seemed in the least nonplussed; were prompt to act in every exigency; good as servants, fellow travelers, and even friends."[68] Muir presented the Indigenous people living in the district as incredibly

[63] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 117.
[64] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 122.
[65] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 122, 138, and 178.
[66] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 175.
[67] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 176.
[68] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 173.

susceptible to both the good and bad of white American culture, but not a threat to U.S. imperialism.[69]

Later purveyors of Northland knowledge reinforced Muir's views of Alaska Natives. In 1909, the University of Chicago geology professor Wallace Atwood's essay, "Alaska and It's Wealth," published in the book *America Across the Seas: Our Colonial Empire*, described Alaska's Indigenous people as friendly and industrious, but in need of American culture.[70] In 1922, one of the first documentaries ever produced, *Nanook of the North*, portrayed its Canadian Inuit subjects in a light Muir would have certainly recognized: hardworking and caring, but in a primitive and backward way. Indigenous people in the North were relics of a bygone age, bypassed by civilization and soon to be little more than a footnote.

Simarly, London painted Alaska and its inhabitants as dangerous, but also primitive and unimaginative, unable to defeat the power of the civilized mind.[71] London often parroted stereotypes of Native Americans when describing Alaska Natives. They were savage and dangerous, as shown when, in *The Call of the Wild*, Buck's virtuous white owner, John Thornton, was ambushed and killed by the fictional Yeehat Indians. Gray Beaver, White Fang's first human owner, was presented as emotionless and sly, yet was easily manipulated by whites when attempting to enter the capitalist marketplace as a trader. And while London portrayed

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[69] The need to tame Alaska Natives was of concern to U.S. government officials during Muir's earliest travels to Alaska. For example, in 1880 Navy Captain Lester A. Beardslee was ordered to subdue the Tlingit who controlled Chilkoot Pass on the main route to the gold fields. Beardslee threatened to attack the area's Tlingit if they hampered the travel of American argonauts. In return, the Tlingit were guaranteed the right to serve as porters through the mountain pass for American gold seekers. Charlotte Gray, *Gold Diggers: Striking It Rich on the Klondike* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), 22.
[70] Wallace W. Atwood, "Alaska and Its Wealth," in *America across the Seas: Our Colonial Empire* (New York: C. S. Hammond & Company, 1909).
[71] Such a perspective was far from unusual at the time. For many years the generally dominant view of Native Americans cast them as "passive, acted on, pushed about by the more forceful white men." Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 179-180.

Gray Beaver as biologically and hierarchically superior to White Fang, London used the term "man-animal" at least twenty-six times when describing Alaska Natives in the novel. Indigenous peoples may have been greater than animals in London's stories, but they were not equal to white men, repeatedly described by London, from White Fang's point of view, as gods. That being said, London did not portray whites as monolithically virtuous. The vilest of London's characters, Beauty Smith, is an ugly little white man who beats and terrorizes White Fang while forcing him to compete in dog fights to the death. London believed that whiteness, by itself, was not enough to guarantee success in Alaska.

Throughout *The Call of the Wild*, the soft Southland dogs, representing white Americans, brought north to labor on the trail and in the goldfields died "under the toil, the frost, and starvation."[72] In fact, Buck is the only one to survive. But Buck not only survived, he thrived. Buck's success stemmed from his good fortune in uniting in one body, primitive physical strength with civilized intelligence, or as London described it, the "quality that made for greatness—imagination."[73] So well did Buck combine the primitive and the civilized, that at the end of the novel, when he joined a wolf pack, Buck quickly became the pack's leader and terrorized the local Indigenous population. Buck, a *domesticated* dog, was able to dominate and lead a pack of *wild* wolves because he is what Richard Slotkin calls the "frontier hero;" a character who is "civilization's most effective instrument against savagery—a man who knows how to think and fight like an Indian, to turn their own methods against them. In its most extreme development … as avenger determined at all costs to 'exterminate the brutes.'"[74] Indeed, Buck used the wolfpack, a literary stand-in for Indigenous people, to terrorize and kill actual

[72] London, "The Call of the Wild," 29.
[73] London, "The Call of the Wild," 35.
[74] Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 16.

Indigenous people. Buck quite literally used savage methods to kill savages on the imperialist periphery.

Buck's use of the wolfpack against Native people also reflects one of the central qualities of racialist frontier literature at the turn of the twentieth century, described by Slotkin as war intended, "to destroy the enemy root and branch (through the murder of mothers and children) or to corrupt and alter his seed (through captivity and rape)."[75] London ensured that Buck accomplished both of these goals. The story's Yeehats described Buck as the Ghost Dog who "has cunning greater than they," and who killed their hunters and brought grief to their women. Buck waged a war of vengeance against the Yeehats in order to destroy them, "root and branch." As the literary scholar Hsuan Hsu describes it, even in his regressed form, "Buck's Euro-American version of primitive vitality is shown to be superior to that of the region's indigenous inhabitants."[76] Furthermore, as leader of the wolfpack, Buck added his seed to the lineage of the story's metaphorical Alaska Natives. London wrote that the timber wolves of the region underwent a physical change, their coats now containing "splashes of brown on head and muzzle, and with a rift of white centring down the chest."[77] Thus, Buck managed to fulfill both imperatives of the frontier hero. In this, London sounded a great deal like Teddy Roosevelt, who, when describing conflict between Euro-Americans and Native Americans, wrote, "Mercy, pity, magnanimity to the fallen, could not be expected from the frontiersmen gathered together to war against an Indian tribe. Almost every man of such a band had bitter personal wrongs to avenge." In fact, Roosevelt argued that "the grimmest, wildest spirit of revenge and hatred" in whites "was

[75] Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 48.
[76] Hsu, "Paleo-Narratives and White Atavism," 303.
[77] London, "The Call of the Wild," 85.

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Fig. 3-2 An advertisement for *The Call of the Wild* in which Jack London is compared to Rudyard Kipling. *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 14 August 1903.

in many instances proper."[78] Buck may have regressed in the Wild, but he carried out civilization's mission nonetheless.

Importantly, American readers believed London's descriptions of Alaska Natives. In 1903, the well-known author and critic Elia W. Peattie wrote in her review of *The Call of the Wild* that, "London has, no doubt, told the occult truth about the Alaskans, just as Kipling has told us something of the occult truth of the Indians."[79] Such comparisons to Rudyard Kipling were not unusual. A 1903 advertisement for *The Call of the Wild* called London the "Kipling of the Arctic regions," (Fig. 3-2) and in a 1906 review of *White Fang*, another critic wrote, "[London] is as sure of himself among those primitive forces of nature as was Kipling in his pictures of Indian life."[80] Just as Kipling provided many readers their only views of India, so

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[78] Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), 116 and 124.

[79] Elia W. Peattie, "London's 'The Call of the Wild': The Western Writer's Romance of a Dog," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 Aug 1903.

[80] "The Call of the Wild," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 14 August 1903; and "Jack London: 'White Fang' Is Another Tale of the Primitive Forces of Nature," *New York Times*, 17 Nov 1906.

London gave many their only views of Alaska. Also like Kipling, though, these views included Indigenous characters flattened to the point caricature.[81]

In contrast, Muir's portrayal of Alaska Natives was far less antagonistic. Whether peaceful or dangerous, however, all the Alaska Natives in Muir's writings desperately wanted American civilization, particularly education and religion. Samuel Hall Young, a Presbyterian missionary in southeastern Alaska, accompanied Muir on his expeditions in 1879 and 1880. Muir and Young, with the assistance of numerous Tlingit guides, made canoe trips throughout the islands and fjords of the Alaska panhandle, Muir searching for glaciers and Young seeking to proselytize the Indigenous peoples.[82] In every Native village to which the men came, Young preached a Christian sermon to the inhabitants, after which, Muir claimed with only one or two exceptions, village leaders asked that schoolteachers and missionaries be sent to them. "Many seemed heartily delighted at the prospect of gaining light on subjects so important and so dark to them," wrote Muir.[83] The response of Shakes, described by Muir as the head chief of the Stickeens at Wrangell, is representative of almost all Alaska Native responses to the Gospel in Muir's narratives. Muir wrote that, "When the missionary had finished his sermon, Chief Shakes slowly arose, and … advised his people to accept the new religion, for he felt satisfied that because the white man knew so much more than the Indian, the white man's religion was likely to be better than theirs." Muir quoted Shakes as saying, "In everything the ways of the white man seem to be better than ours. Compared to the white man we are only blind children, knowing not how best to live either here or in the country we go to after we die." Shakes continued, "So I

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[81] The scholarly literature on Kipling's works about India is vast. For one recent examination of his portrayal of Indian characters, see Gauraa Shankar Narayan, "Hybridity, History, and Empire in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2018).
[82] Muir was among the first to argue that glaciers shaped the land by a repeated process of advancing and retreating over thousands of years.
[83] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 112.

wish you to learn this new religion and teach it to your children, that you may all go when you die into that good heaven country of the white man and be happy."[84] Just as white Americans often couched control of Native Americans in the contiguous United States in terms of Christian charity, and as Kipling's "White Man's Burden" would use similar justifications to support U.S. control of the Philippines, so Muir proclaimed a need for the civilizing effects of white Americans in Alaska.

As with London, reviewers of Muir's work believed it revealed the truth of Alaska's Indigenous peoples. Published posthumously in 1915, in *Travels in Alaska* Muir recounted his trips to Alaska in 1879, 1880, and 1890. One review of *Travels in Alaska* applauded Muir's "broad understanding of the Indians, their virtues, their failings, the hopelessness of their situation."[85] Muir's work helped establish Alaska Natives as backward, if honorable, people in need of American civilization and religion. Such exoticizing of Alaska Natives justified white American domination of Alaska's Indigenous population and the resources Native peoples had depended upon for survival for thousands of years.[86]

For decades, such infantilizing also served to exclude Alaska Natives from many of the opportunities capitalism provided in Alaska. For example, business owners, managers, and government officials never legitimately considered Alaska Natives as viable employees for salmon canneries. Instead, cannery officials shipped in thousands of primarily Asian migrant workers each year to staff the canneries because owners and managers considered Alaska

[84] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 178-179.
[85] Marion Randall Parsons, "Book Reviews: Travels in Alaska," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (January 1916), 122.
[86] For an examination of how cultural representations become essentializing descriptions of others, see Emily S. Rosenberg, "Considering Borders," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Frank Costigiola and Michael J. Hogan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Natives unreliable laborers (see chapter 5). In the end, Alaska's Indigenous people, as described by Muir, held no place in the district's imperialist future.

London racialized Alaska even further. While Muir did not see how Alaska Natives could hope to fully participate in American life in Alaska, London believed only Americans of the purest stock were capable of exploiting Alaska to its fullest. London not only differentiated between Euro-Americans and Indigenous Americans in his Alaska stories, he differentiated between whites of different ethnic backgrounds. By doing so, London's writing reflected a common trope of the time—distinguishing between different levels of whiteness.[87] For example, almost the only Canadians in London's Northland tales are French Canadians—hard-working yet peripheral subjects of the British Empire. Such differentiation between individuals of European descent was rooted deeply in London's psyche. Anglo-Saxons stood above all other Europeans, believed London. It is important to note that, along with contemporaries such as Norris and Roosevelt, London considered white Americans to be Anglo-Saxons, writing, "Anglo-Saxon stands for all the English-speaking people of the world." From London's perspective, Anglo-Saxons possessed the perfect amalgamation of great human qualities. English-speakers possessed "the blood lusts of the Berserkers of old," and "a primitive brutality," thus making them more than a physical match for the world's non-white peoples. Additionally, according to London Anglo-Saxon civilization had imbued its people with qualities that separated them from non-English-speakers and justified Anglo-Saxon world dominance. "He loves freedom," wrote London, "has boundless energy, and does things for himself. He is also a master of matter, an organizer of law, and an administrator of justice."[88] In *The Call of the Wild*, Buck is physically

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[87] Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 46.
[88] Jack London, "These Bones Shall Rise Again," in *Revolution and Other Essays* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1910), 225-226.

stronger than the story's other dogs and wolves as well as exhibiting a near-human level of intelligence. Buck is the metaphorical embodiment of Anglo-Saxon masculinity in canine form.

If Anglo-Saxons stood atop London's racial hierarchy, Americans occupied the pinnacle of the Anglo-Saxon hierarchy. Many of London's Northland stories are set primarily in Canada. The Klondike is, after all, in Canada, as was Dawson, the central town of the gold rush. In London's stories, however, Dawson and the Klondike serve as extensions of the United States. Not only are they primarily populated by Americans, but they have also absorbed American culture, manners, and language. For instance, in a 1909 letter London claimed the American sled command "mush on" was "confined to the Klondike and Alaska" while other terms proliferated throughout Canada.[89] The literary scholar Susan Kollin has gone so far as to argue that London depicted Dawson as "an American city on Canadian soil." Kollin further notes that London's stories served "as a way of justifying U.S. encroachment in the region" and as a "crucial staging ground for territorial struggles between natives, Russians, Canadians, and (U.S.) Americans." [90] In fact, the influx of American miners to the region worried Canadian officials so much that 288 North West Mounted Police were stationed in the Klondike region to secure Canadian claims to the territory.[91] The United States was the last of the European groups to lay claim to Northland, but in London's telling, the fact that only white Americans possessed the traits necessary to properly protect and exploit the region justified the country's possession of the Northland.

British characters, representatives of the region's actual political masters, make few appearances in London's stories of the North, but when they do pop up, they reinforce American

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[89] Jack London to Arthur Stringer, 2 August 1909, in *Letters from Jack London*, 283.
[90] Susan Kollin, *Nature's State: Imagining Alaska as the Last Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 61-62.
[91] Douglas W. Allen, "Information Sharing During the Klondike Gold Rush," *Journal of Economic History* 67, no. 4 (Dec 2007), 950-951.

primacy as the newest and most energetic actors on the imperial northern stage. London introduced a "mounted policeman of the Northwest Territory" in the short story, "To the Man on the Trail." But this representative of the British Empire, specifically called an Englishman by London, is powerless to catch the American Jack Westondale, an honest gold miner done wrong and of whom one character says, "A whiter man than Jack Westondale never ate from the same pot nor stretched blanket with you or me."[92]

Americans reading Muir and London learned that in Alaska race and ethnicity did not completely determine a person's character. They did, however, learn that Alaska Natives were less than white men, and the whitest men of all were American and therefore the most empowered and able exploit the resources found at far reaches of the globe. White American men were the only ones who could make Alaska profitable.

Commercial Alaska

While Alaska promised to reinvigorate white American manhood, something more was needed to truly capture the American imagination. That something was gold. Muir's and London's depiction of mineral wealth in Alaska built upon impulses that had driven past rushes in the United States—rugged individuality, the chance that anyone might strike it rich, even their depictions of masculinity and race—but added a new wrinkle. While the search for precious metals and minerals had spurred U.S. expansion across the West, an expectation of white agricultural settlers following in the miners' footsteps had always existed. The Alaska that Muir and London described, while overflowing with nature's bounty, held no promise of future significant white settlement; it was a commercial storehouse and little more.

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[92] Jack London, "To the Man on the Trail," in *Jack London: Novels & Stories* (New York: The American Library, 1982), 297.

Already by Muir's first Alaska trip in 1879, nearly two decades before discoveries along the Klondike attracted tens of thousands of speculators to the frozen north, informed Americans understood the importance of gold to Alaska's future. Muir devoted an entire dispatch to the *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin* to describing the gold already being mined and to that awaiting discovery. "Probably not one vein or placer in a thousand has yet been touched by the prospector's pick, while the interior region is still a virgin wilderness," wrote Muir. He continued, "Thousands of sturdy miners, graduating from the ledges and gulches of California and Nevada, will push their way over the whole territory and make it tell its wealth." Muir believed there was little question that gold "will come to be regarded as one of the most important and reliable of her [Alaska's] resources."[93] Muir's failure to mention the destruction of the Alaskan wilderness that would undoubtably accompany gold mining is of note, especially in light of his knowledge of the consequences of hydraulic mining in California.[94] Surprisingly, despite Muir's many claims about the value of untrampled nature in Alaska, gold seemed to imbue the land with its real value.

Muir's references to gold mining made before 1894, the year he published his first book, reveal an unsanitized John Muir. By the time he published *In the Mountains of California*, Muir had decided to "carefully and forcibly" edit out the Native Americans and mining companies that had preceded him in Yosemite.[95] Muir believed industrial mining, restricted to "thundering underground," harmed nature less than the individual "pick-and-shovel" prospector.[96] At least when it came to mining, Muir seemed to believe that individuals, not industry, damaged nature.

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[93] John Muir, "Alaska Gold Fields," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), 10 January 1880.
[94] For more on hydraulic mining, see Isenberg, *Mining California*, chapter 1.
[95] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 7-8.
[96] John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 74.

It is difficult to reconcile such views with Muir's much-lauded love of nature.[97] Clearly, Muir held contradictory views that he justified to himself by distinguishing between prospectors digging into the earth's surface and industrial miners blasting beneath it. Industrial mining preserved Muir's precious scenery while also contributing to the inescapable demands of capitalism.[98]

London left the significance of Alaskan gold far more implicit in his stories than did Muir. London did not need to specifically harp on the importance of gold because it formed the undergirding foundation upon which he built his stories. If there were no gold in Alaska, there would be no Alaska stories. Buck would not have been kidnapped and sent to the Klondike without the lure of gold. John Thornton, Buck's most sympathetic owner, was in Alaska as a prospector. Although London never explicitly defined the profession of Weedon Scott, White Fang's final owner, the story makes it clear that he was a manager for some kind of resource extraction company based in the United States. It takes little imaginative work on the part of the reader, therefore, to tie him to Alaskan gold as well. Even Mercedes, Charles, and Hal—the trio doomed by the grievance of sex—were in the Northland to find gold. London did not need to explicitly draw attention to Alaska's gold because gold, in his stories, is clearly the only reason to go to Alaska.

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[97] Muir's frequent depictions as a naturalist probably owe much to his campaign to save Hetch Hetchy Valley from damning. During his life, Muir worked as a lumber sawyer and owned a fruit ranch. When combined with many of his writings, Muir often looks much more like a conservationist in the mold of Gifford Pinchot, known for promoting scientific management of nature that promised to maintain a managed natural environment while guaranteeing industrial profit. For more on Pinchot and his policies, see Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1959).

[98] For more on how Muir reconciled mining and nature, see Witschi, "John of the Mines: Muir's Picturesque Rewrite of the Gold Rush."

Other writers reinforced such ideas. Before the large-scale discovery of gold, Alaska was next to worthless. “All that happened in Alaska prior to 1897 is there considered ancient history,” declared Wallace Atwood.[99] To prove his point, Atwood noted that in Fairbanks alone, miners annually dug $10 million worth of gold from the ground. In Nome, one claim produced $300,000 a month. Each year, Alaska yielded $22 million worth of gold. John Underwood told a similar tale, writing that, “To the miner and the prospector, Alaska has been the land of the Golden Fleece.”[100] The Treadwell gold mine, near Juneau, formed the center of industry in Alaska. Not only had $50 million worth of gold been removed from the mine since 1882, Underwood claimed that engineers had already discovered enough ore to keep the mine operational for another seventy-five years.[101] At the turn of the century, whenever Americans read about Alaska, they read about gold.

Even so, Alaska possessed other natural resources of commercial value. Atwood pointed to mineral wealth other than gold: miners took over $1 million of copper and $100,000 of silver from Alaska each year. Additionally, he reminded readers that the U.S. government allowed hunters to take 15,000 fur seal hides each year and predicted that the raising of foxes for their furs promised great commercial profits in the future.[102] Underwood also praised Alaska’s abundance of additional mineral wealth, particularly copper, tin, iron, and even oil. But coal was the key to Alaska’s future mineral wealth, argued Underwood. In particular, Underwood tied Alaska’s coal fields to the needs of the U.S. Navy in the Philippines. Alaskan coal would allow American Naval vessels to patrol the Pacific at a fraction of the current cost, thus ensuring

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[99] Atwood, “Alaska and Its Wealth,” 59.
[100] Underwood, *Alaska*, 222.
[101] In fact, the Treadwell mines remained operational for only another nine years. For more on the history of Treadwell gold mining, see: Sheila Kelly, *Treadwell Gold: An Alaska Saga of Riches and Ruin* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2010).
[102] Atwood, “Alaska and Its Wealth,” 62.

American shipping lanes remained open even in times of war.[103] Even if Alaska did not produce goods for sale in foreign markets, coal, in the mind of Underwood, tied Alaska to trade in the Pacific Ocean. Muir also noted that Alaska possessed all these valuable resources. But after gold, Muir believed salmon to be Alaska's most valuable resource.

In Muir's telling, Alaskan salmon offered an almost unfathomable bounty. "It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of her [Alaska's] fisheries," claimed Muir. He wrote of "not less than a thousand salmon streams in southeastern Alaska" in which could be found "tens of thousands of them [salmon], side by side, with their backs out of the water in shallow places … One of our men waded out in the midst of them and amused himself by seizing them above the tail and swinging them over his head."[104] But the potential of salmon lay in more than their value as amusement. "That food to last a month or two may thus be procured in less than an hour," proclaimed Muir, "is a striking illustration of the fruitfulness of these Alaskan waters."[105] Alaska's salmon alone, argued Muir, made it clear that while, "there are no wheat fields in Alaska, nevertheless, compared with the most fertile portions of all our foodstuff country, it [Alaska] is pre-eminently the land of plenty."[106] This is not to say that salmon might form the dietary foundation of white settlement in Alaska, but rather that it could form the basis of a profitable *seasonal* industry. Salmon only run for a few months each year, but in that time industrial investors could earn a fortune. Atwood claimed that salmon profits totaled over $10 million in 1909 and Underwood wrote that number had climbed to over $14 million by 1913.[107] Although not as imaginatively enticing as gold to individuals hoping to strike it rich, salmon

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[103] Underwood, *Alaska*, 236-237.
[104] John Muir, "Alaska Land," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), 25 September 1880.
[105] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 187-188.
[106] John Muir, "Alaska Land," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), 25 September 1880.
[107] Atwood, "Alaska and Its Wealth," 62; and Underwood, *Alaska*, 183.

nonetheless challenged gold as Alaska's most valuable natural resource and absentee capitalists and investors took note. Eventually, more than three hundred salmon canneries were built in Alaska and it became the world's leading provider of Pacific salmon.[108] Salmon enmeshed Alaska more firmly in international trade than any other product, earning U.S. investors millions of dollars in the process.

Muir also believed that Americans could consume Alaska's nature itself. Such consumption did not commoditize Alaska—remember Muir's disdain for tourists. Rather, he thought Alaska's unrivaled wilderness would help Americans find God. While Alaska's climate and geography precluded large-scale settlement, Muir described the region as an area in which God had manifested himself in unmistakable ways. "Nowhere on my travels so far have I seen so much warm-blooded rejoicing life as in this grand Arctic reservation," wrote Muir.[109] Muir lamented that "the care-laden commercial lives we lead close our eyes to the operations of God as a workman, though openly carried on that all who will look may see."[110] It was in Alaska, more than anywhere else, that Muir believed Americans might best see the world as God had intended, not as tourists, but as seekers of spiritual truth. Muir described Alaska as "the New Jerusalem," a place where the grandeur of God was self-evident and awe inspiring.[111] In Alaska, believed Muir, "the mountains themselves were made divine, and declared His glory in terms still more impressive" than even Muir's beloved Sierra Nevadas.[112] Alaska was "Nature's Bible," the very sunrise in Alaska a "holy vision" in which humans might see "the heavens opened and God made manifest."[113] If white Americans could travel through the territory without their many

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[108] See chapter 4 for more salmon canning.
[109] John Muir, "Prolific Alaska," *New York Times*, 26 December 1897.
[110] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 207.
[111] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 140.
[112] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 136.
[113] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 135.

commercial and industrial distractions, and simply "read the word of God … in these majestic hieroglyphics blazoned along the sky," then certainly they could restore the very soul of the country.[114]

Muir's descriptions of Alaskan nature as a consumer product for the soul was uncommon, but not completely unheard of. Drawing on such examples as Henry David Thoreau, who published *Walden* in 1854, Muir presented Alaska as an escape from capitalism. Nonetheless, Muir's spiritual consumption of nature found itself in tension with the capitalist exploitation of Alaska's resources—as evidenced by Muir's boosting of the commercial value of Alaska's natural wealth—as well as the dispossession of Alaskan Native lands—justified by Indigenous failure to properly use the land and its resources in the first place. In an effort to preserve as much nature as possible in Alaska, Americans had to fully exploit the natural resources in some parts of Alaska as well as dispossess the region's Indigenous inhabitants of their traditional lands.[115] Alaska revealed contradictory tensions that both Muir and London struggled to overcome.

Tensions between imperialism and socialism color London's works. For example, while his stories of Dolly and Mercedes warned against introducing women into the Northland, they also warned against the dangers London saw in capitalism. Dolly died as an exploited laborer of the capitalist system the dominated the Klondike gold rush. Mercedes' consumerism doomed her and her male companions, as it was the weight of her superfluous possessions that broke the ice. Nonetheless, the capitalist exploitation of gold was what gave Alaska its value in London's

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[114] Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 50.

[115] For more on American policies intended to protect the environment at the expense of an area's Indigenous population, see Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For an example outside of the American context, see Robert H. Nelson, "Environmental Colonialism: 'Saving' Africa from Africans," *The Independent Review* 8, no. 1 (Summer 2003).

stories. While a committed socialist, it seems the strength of capitalism's grip on nineteenth century U.S. life proved too strong for London to completely break free from. Identities are complex, multifaceted, and challenge easy classification. In London's case, his socialist sympathies briefly rise to the surface of his writing but are ultimately consumed by his dedication to a racially justified imperialism.

London's admiration of Rudyard Kipling is also of note, especially considering the frequency with which reviewers compared London, the American socialist, to Kipling, the British imperialist. In 1910, London wrote that Kipling's works revealed, "not what the people of the nineteenth century thought they thought, but what they really thought, not what they thought they ought to do, but what they really did do."[116] Kipling, "is our mouthpiece," wrote London, and the message he proclaimed was that of "the war march of the white man round the world, the triumphant paean of commercialism and imperialism."[117] After his death, London's widow Charmian described him in a letter as "almost rabid on pure breeding."[118] London's sympathies may have lain with the workingman, but almost exclusively the white workingman. Thus, London's Alaska stories serve as a reminder that socialists can also be racialists and imperialists.

Similarly, Muir struggled to reconcile his naturalist and imperialist impulses. This is not to say that Muir (or London for that matter) was a self-conscious imperialist. As the historian Donald Worster writes, Muir "did not come to take possession in the name of imperial America, or to exploit natural resources for personal gain, or even to promote a nascent tourist industry. He came because an insatiable hunger for natural beauty and the knowledge of how that beauty had

[116] London, "These Bones Shall Rise Again," 219-220.
[117] London, "These Bones Shall Rise Again," 232 and 234.
[118] In Donna M. Campbell, "Fictionalizing Jack London: Charmian London and Rose Wilder Lane as Biographers," *Studies in American Naturalism* 7, no. 2 (Winter 2012), 189.

been achieved drove him relentlessly."[119] In this Worster is only partly correct. Muir was often willing to make deals with industrial capitalists when it suited his purposes. For example, Muir allied himself with railroad magnate Edward Harriman during the campaign to protect Yosemite. Harriman supported the creation of Yosemite Park so that his Southern Pacific Railroad could build a line for tourists traveling to the park. Muir compromised his desire to protect nature from human degradation by aligning himself with a railroad magnate whose railroads defaced nature and would transport large numbers of tourists to the national park, resulting in the anthropomorphic reshaping of wilderness into a wooded vacation destination valuable for the profits it earned rather than its intrinsic qualities. While such compromises do not mean that Muir was a scheming capitalist hiding behind a veneer of environmental concern, they do complicate the traditional flattened caricature of St. John of the Mountains. At least at times, Muir willingly sacrificed wilderness in a world in which only profit imparted value.

Muir helped create an image of Alaska that fixated on exploiting the district's natural resources for profit. Perhaps Muir simply accepted that by the late nineteenth century capitalism could not be defeated, only managed. Nature was God's plan; capitalism was humanity's plan. Perhaps Muir looked for a way for capitalism to instill value on at least a remnant of nature. Imperialism, by imparting a profit value on nature without encouraging significant settlement, seemed to offer a way to do so. Imperialist Alaska could return a profit for U.S. investors without

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[119] Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 249. For similar descriptions of Muir, see Char Miller, "A Sylvan Prospect: John Muir, Gifford Pichot, and Early Twentieth-Century Conservationism," in *American Wilderness: A New History*, ed. Michael Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Douglas H. Strong, "John Muir," in *Dreamers & Defenders: American Conservationists* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); and Roderick Nash, "John Muir: Publicizer," in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). For more complicated perspectives of Muir, see Jared Farmer, *Trees in Paradise: A California History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), xxxiii-xxxix; and Ken Ross, "John Muir and the Land," in *Pioneering Conservation in Alaska* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006).

requiring a sizeable white population. The lack of white intruders meant that, even if the pure wilderness of Alaska was sacrificed, large sections of nature might remain untouched by the commercially-driven American public.[120] Alaska was big enough that it might simultaneously serve as both a center of industry and a nature preserve.

Muir and London occupied positions of respect and, as a result, people afforded their work a corresponding legitimacy. Harvard awarded Muir and honorary degree in 1896, and the *New York Tribune* in its coverage of the ceremony described Muir as "inseparably connected with the Yosemite Valley and the alpine regions of the Sierra Nevada, and with the glaciers of Alaska."[121] In 1914, the Dutch literary critic Georg Brandes visited the United States for a series of lectures at Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Wisconsin. When asked to give his opinion of American writers, Brandes declared London the country's greatest author.[122] Newspapers, universities, professors, and critics, in their praise of Muir and London, presented the two men as the country's unrivaled Alaska experts.

The Alaska that Muir and London promoted remained on the periphery of the United States; neither man pretended that millions of white Americans would ever call the district home. But the Alaska they portrayed—a rugged, primitive, colonial space on the edge of the continent—was ideally suited to fulfill a new imperialist role. Alaska could not support a significant settler population and, therefore, would not renew democracy as Turner's mythical frontier had, but it could help the country's men recover what they had lost in a modernizing world. In Alaska, white American men could find a place to rediscover and refine the traits that late nineteenth-century leaders feared the country's industrializing population had lost. At the

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[120] Richard Cartwright Austin, *Baptized into Wilderness: A Christian Perspective on John Muir* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 20.
[121] "John Muir, Naturalist," *New York Daily Tribune*, 13 July 1896.
[122] "Critic Brandes Reaches America," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 22 May 1914.

close of the nineteenth century, Alaska was a space in which Americans might complete the conquering of North America by taming the northern wilderness and civilizing (or conquering) savage people.[123] Doing so required experimenting with a capitalist imperialism dependent not upon white settlers and agriculture, but almost solely upon modern exploitation of natural resources.

At the same time, Muir's and London's writings drew upon and reflected the nostalgia for a disappearing frontier already manifesting itself in the imagination of many Americans by the end of the nineteenth century. In London's case, it is important to note that novels are more than mere entertainment. Amy Kaplan has argued that the historical novel of the 1890s "romances the empire with a potent nostalgia that renders imperial conquest and the struggle for power over others as nothing more than the return home to the embodied man." Specifically, she had in mind works such as Owen Wister's 1902 novel, *The Virginian*, in which "the Western frontier was violently exported to the New Empire in Cuba and the Philippines."[124] Frank Norris also found the new frontier across the ocean, writing, "a gun was fired in the Bay of Manila … and in response the skirmish-line crossed the Pacific, still pushing the Frontier before it."[125] Teddy Roosevelt explicitly tied the Western frontier to the Philippines, writing that in destroying the "last vestiges of the medieval Spanish domain in the tropic seas alike of West and the remote East," Americans of his generation "were but carrying to completion the work of our fathers and of our fathers' fathers."[126] The impetus to export the frontier across oceans was, argues Kaplan, the fear produced by the closing of the continental frontier and Turner's perseverance upon the implications of the closed frontier for the future of U.S. democracy. The mythical closing of the

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[123] Wrobel, *Global West, American Frontier*, 183.
[124] Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, 120.
[125] Norris, "The Frontier Gone at Last," 1728-1729.
[126] Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, ix.

frontier, regardless of the historical inaccuracy of Turner and his thesis, represented a challenge to how Americans imagined themselves and their country. And while Americans may have imagined the frontier to have crossed the seas, whether in Asia or the Northland, it was nonetheless a new kind of frontier, and therefore a new empire.

Muir's positioning as a man of science lent weight to his writings and American readers interpreted them in an imperial light, regardless of his intent. The literary historian Donald Pease has argued that "according to the demands of the emergent sciences of geography, botany, and anthropology, imperialism understood itself primarily as a cultural project involved in naming, classifying, textualizing, appropriating, exterminating, demarcating, and governing a new regime."[127] The creation, expansion, and propagation of scientific knowledge is a form of power that can be, like numerous other forms of power, exercised for imperialist purposes, regardless of whether or not the scientist intends or even knows the knowledge might be used in such a manner. This means that even though Muir was not an official agent of the U.S. government, his works helped to classify, create, and extend U.S. imperialist power in Alaska.[128]

The Alaska of John Muir and Jack London signaled the United States' turn toward a new empire. Although Alaska had been acquired during a time when empires sought territorial aggrandizement, its perceived inability to support white settlers initially relegated the district to the peripheral imaginary of the U.S. empire. But the development of new technologies, such as steam-powered ships, railroads, and the telegraph, meant that significant white occupation of the

[127] David E. Pease, "New Perspectives on U.S. Culture and Imperialism," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 22.
[128] Russian naturalist writings significantly affected perceptions of the North Pacific in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well. See Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

land was no longer necessary to extract value from colonized spaces.[129] The world's successful powers began to adapt; imperialism began to replace territorial empire around the globe. For the United States, imperialism first found significant expression in Alaska.

Muir and London were among the most important boosters of imperialist Alaska, even if they were unaware of it. No doubt, both men viewed themselves as lovers of the Alaskan wilderness. Nonetheless, the writings of both men demonstrate that the very idea of wilderness often does little more than romanticize and fetishize nature by creating a misguided belief that a pure wilderness devoid of human influence exists at all.[130] Instead, humans not only shaped the wilderness both writers encountered in Alaska, Muir and London described a wilderness valued primarily because of humans' ability to exploit its natural resources. Because both men made sense of the world through the lens of capitalism, even if both intellectually rejected aspects of it, both also served as imperialist boosters.

Muir and London fought to reconcile their personal beliefs with the capitalist future of Alaska that they promoted. In places Muir presented Alaska as nature's temple to God. London's stories struggled with questions of social justice. But in the end, both men served as boosters for the Alaskan imperialist project. For three decades after U.S. acquisition, Alaska languished, nearly forgotten by the American people and their leaders. Imperialist adaptation to changing global conditions, however, breathed new life into Alaska. Imperialism, empire on the cheap,

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[129] See James A. Field, Jr., "American Imperialism: The Worst Chapter in Almost Any Book," *American Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (June 1978); Walter LaFeber and Robert L. Beisner, "[American Imperialism: The Worst Chapter in Almost Any Book]: Comments," *American Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (June 1978); and James A. Jr. Field, "[American Imperialism: The Worst Chapter in Almost Any Book]: Reply," *American Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (June 1978).
[130] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996).

made Alaska a space worthy of investment. The literature produced by Muir and London drove this lesson home to Americans.

The United States carried this vision of a new empire largely devoid of white settlers forward into the twentieth century. In the decades following the publication of Muir's and London's Alaska writings, capitalists did invest in industries that exploited Alaska's natural resources, primarily salmon, gold, and timber. But few white Americans settled in Alaska until after the Second World War, and even then, in relatively limited numbers. Today, Alaska remains the least densely populated state in the country. Furthermore, as the ongoing struggle over the extraction of Alaskan oil, particularly in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), demonstrates, many American and Alaskan consumers, laborers, and politicians still see Alaska's value as primarily tied to the state's ability to provide the metropole with valuable natural resources. Imagining Alaska's value in such an imperialist manner owes much to the writings of John Muir and Jack London.

4 – Alaska Time

In his semi-autobiographical novel *America is in the Heart*, first published in 1946, Carlos Bulosan offers an ugly account of Filipino working life in Alaska's salmon canneries. In the novel, Bulosan and his companions found themselves "sold for five dollars each to work in the fish canneries in Alaska" within days of landing in Seattle.[1] Bulosan described company henchmen who prevented unionization, bunkhouses "unfit for human habitation," and dangerous work conditions in which losing a limb was common. "It was only at night that we felt free," wrote Bulosan, who described baseball games played under a sun that "seemed never to disappear from the sky" and sexual trysts between young Filipino men and Indigenous women. But even these moments of escape were undone by corporate power, such as when Bulosan's compatriot Paulo was forced by a cannery official to marry the "dirty Indian girl" La Belle and remain in Alaska for seven years because she had become pregnant, even though Bulosan suspected the father of the baby to be an Italian fisherman. Bulosan recalled that his total pay for the canning season, after deductions for room and board, bedding, and another fee that he cannot remember, amounted to a mere thirteen dollars.[2] Later in the novel, one of Bulosan's friends suggested returning to Alaska for another canning season, but Bulosan vetoed the proposal, arguing that "the conditions there were intolerable."[3] Bulosan's account of the exploitative conditions in the canneries remains one of the most widely known descriptions of Filipino life in Alaska.

Bulosan's account of the Alaska canneries is in many ways an accurate depiction of his and other Filipinos' Alaskan cannery experiences. Many Filipino laborers did indeed return from

[1] Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart: A Personal History* (University of Washington Press, 2014), 101.
[2] Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart*, 101-104.
[3] Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart*, 148.

Alaska with little money in their pockets. Yet the historical evidence, provided directly by a number of Alaskeros—the name Filipinos gave to those who worked in Alaska's salmon canneries—indicates that the lived experience of Filipinos in Alaska was far more complex and nuanced than that described by Bulosan. Cannery work was difficult and dangerous, and there were unscrupulous contractors who attempted to swindle laborers out of their hard-earned money. Filipino labor organizers, whose voices have been privileged in histories of Filipinos in Alaska, have clearly demonstrated this reality. It is not the whole story, however. There was money to be made in the canneries. Because capitalists and factory managers could not impose their own time-work discipline on salmon, the work was not always exhausting and dangerous. There were down-times during which the workers had a great deal of freedom to live and move as they pleased. And most importantly, because Filipinos made up such a large part of the canneries' labor force, Alaska's salmon canneries presented Filipinos in the United States, thousands of miles away from their homeland, with an opportunity to affirm and express a masculine Filipino American identity.

Imperialism represented a U.S. adaptation to the changing world circumstances of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But imperialist subjects adapted as well. In this instance, young Filipino men took advantage of the networks created by U.S. imperialism in ways American authorities did not anticipate and, from the perspective of the early twenty-first century, may seem surprising. The evidence indicates that young Filipino migrant laborers in the United States, most with no desire to become U.S. citizens, took advantage of the opportunities provided by empire to better their lives. White Americans did not possess a monopoly on

mobility or its benefits.[4] Realizing that such opportunities existed and that imperialist subjects seized upon them is not an apology for imperialism, but rather a recognition that nation-states have a tendency to shut down connections beyond their borders while empires often created zones of connection that are now difficult to imagine.

Filipino Diaspora

In the 1920s and 1930s, labor shortages typical of extractive industries of the U.S. West drew young men from the Philippines, on the southwestern periphery of the United States' Pacific empire, to its resource-rich northeastern periphery in Alaska. Without any plan or forethought, colonial Alaska, because of an abundance of salmon, bound together a series of imperial networks that connected the Philippines, Hawai'i, and the U.S. Pacific Coast. But the story of the Alaskeros and the Alaskan salmon canneries is about more than labor and resources; it is one of power negotiation and identity creation. Young Filipino men, involuntarily turned into American nationals by the U.S. conquest of the Philippines, voluntarily traveled to the metropole in search of the opportunities promised to them by U.S. imperial agents. After arriving on the U.S. mainland, many Filipinos found their opportunities more limited than they had been led to believe. Nonetheless, Filipino migrants exploited those opportunities to their full advantage while creating new, unexpected, prospects that did provide chances for an affluence unavailable in the Philippines. In the process, the Alaskan rite of passage invigorated an emerging masculinized Filipino American identity. Scholars have focused on one of the immediate fruits of this identity—successful Filipino unionization—but far less attention has been paid to the lived experience of the Alaskeros themselves.

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[4] For more on how largely non-white, transient, male laborers used mobility to their advantage elsewhere in the West, see Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

The deployment of U.S. military and economic power allowed Filipinos to travel to the United States' northernmost colony, thereby escaping at least some of the economic difficulties of the Philippines as well as some of the social troubles of the U.S. metropole. Just as Filipinos chose to leave the islands, they chose to leave the metropole for colonial Alaska in search of employment. In exercising this power of choice, they took advantage of labor scarcity in Alaska and came to control nearly the entire labor supply of the salmon canneries, leading to a significant restructuring of the industry's labor. While this exercise of labor power was significant, it was possible only because of the United States' imperial networks that allowed, even encouraged, Filipinos to travel to Alaska in the first place.

Historians have long appreciated the imperial nature of U.S.-Philippine relations. When exploring the consequences of U.S. empire upon Filipino people, studies have focused, understandably, primarily on Filipino experiences in the Philippines.[5] But empire is about more than exploiting or repressing Indigenous populations. For centuries, empires have formed global networks that have facilitated the movement of the world's marginalized people as well as the powerful.[6] There remains, however, a paucity of work scrutinizing the experiences of Filipinos in the United States, and those that exist largely focus on the legal and social obstacles placed before Filipinos by white Americans in urban settings.[7] Historians studying Filipinos in the

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[5] For a sampling of the literature, see: H. W. Brands, *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Nick Cullather, *Illusions of Influence: The Political Economy of United States-Philippines Relations, 1942-1960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); and Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Empire: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[6] Studies exploring the imperial movement of often marginalized people include: Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007); and Nancy Shoemaker, *Native American Whalemen and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[7] The few book-length, scholarly works on the subject include: Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific*

United States have tended to emphasize what was done unto Filipinos, and how they resisted, rather than how Filipinos improvised new lives in order to take advantage of their new imperial situation.[8] As a result, the gravitational pull of imperial Alaska has been largely understudied. In fact, Alaska, and the attraction of work in the salmon canneries, was the foundation upon which the imperial networks drawing young Filipino men to the United States depended. So universal were the yearly trips to Alaska's canneries that the summer-long canning season came to be known in the Filipino community as Alaska Time and structured the entire migration calendar of Filipinos in the United States. Indeed, Alaska Time importantly helped men from the Philippines, comprised of more than 7,600 islands and nearly two hundred ethnolinguistic groups, begin to think of themselves as Filipino.

In the 1920s, Filipinos began migrating to other parts of the American empire in significant numbers, first to Hawai'i to work on the islands' sugar and fruit plantations, then to the American mainland. In 1920, some 5,600 Filipinos lived in the continental United States; by 1930 that number had increased to about 56,000. Most of these young, single men followed a migratory labor pattern, working in lumber mills and for railroads in the Northwest and performing labor-intensive agricultural work in California, Arizona, Oregon, and Washington as the harvests demanded.[9] Other Filipinos traveled to the United States in search of an education.[10]

West, 1919-1941 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Linda España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s* (New York: Columbia Univeristy Press, 2006).

[8] A significant exception is Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[9] Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, 2014 Paperback ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 101-103; and Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 177-181.

[10] For the importance of education in the United States' imperial strategy in the Philippines, see: Glenn Anthony May, "The Business of Education in the Colonial Philippines, 1909-1930," in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

The canneries were just as important for Filipino students, who often financed the bulk of their educations with money earned in the canneries. For many Filipinos, summertime meant traveling to Alaska for three or four months to work in the salmon canneries. These months represented the longest many Filipino workers remained at one work site. Thus, Alaska's salmon canneries concentrated thousands of Filipinos in Alaska each year for a relatively long period of time, allowing Alaskeros to renew their sense of masculine identity and community as nowhere else outside of the Philippines allowed.

Well over ninety percent of Filipino migrants to the United States during this time were men. A sense of masculine familial responsibility drove many young Filipino men to travel to the United States to earn either money to help their family's at home, or to obtain an education which they could then use to better their employment and earning opportunities in the Philippines.[11] A felt need to display industriousness pushed men from certain regions of the Philippines, such as Ilocos to the northwest of Manila, to travel to the United States in order to earn enough to provide and protect their family honor. Thus, because many Filipinos viewed temporary labor migrations as a manly responsibility, travel to the United States reinforced concepts of masculinity. Once in the United States, however, many Filipinos felt their masculinity under a particular form of attack. Physical attacks and race riots common along the West Coast certainly assaulted Filipino ideas of masculinity, but verbal assaults may have challenged Filipino masculinity even more. According to the anthropologist Jane A. Margold, for many Filipinos verbal slights challenged their masculinity more deeply than physical attacks. This was especially confusing to many young Filipino men who saw their time in the United

[11] For more on the importance of the provider role in defining Filipino masculinity, see: Theresa Cenidoza Suarez, "The Language of Militarism: Engendering Filipino Masculinity in the U.S. Empire" (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2008).

States as a type of heroic quest.[12] Instead, many Filipino men discovered that in the United States their race disqualified them from all but the most menial and physically demanding of work. Moreover, instead of serving to bolster conceptions of masculinity, mobility and unskilled labor signaled to white Americans a failure of Filipino masculinity to provide and robbed Filipino men in the United States of the masculine honor to which they thought they were entitled.[13]

Within this context of conflicting standards of masculinity and the devaluing of labor, Filipino men in the United States forged communities in unexpected places. Migration scholars have demonstrated how U.S. networks, by transporting laborers around the globe, helped create communities of people far away from their homelands.[14] Unlike examples such as the Panama Canal, however, the imperial networks that transported thousands of Filipinos to Alaska served only corporate interests, not a government project. In the United States, Alaska had always been envisioned as a bridge from the North American continent to Asia; in the end it may have been more important as a bridge from Asia to the United States.[15] Filipino migrants in Alaska proved that U.S. imperial networks leading to Alaska functioned multi-directionally and strengthened migrant communities, despite the desires of many white Americans.[16]

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[12] Jane A. Margold, "Narratives of Masculinity and Transnational Migration: Filipino Workers in the Middle East," in *Bewitching Women, Pios Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 280-281.
[13] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, "'White Trash' Meets the 'Little Brown Monkeys': The Taxi Dance Hall as a Site of Interracial and Gender Alliances between White Working Class Women and Filipino Immigrant Men in the 1920s and 30s," *Amerasia Journal* 24, no. 2 (1998), 117.
[14] For example, see: Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009).
[15] For U.S. conceptions of Alaska as a bridge to Asia, see: Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, 35th Anniversary ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Michael A. Hill, "The Myth of Seward's Folly," *Western Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2019); and Michael A. Hill, "Imperial Stepping Stone: Bridging Continental and Overseas Empire in Alaska," *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 1 (January 2020).
[16] On how U.S. imperial networks facilitated the multidirectional movement of goods and ideas rather than people, see: Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

The migratory lives of Alaskeros emphasizes that in taking migrant and immigrant communities in the United States seriously, scholars must do more than merely focus on the global changes that have forced the poor to react. Instead, following the advice of Josef Barton, scholars must seek to better understand and explain how the "choices that the poor themselves make in constructing new solidarities in rural, in urban, and in migrant settlements" affect themselves, their communities, and the states that seek to control migratory movement.[17] In focusing on the admittedly important, but relatively short-lived, urban concentrations of Filipinos in the continental United States before Philippine independence, scholars have missed that the isolated rural canneries of Alaska played at least as important a role in the lives of Filipino migrants in the United States as did large cities.

Salmon and the Alaska Canneries

The presence of hundreds of millions of salmon in the north Pacific provided the means, motive, and opportunity for the first true efforts to integrate Alaska into the U.S. empire.[18] When

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[17] Josef Barton, "Borderland Discontents: Mexican Migration in Regional Contexts, 1880-1930," in *Repositioning North American Migration History: New Directions in Modern Continental Migration, Citizenship, and Community*, ed. Marc S. Rodriguez (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 141. For more on how migrant communities have managed to coalesce in what might be viewed as unexpected regions of the United States, see: Marc Simon Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism & Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). For a discussion of the intersection of transnational migrations and U.S. foreign relations, see: Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[18] Comprehensive collection of Pacific salmon data began only in 1925. The early twentieth century Pacific salmon population peaked in the late 1930s, totaling approximately 530 million salmon. It has been suggested that the salmon population of the mid-nineteenth century was even higher because the precipitous decline of Pacific coast Indigenous populations between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, after contact with Europeans, eased the anthropological pressure on Pacific salmon populations until the rise of the canning industry in the second half of the nineteenth century. See: Gregory T. Ruggerone and James R. Irvine, "Numbers and Biomass of Natural- and Hatchery-Origin Pink Salmon, Chum Salmon, and Sockeye Salmon in the North Pacific Ocean, 1925-2015," *Marine and Coastal Fisheries: Dynamics, Management, and Ecosystem Science* 10 (2018), 157; and Robert T. Lackey, Denise H. Lach, and Sally L. Duncan, "Wild Salmon in Western North America: The Historical and Policy Context," in *Salmon 2100: The Future of Wild Pacific Salmon*, ed. Robert T. Lackey, Denise H. Lach, and Sally L. Duncan (Bethesda, MD: American Fisheries Society, 2006), 28. On the other hand, Joseph

members of the U.S. Senate debated the purchase of Russian America in 1867, one issue, broadly speaking, proved to be more influential in securing the approval of the treaty with Russia than any other—the region's natural resources. Charles Sumner, the leading champion of the purchase, lectured the Senate on Alaska's ice, furs, timber, coal, copper, iron, silver, lead, and gold. But fish were recognized as the resource of resources in Alaska, described by Sumner as, "not inferior to any other in importance; perhaps the most important of all."[19]

Sumner's prescience proved accurate. The Alaskan fur trade provided substantial immediate returns; in the 1890s Alaskan gold captured American imaginations; and Alaskan oil reserves (a resource Sumner could not have foreseen) currently fuel the state's economy. But fish, particularly salmon, have proven to be the most constant and important of Alaska's natural resources. The salmon of the Pacific Northwest have shaped the economic and human geographies of Alaska, and thus the character of the United States' empire in the Pacific world, with a consistency no other resource can match.

During the public and Congressional debates surrounding the purchase of Alaska, the territory's fisheries made every list of valuable natural resources. An April 1867 article in the Washington D.C. *Evening Star* quoted Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, who stated, "I should value Russian America, its fisheries and mines, beyond the hot plains of Mexico or the fertile plantations of Cuba."[20] The *New York Tribune*, edited by Horace Greeley, a staunch

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Taylor argues that annual Native American salmon harvests may have ranged between 4.5-6.3 million, and that this harvesting helped prevent a "superabundance" of salmon. The decline of the Indigenous population did indeed ease pressures on the salmon population, he argues, but the resulting superabundance of salmon may have caused greater pressure for spawning beds and more erratic salmon reproduction. Thus, "Reduced harvests did not necessarily result in greater reproduction," he concludes. Joseph E. Taylor, *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 20-24 and 42.

[19] Charles Sumner, *Speech on the Cession of Russian America to the United States* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1867), 41.

[20] "The Russian-American Treaty," *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), 6 April 1867.

critic of Secretary of State William Seward and President Andrew Johnson, vocally opposed the purchase, arguing that the cost of administering Alaska would outweigh any possible advantages the territory could bring. Nonetheless, the *Tribune* admitted, "the fisheries are immense," but then turned that apparent advantage into a point against the purchase. The *Tribune* described Alaska as a "territory on which Great Britain holds a virtual mortgage, and in which her fishermen and hunters will have equal rights with ours."[21] The *Tribune* feared the value of Alaska's fisheries was so great that they would lead to eventual conflict with Great Britain. While the fisheries could be interpreted as avenues to wealth or war, there was no denying their financial value.

In Congress, the value of Alaska's fisheries remained at the forefront of the debates concerning the purchase. Congressman Nathaniel P. Banks, chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, believed the fisheries of the north Pacific offered untold wealth and employment opportunities. He argued that possession of Alaska would at least double the number of American fishermen in the Pacific Northwest, from 60,000 to 120,000. The extent of U.S. oceanic fishing grounds would increase from a mere 84,000 square miles off the coast of New England and Canada, and which had to be shared with England and France, to over 320,000 square miles through the addition of Alaska. In fact, Banks stated that the report the Committee on Foreign Affairs had received from the Coast Survey on the quantity of fish found in the bays and rivers of Alaska, "was so extravagant that the gentlemen of the committee thought it would be better to omit it in the report."[22] Alaska's bounty of fish was literally unbelievable.

Sumner spoke specifically of the potential windfall Alaskan salmon would provide to the country. He noted the small allowance of 200,000 salmon the fisheries of England provided the

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[21] "If Mr. Seward Thinks," *New York Daily Tribune*, 8 April 1867.
[22] *Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1868), 391.

American consumer versus the 2,000 salmon a single haul in Alaska provided. In Alaska, "Salmon exist in unequaled numbers, so that this fish, so aristocratic elsewhere, becomes common enough. Not merely the prize of epicures, it is the food of all."[23] Not only did Alaska's salmon promise tremendous profits, but according to Sumner, the fish existed in such quantities that they would contribute to the leveling of American society.

Sumner's speech came only two years after the end of the American Civil War. Republicans, who had earlier opposed territorial expansion because they feared the spread of slavery, now embraced imperial growth.[24] Sumner's hyperbolic language reflected both his, and his fellow Republicans', enthusiasm for territorial growth as well as his understanding of what the future United States should look like: an extractive, industrial empire based upon exploiting what was believed to be the continent's inexhaustible natural wealth. While such optimistic oratory often masked the social, economic, and environmental reality of life in the U.S. West, it was common among regional boosters and imperial prophets.[25] Thus, salmon, despite scholars' continuing fascination with Alaskan gold and oil, was the natural resource that proved most important to U.S. investors.

Businesses based on natural resources throughout the West depended on labor to extract and transform nature's raw materials into marketable commodities. Because of a chronic shortage of labor, Western jobs offered relatively high pay to those willing to work in the often times dangerous and isolated industries. Filipinos, and before them Chinese and then Japanese, were drawn to Alaska by the promise of relatively well-paying jobs in the territory's salmon

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[23] Sumner, *Speech on the Cession of Russian America to the United States*, 44.
[24] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1988; repr., 2002), 495.
[25] For more on the tension between the exuberance of Western dreams and the often-disappointing reality of the region, see Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

canneries. The canneries themselves were drawn to Alaska by the abundance of salmon living in the Northland. An important natural resource, capital, and unusual geography combined in Alaska to take advantage of the imperial United States' unique human resources. But the foundation of the entire structure was the natural resource—salmon.[26]

The north Pacific Ocean's abundance of salmon was of little value, however, until the development of techniques to preserve and can salmon transformed Alaska's coastline into the center of a global financial empire. The first salmon cannery in North America began operations in 1864 along the Sacramento River in California. By 1866, however, the owners and operators of the nascent industry moved their operations to the Columbia River in Washington; silt resulting from hydraulic gold mining in California corrupted the clear, cold, water salmon need in order to spawn.[27] Pollution from the mineral runoff of the mining and increased human population may have corrupted the taste of the state's salmon as well.[28] In 1878, the first Alaskan cannery opened at Klawock. The centripetal force of Alaska's vast coastline and the abundance of salmon in the district's rivers quickly drew investors. An 1896 Tacoma *Tribune* article acknowledged, "We are only beginning to appreciate the vast fishing interests of Alaska." Despite an underdeveloped awareness of the potential of Alaska's fisheries at this time, the same article recognized that, "The most valuable salmon fisheries are now in Alaska."[29] In only thirty

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[26] For more on salmon fishing and canning, see: Taylor, *Making Salmon*; and August C. Radke, *Pacific American Fisheries, Inc.: A History of a Washington State Salmon Packing Company, 1890-1966*, ed. Barbara S. Radke (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2002).
[27] Arthur F. McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 47-48; and Andrew C. Isenberg, *Mining California: An Ecological History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 46.
[28] Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 11.
[29] "Fisheries of the Pacific Will Soon Be One of the Great Industries of the World," *Tribune* (Tacoma), April 1896, Box 109, File 24, Pacific American Fisheries Records, Center for Studies of the Pacific Northwest, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

years, the center of the salmon canning industry had traveled from California to Washington to Alaska, the extreme periphery of the U.S. empire.

The development of reliable canning technology during the second half of the nineteenth century transformed salmon from a local or regional food, difficult to transport and quick to spoil, into a global commodity. Cannery owners built their factories on the waterfront in order to process salmon on the day of harvest by a relatively small crew of workers, as well as to facilitate transportation to anywhere on the globe without worry of product degradation. Two companies, Pacific American Fisheries (PAF) and the Alaska Packers Association (APA), dominated the salmon canning industry. [30] To solidify their dominance of the salmon canning industry, PAF and APA purchased dozens of subsidiary canning companies as well as fishing companies.[31] Most importantly, these companies and their investors provided the capital necessary to take advantage of the technological improvements that made salmon canning possible. By the end of the nineteenth century, the canneries combined human and machine energy in an assembly line of clockwork-like efficiency.

Fishermen, initially self-employed but increasingly employed by PAF and APA to collect salmon from cannery-owned traps designed to catch the fish as they swam upstream to their spawning grounds, offloaded their catch on the canneries' docks. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was not unheard-of for a single cannery to receive more than 100,000 salmon a day, although by World War I overfishing, pollution, and habitat degradation caused

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[30] The relationship between the companies was deeply entwined. For example, PAF president Ed Deming was also a stockholder in APA and a close friend of APA's president, William Timson. Radke, *Pacific American Fisheries, Inc.*, 70.

[31] In efforts to preserve fisheries, federal and state laws limited the number of salmon traps an individual or corporation could own to three. In order to bypass these laws, PAF and AFA bought numerous smaller canning companies, which on paper continued to operate as separate businesses.

those numbers to decline substantially.[32] From the docks, unskilled laborers carried the fish inside the cannery, where workers weighed the salmon and issued a receipt for payment to the fishermen. The workers tossed the salmon on the cannery floor and hosed them down with pressurized water until the salmon were clean enough to continue their journey to the can. The first skilled butcher in the process, called the header, severed the head, fins, and tail. A second butcher, the cleaner, sliced the salmon open, removed the viscera, and scraped the inside and outside of the fish. Often, the cleaner simply tossed the salmon waste through a hole in the cannery floor located directly over the river, schools of scavenger fish and flocks of gulls scrambling for their share of the offal. Later, factory owners added collection bins so that the wastage could be collected and processed into fertilizer and fish oil.

The next step of the canning process involved a second washing and a more thorough scraping of the exterior to remove the salmon's scales. After submersion in a water tank for the final cleaning, the salmon passed to a third set of butchers who cut the salmon into the appropriate sizes for canning. A fish processing machine eventually industrialized and sped up

[32] Taylor argues that while industrial salmon fishing between 1883 and 1919 never outstripped Native American fishing hauls of previous centuries, the concentration of industrial fisheries on the lower portion of rivers placed greater pressure on salmon and led to a decline in their population. He also argues that farming and mining increased river siltation and warmed river temperatures, reducing the efficiency of salmon reproduction. Finally, river diversion and dam building, which Taylor calls the "coup de grâce," blocked salmon migration to spawning grounds, interfering with reproduction. See, Taylor, *Making Salmon*, 39-67.

NEW YORK COMMERCIAL

Salmon Canneries of the Pacific Northwest.

MAP

CANNERIES DENOTED THUS: *

EXACT LOCATION OF CANNERIES SHOWN ON AN UP-TO-DATE MAP.

MANY NEW CONCERNS ARE REPRESENTED.

THE AREA OF THE COUNTRY COVERED IS ENORMOUS.

Fig. 4-1 A map showing the locations of the many salmon canneries found in the Pacific Northwest. By 1901, only the Fraser River, in Canada, boasted as many canneries as Alaska, but the map makers reminded their audience, "Along the thousands of miles of Alaskan coast line are many excellent fishing locations yet unoccupied." *Salmon Canneries of the Pacific Northwest*. Map. New York: D. O. Haynes & Co., 1901. From Library of Congress, Map Collections. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4232c.mf000036.

the third butchering stage. Referred to as the Iron Chink (so-called because of the high number of Chinese working in the canneries at the time), the machine's inventor, Edmund A. Smith, bragged it would, "do away with Chinamen."[33] After being sliced to the appropriate size, a group of laborers, called the filling gang, filled cans with half a pound to one pound of salmon, depending on the size of the cans. Another worker then placed the filled cans on a revolving plate, which spun and sprayed the cans with pressurized water to ensure their cleanliness before soldering. After cleaning, another laborer placed a tin lid on top of the salmon and pressed it in placed by means of a foot-operated press, which also crimped the top of the can over the lid.

The tops of the cans then passed through a trough of muriatic acid, which prepared the cans for a second trough filled with molten solder. After the soldering, the cans slid down an inclined plane while being showered with cold water. Placed on iron trays, workers dunked the cooled cans into a vat of water heated to 212° F. Air bubbles escaping from the cans revealed any that had not been properly soldered. After testing for an air-tight seal, the trays of cans were placed in steam ovens and cooked at 230° F for one hour. Next, workers vented the cans by punching a small hole into the lid. After the venting, workers sealed the hole with a small drop of solder and cooked the cans in a second oven at 240° F for one hour to one hour fifteen minutes, depending on the size of the can. Upon removal from the oven, the cans were once again sprayed with cold water. Another specialized set of workers conducted a final test for airtightness by tapping the top of each can with a small piece of iron, "an experienced ear quickly detecting by sound any imperfection." From there, a final set of workers lacquered, labeled, and packed the

[33] "Inventor Edmund A. Smith and his Fish Cleaning Machine," *Sunday Times* (Seattle), December 1903, Box 109, File 25, Pacific American Fisheries Records, Center for Studies of the Pacific Northwest, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

finished product into 48-can cases. So ended the canning process. The airtight seal preserved the salmon, allowing for distribution to almost anywhere in the world.[34]

One of the unique elements of the Alaskan canning industry was its relative lack of centralization. Unlike commodities such as wheat or beef, which relied on urban hubs for collection and distribution, the ships which picked up the cases of canned salmon immediately distributed the fish to markets around the world; there was no need to transport the filled cans to a central urban center, like San Francisco for example, to simply place the cans back onto ships for further distribution.[35] The amount of capital necessary to successfully operate a cannery discouraged small, independent producers while encouraging organizational, but not operational, centralization, thus the ability of PAF and APA to buy numerous subsidiary canning companies and dominate the industry.

Of course, fishermen could catch every salmon in the ocean, and canneries might be equipped with the most modern technology, but if there was no one to process and can the catch, the fisheries and factories would have been worthless. Asian workers formed the backbone of the cannery labor force. Many of the earliest Chinese migrants to the United States worked as physical laborers, building railroads throughout the Western United States. When canneries needed hardworking, dependable workers, they drew from the ready supply of Chinese in the U.S. West, as well as borrowing the recruitment system of railroad contractors already in place. Cannery operators coordinated with established Chinese contractors, or bosses, who controlled all aspects of cannery labor. The canning companies themselves purposely distanced themselves from their labor force. The contractors were completely responsible for hiring, paying, feeding,

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[34] U.S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries, *Notes on the Fisheries of the Pacific Coast in 1895*, by William A. Wilcox (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 584-586.
[35] Compare to wheat and beef in William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991).

and disciplining cannery workers.[36] As long as daily and seasonal canning quotas were met, the Asian men and women who worked in the canneries were essentially invisible to the capitalists who profited from the salmon canneries.

A 1938 PAF memo noted that between 1929 and 1937, the base pay of white cannery workers increased by 22.72 percent.[37] "The Oriental labor situation is more difficult of accurate comparison," the memo's writer conceded.[38] PAF knew their total labor costs for 1929: $968,851.38, including longshore labor.[39] But determining the pay Asian laborers—the vast majority of the canneries' workers—actually received was impossible because 1937 was the first year PAF paid their workers directly; in prior years, "all Oriental labor was contracted for through certain individuals."[40] How much of PAF's labor payout the contractor pocketed can only be estimated, as the terms of the labor contracts themselves can be difficult to determine. PAF's surviving financial ledgers, annual reports, account books, and balance sheets for 1899, 1901, 1911, and 1917-1936 all fail to note how much money contractors received. So too does

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[36] This system of contracted labor remained in place until 1937, when Filipino cannery workers successfully unionized. Filipino labor organizers cared more about combating the power of the contractors than with pay or working conditions. After 1937 the union, rather than the contractors, negotiated with the canning companies and took over the other responsibilities that had previously been the purview of contractors.

[37] White Americans formed an extreme minority in the Alaska salmon canneries. In 1938, the total cannery workforce consisted of 3,266 Filipinos; 684 Japanese; 380 Mexicans; 367 Chinese; 87 Puerto Ricans; 78 African Americans; 27 Hawaiians; a total of 39 Koreans, Chileans, and Peruvians; and "several dozen" white Americans. Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 172. Whites typically occupied the management and foreman positions, while all the laboring positions were usually the domain of the non-white laborers. Occasionally, a non-white worker would rise to become a foreman.

[38] Don S. Griffith to Frank L. Taylor, 31 March 1938, Box 2, File 6, Pacific American Fisheries Records, Center for Studies of the Pacific Northwest, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

[39] Don S. Griffith to Frank L. Taylor, 29 March 1938, Box 2, File 6, Pacific American Fisheries Records, Center for Studies of the Pacific Northwest, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

[40] Don S. Griffith to Frank L. Taylor, 31 March 1938.

the PAF company payroll from 1900-1903 and the monthly salaries rate table of 1912.[41] While the APA kept far more detailed records of contractor payments, in searching the archival records of PAF and eleven other salmon canning companies, the only reference found to any agreements between a cannery and a contractor are the internal memos mentioning PAF's 1929 labor costs and a reference in a 1912 letter to, "two copies of the proposed further agreement between the Hoonah Packing Company and Goon Dip."[42] The agreements themselves, however, are not to be found, nor is it clear that the agreements represented actual written contracts. Dip, perhaps Seattle's most prominent contractor, was rumored to never sign contracts with cannery owners or operators, but instead sealed all agreements with a handshake.[43] Whether or not Dip signed contracts, agreements of some kind were put on paper. The salmon canneries were businesses and would have wanted some kind of written, legal security defining their responsibilities as well as those of the labor contractors. APA's financial records and the 1912 letter are proof enough that rumors of handshake contracts were exaggerated if not downright wrong. At the same time, however, it seems apparent that at least some canning companies did not think those agreements important enough to retain beyond only a few canning seasons. Despite apparent corporate ignorance of the Asian workers' wages, at least before the 1937 introduction of the union, the necessity of Asian labor was undisputed by all involved in the salmon canning business.

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[41] Financial Records, Box 17, Files 1-9; Financial Statements, Box 17, Files 13-19, and Box 18, Files 1-10; Cannery Payroll: 1900-1903, Box 73, File 1; Monthly Salaries Rate Table: 1912, Box 74, File 12, Pacific American Fisheries Records, Center for Studies of the Pacific Northwest, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

[42] A. W. Buddress to H. L. Simonds, 25 January 1912, Box 166, File 6, Pacific American Fisheries Records, Center for Studies of the Pacific Northwest, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. For APA financial records, see: Alaska Packers Association Records, 1897-1970, MS 0009, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

[43] Radke, *Pacific American Fisheries, Inc.*, 64.

The U.S. salmon canning industry could not have functioned without Asian labor. Initially, Chinese laborers were so vital to the canning industry that an 1898 government report bluntly noted, "Chinese have a monopoly in the canning of salmon."[44] While Chinese laborers retained their reputation as the best cannery workers, and Chinese contractors continued to dominate the hiring of labor until the 1930s, the inexorable effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 forced canneries to look elsewhere for labor. In 1902, another government report bemoaned the fact that a scarcity of labor meant that "an inferior class of Chinese was obtained in many canneries." In fact, the labor shortage was so severe that some Chinese bosses resorted to hiring Japanese workers, described in the report as, "not only lazy and worthless, but were constantly raising a disturbance."[45] Cannery owners experimented with different ethnically-based labor groups in hopes of replacing Chinese workers, but found doing so difficult.

At first glance, Alaska Natives might seem a logical choice as cannery workers. Indeed, Native Americans in Washington and First Nations members in British Columbia were vital members of the cannery workforce.[46] In Alaska, canneries hired Indigenous laborers, but found they could not count on Native workers day in and day out. The same report that criticized Japanese workers stated that canneries "gladly employ every native who is willing to work," but noted that Alaska Native laborers could not be governed by industrial time and work discipline: "His daily wages soon supply the few luxuries he desires, and then he no longer cares for work.

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[44] U.S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries, *Notes on the Fisheries of the Pacific Coast in 1895*, by William A. Wilcox (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 583.
[45] U.S. Commision of Fish and Fisheries, *The Salmon and Salmon Fisheries of Alaska*, by Jefferson F. Moser (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 185. Box 120, File 4, Pacific American Fisheries Records, Center for Studies of the Pacific Northwest, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.
[46] For more on Native American and First Nations cannery workers in Washington and Canada, see: Joshua L. Reid, *The Sea Is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs, an Indigenous Borderlands People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

Why should he? Hunger no longer worries him, his immediate wants are satisfied, and he has no others!" The report lamented that, "Some days there may be 40 [Alaska Native workers at a cannery] and the next only 10."[47] Working in their homelands provided Alaska Natives with a personal and professional flexibility and freedom unavailable to Asian laborers shipped hundreds of miles to remote factories and who depended on the canneries for food, shelter, and a limited number of company ships for transport back to the mainland. Additionally, Alaska Natives, by virtue of their large numbers, retained a degree of autonomy unavailable to Indigenous peoples farther south. Cannery operators, therefore, believed the best and most reliable cannery workers were Asian. Regardless of the necessity of Asian laborers to the salmon canning industry, however, American racist attitudes, especially on the West Coast, conspired to limit Asian entry into the United States.

The lack of Asian labor caused serious concerns among fishermen and cannery owners. A 1911 article in *Pacific Fisherman* noted that declining numbers of Chinese cannery workers significantly damaged the salmon canning industry. "Whatever objection may be raised against the Chinese laborers in other lines of industrial effort," declared the *Pacific Fisherman*, "the white man has not yet found a satisfactory substitute for them in the Alaska canneries. The white labor that can be found in the cities cannot be depended on to undergo the hardship and hard work attendant on a season in the Alaskan canneries."[48] The article noted that Hawaiian and Filipino laborers, imperialist subjects of the United States, offered the best hope of providing a dependable workforce in the canneries. Eventually, Filipino workers did step in to fill the labor shortage created by Chinese Exclusion as well as the 1908 Gentlemen's Agreement and the Immigration Act of 1924, both of which limited Japanese immigration to the United States. In

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[47] *The Salmon and Salmon Fisheries of Alaska*, 186.
[48] "Hawaiian Labor Scheme Fails," *Pacific Fisherman*, 9, no. 5 (May 1911), 16.

1921, about 1,000 Filipinos worked in Alaska's canneries, already outnumbering both Chinese and Japanese workers. By 1928 that number had risen to 3,916 Alaskeros, outnumbering Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican laborers combined. So common to Filipino migrants was the yearly trip to the Alaska canneries, that a 1925 article in the *Juneau Gateway* observed that, "Very seldom will you meet a Filipino along the Pacific Coast who had never been to Alaska."[49] And it was largely because of the community's shared cannery experiences that Filipinos succeeded in creating the first successful Asian unions in the United States during the 1930s.[50] Both Alaska's and Filipinos' unique positions within the U.S. empire contributed greatly to the extraordinary relationship between place and people.

Alaskero Labor in the Alaska Canneries

Despite the violence accompanying the Philippine-American War, many Filipinos believed the rhetoric of American teachers and missionaries, who traveled to the Philippines to pacify, educate, and acculturate the islands' population.[51] These imperial agents encouraged young Filipinos to seek greater educational and life opportunities in the United States, which, the ambassadors of the U.S. metropole claimed, promised physical, social, and class mobility to all its subjects. "Are we going to get the same treatment as other Americans? Would it be possible for us to get jobs? And to go to school?" Juan Castillo asked his American teachers. "Their

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[49] In Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 127.
[50] For more on Filipino unionization, see Michael W. McCann with George I. Lovell, *Union by Law: Filipino Labor Activists, Rights Radicalism, and Racial Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 119-159; Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 134-148; Jack Masson and Donald Guimary, "Asian Labor Contractors in the Alaskan Canned Salmon Industry: 1880-1937," *Labor History* 22, no. 3 (1981); and Stephanie Hinnershitz, "'We Ask Not for Mercy, but for Justice': The Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers' Union and Filipino Civil Rights in the United States, 1927-1937," *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 1 (2013).
[51] For more on Philippine resistance to U.S. acquisition and occupation, see: David J. Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); and Kramer, *The Blood of Government*. For more on the affect of U.S. educators and missionaries upon young Filipinos, see: Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 126; and Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 176-177.

answer is affirmative," he confirmed.[52] Familiarity with western imperialism—the Philippines had been a Spanish possession for nearly four hundred years—when combined with stories of American affluence and opportunity, convinced many Filipinos that membership in this new empire might prove to be a tremendous boon to their islands' people, culture, economy, and government.[53]

The earliest Filipino migrants fell into two broad categories. The first were landowning members of the Filipino educated middle class, or *pensionados*. These migrants usually came to the United States for the educational opportunities, such as admission to U.S. universities, the metropole offered its new imperial subjects. The second group of Filipino migrants were generally poor peasants who had lost access to their land and agricultural livelihoods as a consequence of hundreds of years of Spanish imperial structures and taxes. They came to the United States in search of work. In both cases, and is common of numerous migrant groups, many Filipinos intended to remain in the United States for only a few years before returning home with American dollars in their pockets. Some Filipinos did return to the Philippines. Many did not. Initially, many Filipino migrants worked on Hawaiian plantations, but before long many left Hawaiʻi for the mainland, where they worked as migratory laborers along the West Coast. Upon arriving in the United States, however, *pensionados* and migratory laborers alike learned that often times the United States did not fulfill the promises its promoters made to young Filipinos.

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[52] John (Juan) Castillo interviewed by Frederic A. Cordova, Jr., Accession No. FIL75-KNG-75-15jrc; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.
[53] Julian Go, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Elite Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico During U.S. Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 37-39 and 94-98.

Fig. 4-2 A group of Alaskeros awaiting transport to Alaska. File AR-N-Fil-Kng-1ck-76-15_r6f3; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

The status of these recent arrivals to the United States was a unique legal construction. According to the *Insular Cases*, those born and living in incorporated territories were citizens of the United States and entitled to the full protection of the Constitution.[54] Those living in unincorporated territories were classified as U.S. nationals, subjects of American imperial power but not fully protected by the Constitution. The Court decided that Alaska, in which white Americans by this time formed the largest single ethnic group, was incorporated, but the

[54] It is important to note that this ruling did not include North American Indigenous peoples.

Philippines, populated by exotic Asians, was unincorporated.[55] Historians have subsequently pointed to the *Insular Cases* as evidence that Americans always envisioned eventual statehood for Alaska, and that Alaska, therefore, represents simply another case of continental expansion.[56] Such a teleological interpretation, however, presupposes the statehood of Alaska (and Hawai‘i), something that did not become likely until well into the twentieth century. It was the whiteness of Alaska's population by the time of the *Insular Cases* that suggested eventual statehood, not a historical belief in the district's potential for statehood.[57] Similarly, it was the overwhelmingly non-white population of the Philippines that relegated the territory and it's people to the status of unincorporated, not geographic distance from the metropole.

While Filipinos were not, according to the *Insular Cases*, entitled to full Constitutional protections, being classified as American nationals did bring with it one important right—complete freedom of movement within the United States. Filipino migrants did not need a passport, visa, or any other kind of paperwork to travel to or through any part of the American empire, including the mainland United States.

In the 1970s, when Washington State undertook to collect oral histories from Filipino migrants who had remained in the United States after Philippine independence, the early interviewers were surprised by the answers given when they asked Seattle-area Filipinos what visa they had used to enter the United States.[58] Felix Narte's response was typical: "You don't

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[55] For more on the cases, see Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).
[56] For example, see: Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 97.
[57] See: Hill, "The Myth of Seward's Folly," 61-64; and Hill, "Imperial Stepping Stone," 97.
[58] This chapter utilizes the Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, conducted between 1974-77, organized by the Washington State Division of Archives and Records Management, and currently housed at the Center for Studies of the Pacific Northwest in Bellingham, WA. The interviews were intended to document the lives of African Americans and Filipinos living in Washington State and interviewed approximately fifty Filipinos living in the Seattle area. Many thousands more worked in the Alaska salmon canneries; their stories are unfortunately lost to us. However, this collection of oral histories

have to have passports before when you come to America because Philippines is a part of the United States and you could come to the United States that time, not like now."[59] As the generation of Filipinos born just after the United States conquered the Philippines neared and entered adulthood, many decided to take advantage of the mobility offered by the United States' intra-imperial networks.

The importance of these specifically U.S. imperial networks, rather than the earlier international labor networks that had supplied previous Asian labor to the West, is made clearer when one considers that almost no Filipinos worked in British Columbian salmon canneries. The Canadian canneries were closer to Washington State than the Alaskan canneries, but British Columbia's status as a British colonial outpost served to create different networks and understandings of empire as well as of those who labored within it. A more complicated process of international, or inter-imperial, travel was required for Filipinos to enter Canada. Instead of Filipinos, British Columbian canneries relied heavily upon female First Nations laborers.[60] The U.S. empire, on the other hand, created a network that successfully linked its Asian Far East colony with its North American Far North colony. In doing so, Alaska Time, the community it

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allows researchers to provide a platform for the voices of many previously unheard Filipino/a men and women to be heard, in addition to the more commonly heard voices of Filipino labor and union leaders, who, in the historical record, form a privileged labor elite. The Filipino voices in this archive, while limited in number, represent not only cannery workers, but agricultural stoop laborers, factory workers, and shipyard workers. Often, each of these types of workers, regularly spoken of as separate laborers, was embodied in a single Filipino American. Obviously, these oral histories, collected decades after the events recalled occurred, rely on the memories of the participants. Such a reliance on memory comes with certain pitfalls, including misremembering or selective remembering. Nonetheless, the memories of these individuals provide important, and in this case almost completely ignored, perspectives on the time in question. For more on the use of memory in historical studies, see Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

[59] Felix A. Narte interviewed by Teresa Cronin, Accession No. FIL75-KNG-75-8tc; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

[60] Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 89.

engendered, and the educations it helped fund were vital to the Filipino laborers' successful unionization.

Pete Filiarca migrated to the United States in 1928. "There were stories in the Philippines that it was easy to get a job [in the United States], but when I came here it was different," said Filiarca. For a year he worked as a houseboy, cleaning and doing housework for a Seattle businessman, before making his first trip to Alaska. Alaska Time disappointed Filiarca, who complained, "From Alaska, I didn't make very much." Nonetheless, Filiarca worked four seasons in the Alaska canneries. Like Bulosan, he lamented the exploitation of Filipino laborers in Alaska, decrying how gambling robbed Filipinos of their wages. According to his recollection of Alaska, "Lots of these boys, they go up to Alaska, then when they come back, lots of them have no money left, because they gamble, and they go to California to work on the farms. And then when it's time to go to Alaska, they come back again. That's why you see so many Filipinos here during the month of May, June, and July." The reason so many Filipinos went to Alaska so many times, implied Filiarca, was because they lost the money they earned in the canneries due to contractors encouraging, even bullying, young Filipinos into gambling away their wages.[61] Consequently, Filiarca worked with like-minded Filipino laborers to help begin the first successful Asian-American labor unions in 1937.[62]

Chris Mensalvas, born into a family of farmers and later known for his work as a Filipino labor organizer in the Pacific Northwest, said he migrated because, "There was nothing for me and I thought there was something in the United States." He related that agricultural recruiters enticed Filipinos to Hawai'i by promising these young men a "good life" in the United States.

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[61] Pete Filiarca interviewed by Frederic A. Cordova, Jr., Accession No. FIL-KNG-75-13jr; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

[62] See: Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 55, 129, and 178.

"So we all came here [the United States]," said Mensalvas. But "we can't have a good life. Because as soon as we got here the contractors and all the agents they got us on to the farms at 25 cents an hour." Mensalvas hoped to better his situation by attending college. "I went to school in L.A. to be a lawyer," he said. "But I finally found out that Filipinos cannot practice law in this country. They cannot even own farms, nothing we can do. I got so disgusted I said, 'Why am I studying law when I can't practice law in the States?' So I quit."[63]

Ponce Torres began working in the Alaska canneries within weeks of arriving in Seattle in 1925. As Torres' example shows, knowledge of the National Recovery Administration (NRA) altered how some Filipinos understood cannery life.[64] "As the years goes on we found out more and more," he recalled in 1975. "It [work conditions in the canneries] needs improvement because … of course we did not know the difference before. Even in the third or fourth year … we thought that those were really the conditions and that should be. But we found out that it could be better … it could be improved."[65] While the Supreme Court quickly ruled the NRA unconstitutional, it made Alaskeros aware that their situation could be improved through unionization. The NRA was a government initiative that Chinese and Japanese laborers had lacked and despite the decision of the Supreme Court, the NRA convinced Filipinos that they

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[63] Mensalvas' statement that Filipinos could not own land refers to legislation such as the California Alien Land Law of 1913 and Article II, Section 33 of the Washington State Constitution. Under these provisions, non-citizens and non-white aliens ineligible for citizenship were barred from owning land. Such legislation targeted, but did not name, Asians living in the United States. The California Supreme Court struck down the Alien Land Law in 1952 and Washington state repealed Article II, Section 33 in 1966. Chris Mensalves interviewed by Carolina D. Koslosky, Accession No. FIL75-KNG-75-1ck; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

[64] The National Recovery Administration was intended to ease competition during the Great Depression by bringing business and labor interests together to cooperatively create codes of fair practices and prices. See: Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 38-39.

[65] Ponce M. Torres interviewed by Teresa Cronin, Accession No. FIL-KNG-75-14tc; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

could and should unionize. But Filipinos in the United States had another advantage in their struggle to unionize that needs further investigation—their status as U.S. nationals.

Chinese and Japanese laborers had failed in their early efforts to unionize, in part, because their continued presence in the United States was conditional. The category of U.S. national, while legally inferior to that of citizen, provided Filipinos with a certain security that previous Asian laborers had lacked. While Chris Mensalvas may not have successfully become a lawyer, he did become a leading Filipino labor organizer. His example demonstrates the power being a U.S. national gave to Filipinos. Mensalvas never became a U.S. citizen, yet being a U.S. national prevented his deportation when he was accused of being a communist. Instead of deportation, Mensalvas said he was jailed for two weeks and then released. It is difficult to believe a Chinese or Japanese laborer and union organizer, lacking U.S. citizenship or national standing and accused of communism, could have escaped deportation during this time.[66]

It does not appear that Filipinos consciously used their status as U.S. nationals as a weapon in the fight to organize. Instead, the work of American educators in the Philippines seems to have done a marvelous job of convincing Filipinos that as members of the U.S. empire, they were indeed American. This perception is evident in Filipino assertions of Americanness, such as Felix Narte's declaration that visas and passports were not needed to travel to the United States because the Philippines was America. Thus, buoyed by their unique status as U.S. nationals and the existence of a relatively large and powerful presence in Alaska, Filipinos in the

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[66] The U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled three times between 1947 and 1953 that Filipinos already in the United States when Congress passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act (1934) or when the Philippines gained full legal and political independence (1946) retained their status as U.S. nationals and therefore could not be deported. See: *Del Guercio v. Gabot*, 9 Cir., 161 F.2d 559 (1947); *Cabebe v. Acheson*, 9 Cir., 183 F.2d 795 (1950); and *Mangaoang v. Boyd*, 9 Cir., 205 F.2d 553 (1953).

United States successfully unionized around their ethnicity in 1937, but, unfortunately for the Alaskeros, only as the Alaskan canned salmon industry began its decline.[67]

It would be easy to blame organized labor and rising labor costs for the decline of the canned salmon industry, but doing so would be inaccurate. In fact, cutting out the contractors served to raise laborers' wages while simultaneously lowering cannery labor costs. In 1932 and 1933, for instance, common cannery laborers earned between $25 and $50 a month. By 1939, after unionization, common laborers earned between $80 and $100 a month.[68] A 1938 PAF internal communication reveals that between 1929 and 1937, however, their labor costs dropped from $968,851.38 to $849.863.70, a savings of $118,987.68. While increased mechanization may be partly responsible for the decline in labor costs, PAF also attributed the decline to the fact that, "Discontinuance of Oriental contracts" allowed an increase in wages while labor costs "paid directly from the Company, was substantially lower per case."[69] It was not increased wages, but Alaskan statehood that effectively ended the salmon canning industry.

While union leaders' and Bulosan's recollections of Filipino exploitation in Alaskan salmon canneries have largely shaped what little understanding we have of the experience, it is important to note that the lived reality of other Alaskeros demonstrates that Filipino life in Alaska was far more complex than those union organizers and Bulosan acknowledged. There is no question that the canneries and labor contractors possessed substantial power in Alaska. But it is also true that the lack of readily available labor and the solidarity of the Filipino community, buttressed by their status as U.S. nationals and strengthened by shared Alaskan experiences,

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[67] For more on the decline of the Alaska canned salmon industry, see: Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, especially 172-195.
[68] Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 178.
[69] Don S. Griffith to Frank L. Taylor, 29 March 1938. Box 2, File 6, Pacific American Fisheries Records, Center for Studies of the Pacific Northwest, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

ensured that the Alaskeros retained, and eventually expanded, significant power of their own in the Alaskan labor market.

Few Filipinos left the islands planning to work in Alaska's salmon canneries. Many young Filipino men left the Philippines bound for Hawai'i. Narte recalled that he and about 300 other Filipinos were recruited to Hawai'i in 1924 because of plantation strikes on the islands. Narte remembered seeing men returning to the Philippines from work on the Hawaiian plantations: "When they come home it looks like a million dollars, so we thought we could go out there too and make the same like that." But Hawai'i proved disappointing for Narte. "When I reach Hawai'i, why, it is very hard, just the same because the labor is only dollar a day," he recalled. Narte worked on Hawaiian plantations for seven months before leaving for the mainland. When he reached the United States, Narte found himself inexorably drawn to Alaska. "We reach Seattle, no employment," said Narte. "The only job I get first is going to Alaska. That's three months, from June up to September." After 1925's Alaska Time ended, Narte returned to Washington State, where he worked picking hops and apples. When those seasons ended, Narte and his brother "went back to the hotel, and stay there again until Alaska, that's all we do." Compared to the agricultural work Narte had previously experienced, Alaska Time proved lucrative. As opposed to the dollar-a-day to be earned on Hawaiian plantations, Narte remembered, "The first time I work [in Alaska] anyway, I get fifty dollars a month. I stay there for almost, just about over three months. I made about pretty near $500 anyway because I had my overtime." A cannery worker in Alaska, who avoided gambling and other vices, stood to return to Washington, after only three months, with more money than he could earn in a year on

a Hawaiian plantation.[70] Narte had intended to return to the Philippines after a few years. Such was the intention of many Filipinos when they embarked for the U.S. mainland; after lining their pockets with American dollars, young Filipino men dreamt of returning home with enough money to buy land and settle back into their traditional agricultural lives.

For many, the exigencies of life altered their plans.

Mariano Laigo migrated in 1925 when his older brother, who already lived in the United States, convinced him that life in the metropole was better than in the Philippines. Laigo's only expectation was to "see the world … three years, and then go home, and get married. It didn't come out that way." Laigo tried his hand at a number of jobs: farming, working for the railroad, in a sawmill, in a shipyard, and for Boeing. Laigo described American prejudice that prevented Filipino workers from earning promotions at the same pace as their white counterparts. Nonetheless, Laigo believed life was "much easier here than in the Philippines … it [life in the United States] was good." Like thousands of other young Filipino men, Laigo spent a season working in an Alaska salmon cannery. But Laigo had a sweetheart in Washington, and the pull of love and family outweighed the pull of Alaskan employment. Laigo chose to remain in the Seattle area to be with his family.[71] Most Alaskeros remained unmarried, however. For these men a different community, one based on a uniquely Filipino American identity of labor and masculinity in the Alaska canneries rooted their experience in the United States. Alaska Time had become a necessary yearly exodus that made continued financial and emotional survival in the United States possible.

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[70] Felix A. Narte interviewed by Teresa Cronin, Accession No. FIL75-KNG-75-8tc; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

[71] Mariano M. Laigo interviewed by Carolina Koslosky, Accession No. FIL-KNG-75-10(B)ck; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

Many Alaskeros used their Alaska Time money to fund university educations, with varying degrees of success. Fabian Bergano migrated to Los Angles in the mid-1920s. He finished high school in 1929 and spent three years saving money in order to attend university. In 1932, he enrolled at Oregon State University and studied pharmacy. "During summertime I used to on to Alaska for my tuition," he recalled. Consistently working in Alaska created ties that could be called upon when needed. "In my senior year, I didn't have any money for my cap and gown," said Bergano. "I had to write my Alaska contractor to advance me money to pay for my expenses," he continued. Bergano worked hard and graduated. He remembered, "I have a complex that if I didn't show up in my schooling, the American people might say that we, I, as a student is not up to their par. So I studied and studied and studied and I did manage to end up better than the average American student." Bergano was driven and used Alaska Time to achieve his dream of a university education, although finding a way to professionally apply his university training proved difficult, as it did for many other Alaskeros as well.[72]

Filipinos from more privileged backgrounds faced the same adversities and lack of opportunities that confronted Chris Mensalvas, as previously described. Fred C. Floresca came from a wealthy *pensionado* family. Remarkably, Floresca graduated from high school, earned an associate degree from the University of the Philippines, taught seventh grade, and became an elementary school principal before migrating to the United States in 1927 with the intention of earning a bachelor's degree. "There was no other reason … that [university education] was the all and immediate reason of my coming [to the United States]," said Floresca. He continued, "I told the people that I'm going back to school and learn more, and then go back again [to the

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[72] Fabian Bergano interviewed by Fredrick A. Cordova, Jr., Accession No. FIL-KNG-75-7jr; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

Philippines] … to teach the children." Like Mensalvas, however, Floresca found that attending university in the United States was not an easy proposition for Filipinos. "It [attending university in the United States] never materialized," said Floresca. "When I came here in 1927 with my sister and brother-in-law … I found an entirely different environment here, where going to school was a problem." Apparently, Floresca was one of the few Filipinos who never went to Alaska. Instead, Floresca found employment washing dishes at the Frye Hotel in Seattle. Eventually, Floresca became a pastry chef and worked in other establishments. But the education he desired, which he thought the United States would make possible, remained forever beyond his reach.[73]

Alaskeros, unlike Mensalvas and Floresca, seem to have been more successful in obtaining their university degrees. When asked why he migrated to the United States, Emiliano A. Francisco replied: "For the love for further education and to see the beautiful America that they advertised in there." Francisco also came from a *pensionado* family, and upon arrival in the United States in 1924 or 1925, he enrolled at the University of Washington, but found "there was too much discrimination then, during that time." Like so many young Filipinos, Francisco traveled to Alaska during the summer to work in a salmon cannery in order to help fund his next year of study. So central was Alaska Time to Filipinos in the United States, that Francisco met a Filipino professor from the University of Idaho who also spent his summers working in Alaska's canneries. This professor encouraged Francisco to transfer. Nearly forty years later, Francisco recalled that, "He [the professor] said, 'Frank, why don't you go with me? I am a professor there [University of Idaho] and we have all kinds of good times. Not only that, people there are

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[73] Fred C. Floresca interviewed by Carolina D. Koslosky, Accession No. FIL-KNG-7-6ck; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

friendly and there's no discrimination there.'" Francisco capitalized on U.S. imperial networks by migrating to the United States to attend university, as did many other Filipinos. Those labor networks took Francisco all the way to Alaska, a place so important to the emerging Filipino American community that he met a mentor who presented Francisco with a new path to success. Eventually Francisco earned his bachelor's degree in English and Philosophy from the University of Idaho. Throughout his studies at university, however, Alaska Time continued to organize Francisco's early American experience. Francisco may have graduated, but "I did not finish in 5, 4 years," he said. "It was staggered because on account of this going to Alaska."[74]

Working in the salmon canneries was not Francisco's vision of the American dream, but without Alaska Time he would have been unable to participate in any of the opportunities the United States did afford its imperial subjects. The work and, more importantly, the money to be earned in Alaska's canneries shaped the lived experience of most young Filipinos in the United States, as they did for Francisco. True, the work was organized around and guided by the racialized worldview of the canneries' owners and operators, but Filipinos nonetheless grasped the opportunity provided by Alaska Time and used it to achieve their own ends.

Identity in the Alaska Canneries

The example of the professor mentioned by Emiliano Francisco is worthy of examination. This unnamed individual demonstrates that while jobs and salaries were important motivations for Alaskeros, they were, ultimately, incidental to the continued importance of Alaska Time for many Filipinos. The professor represents a professional Filipino who achieved what appears to be a measure of success and respectability in the United States. Nonetheless, this professor

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[74] Emiliano Francisco interviewed by Carolina D. Koslosky, Accession No. FIL-KNG-75-20ck; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

continued to trek to Alaska each summer to work in the canneries. He was not a contractor or boss; the professor remained a simple cannery laborer. What motivated this middle-class professional to work in the salmon canneries each summer? Without recourse to his thoughts and recollections we cannot know for sure, but clearly Alaska Time remained an essential part of the professor's life. Jokes about professors' salaries aside, it is safe to assume that he did not need the money he earned in Alaska. Instead, it is likely that he continued to return to Alaska, year after year, to reconnect with the emerging Filipino American community for which Alaska Time was the most important time of the year. The example of this unknown Filipino professor from the University of Idaho, who spent his summers working alongside his countrymen in Alaska's salmon canneries, demonstrates that Alaska Time provided more than simply the financial means necessary to support Filipino life in the United States; it also provided the emotional support required by members of the community. Outside of the canning season, much of the relatively small Filipino community was scattered in small groups along the Pacific Coast, working in fields, farms, and factories from Washington to Arizona. But for three or four months every year, Alaska Time gave Filipinos in the United States an appointed time and place to congregate, find support and understanding from those who shared a unique lived American experience, and earn the money that would help see them through the rest of the year.[75]

Alaska Time formed the centerpiece of the Filipino year in the United States. Alaska Time was seasonal, as were most Filipino labor opportunities in the 1920s and 1930s, but it was a relatively long and remunerative form of seasonal labor. Thus, many Filipinos spent more time

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[75] In this way, the annual salmon runs which fueled the canneries worked similarly to the annual bison mating gatherings of previous centuries, which encouraged the gathering together of plains Indians not only for the hunt, but for times of fellowship and community renewal. See: Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

in Alaska than they did anywhere else in North America. Alaska formed the cornerstone of how Filipinos came to understand their American experience and around which the entire migratory year was organized. Because Alaskeros were almost exclusively male, Alaska Time also provided a universally recognized time and place for young Filipino migrants to prove their masculinity to one another and white Americans.[76]

Racial violence directed at Filipinos, at times quite severe in the United States, was largely absent in Alaska. The power of these young Filipino men in Alaska was strong enough that, rather than run from expressions of racial bigotry and violence, Alaskeros could revel in an exuberant masculinity. The common experience of Alaskan labor allowed the American Filipino community to negotiate and enhance its place in the U.S. empire of the 1920s and 1930s.

The experience of Rudy Romero, who worked in the canneries from 1930 through 1959, was not unusual. Romero migrated to the United States to join his brother and cousins already living in the Pacific Northwest. Romero arrived in Seattle in March, several months before recruiting for Alaska Time began. He worked on strawberry farms until a cousin convinced him to go to Alaska. "They treat us good," recalled Romero. "We got a ping-pong table, we got, you know, that bunkhouse … and in there's a recreation room. You know, we got a lots of fun in there, and outside … we play volleyball all the time." Cannery work was not easy, but it did not detract from the laborers' opportunity for community; the canneries enhanced Filipino community. More than after-work pick-up volleyball games, though, Romero remembered Alaska as a time of freedom: "I enjoyed it up there. When there's no work, why, we go up in mountain and hook some trout. Sometimes we don't come home to eat … start a campfire …

[76] It is possible that Bulosan's frustrations with life in Alaska were partially a consequence of the fact that as a sensitive and sickly individual he may have found himself an outsider in this hypermasculine community.

Fig. 4-3 An Alaskero band playing outside their Alaskan cannery bunkhouse, labeled the "Bataan Bunk House." File AR-N-Fil-Kng-1ck-76-15_r1f1; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

then fry those, what do you call, trout," reminisced Romero. It was in Alaska, at the edge of the U.S. empire, that Romero and his fellow Alaskeros experienced the most freedom while away from the Philippines.

Wages, while certainly important for immediate survival, seemed to have little importance in Romero's recollection of Alaska Time and were not something he mentioned on his own. When asked, Romero stated he believed unions "represented us for better wages," but he did not clarify if by "us" he meant Filipino laborers specifically. When asked, "Did you ever have any discrimination by your bosses? Like giving you less pay than maybe a white person was getting?" Romero simply replied, "No, I don't think so." Nor did the money earned in Alaska seem of great importance to Romero. What mattered to him was the opportunity to be

around his own people, to live a few months each year in a community, even if it was fairly isolated, in which Filipinos no longer formed the minority.[77] Many Alaskeros expressed satisfaction with their Alaska experience. Those who voiced disappointment with the failure of the U.S. empire to deliver upon its promises of racial equality and social and economic mobility tended to be educated Filipinos or those who befriended educated Filipinos. Nonetheless, Romero's example, and others like his, suggests that the voices of labor and union leaders, preserved in and privileged by union archives and social visibility, have perhaps been disproportionately loud in the historical record.

Ignacio Navarrete came to the United States in 1926, at the age of 18, to pursue a university education. Although he had to abandon his studies at the University of Oregon, the Filipino community remained the centerpiece of his life in the United States. Navarrete eventually managed to buy a casino and restaurant in Seattle, the clientele of which was "mostly Filipino and colored, Indians." The gambling at Navarrete's casino was not high stakes, but rather was intended for camaraderie. According to Navarrete, "Most people play bingo. They just go there and sit down and see their friends and talk to them." Navarrete also used his business to support the migratory Filipino community, which he described as in the thousands, "especially [during] Alaska Time." Navarrete recalled that, "They [Filipinos] were here—waiting for their dispatching … sometimes they are short of money. Mostly from California. They ask me some credit until they are dispatched to Alaska." After Alaska Time ended, Alaskeros returned to Navarrete and settled their accounts. Even after becoming a business owner, though, Navarrete continued his own yearly trips to Alaska's canneries. Perhaps because of his maturity or business

[77] Rudy C. Romero interviewed by Teresa Cronin, Accession No. FIL-KNG-75-4tc; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

acumen, Navarrete became what he called a "Cannery Oriental foreman." Navarrete even claimed to have been so important to the operations of the West Wrangle Cannery that the owner, whom Navarrete called "the old man," successfully petitioned for Navarrete to receive a draft deferment during World War II. But neither the deferment nor the pay is what continued to draw Navarrete to Alaska. He went to Alaska because he wanted to "go out there and have some friends to look over." A life-long bachelor, remaining intimately connected to the Alaskero community motivated Navarrete professionally and personally.[78]

Unlike Navarette, Honorato Rapada married and had thirteen children. He arrived in the United States in 1927 and almost immediately found himself working in the Alaska canneries, which he quite enjoyed. "Is a good, good place to work," he said. "We go down there, they pay transportation, board and room down there, then they give us sixty dollars a month. Plus overtime." In Rapada's opinion, the only problem was that the canning season was too short. Before his marriage, Rapada worked in Washington and California after Alaska Time, picking apples, potatoes, hops, tomatoes, oranges, lemons, lettuce, carrots, and peas. After marrying in 1938, Rapada ended his fulltime migratory cycle. He rented, and eventually bought, a small strawberry farm and worked as a welder in a shipyard. The combination of his shipyard wages and the proceeds from his strawberry farm provided enough money for Rapada to support his wife and thirteen children. But he answered the call of Alaska Time every year between 1927 and 1960. The months in Alaska, communing with his fellow Alaskeros, must have been a welcome reprieve from a house brimming with children.[79]

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[78] Ignacio Navarrete interviewed by Dorothy Cordova, Accession No. FIL-KNG-76-51dc; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.
[79] Honorato R. Rapada interviewed by Teresa Cronin, Accession No. FIL-KNG-75-11tc; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

The isolation of the Alaskan canneries, from both significant centers of population and significant numbers of white Americans, undoubtedly aided in the creation of season-long Filipino communities in Alaska. Filipino migrants faced significant discrimination and violence in the States, particularly along the West Coast. Filipinos met with substantial white mob violence in Yakima, Washington, in 1927; Cashmere, Washington, in 1928; Dinuba, California, in 1928; Exeter, California, in 1929; Watsonville, California, in 1930; Palm Beach, California, in 1930; San Francisco, California, in 1930; and San Jose, California, in 1930. Filipinos found themselves expelled from towns and threatened with hanging if they returned. The most violent instances resulted in the deaths of Filipino and white Americans. The violence stemmed from accusations that Filipino agricultural workers undercut the wages of white workers and took their jobs. The predominantly young Filipino men were also accused of aggressively courting white women and taking them from white men.[80] Calls for the expulsion of Filipinos from the U.S. metropole were rampant up and down the Pacific Coast. Even a *New York Times* article, in 1929, while sympathetic to Filipinos suffering violence at the hands of white Americans, suggested that, "efforts be directed toward inducing Filipinos on the Pacific Coast rather than in the Philippine Islands to seek work in Hawaii. This would reduce the number of Filipino laborers in California and at the same time cut down emigration from the home islands."[81] According to the article, the solution for violence directed against Filipinos, who as U.S. nationals had every right to be in any of the forty-eight states, was to send those already in the metropole back to the periphery and prevent the migration of those still in the Philippines.

[80] Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion*, 136-143; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 109-116; and Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 20.
[81] "Filipinos in California," *New York Times*, 28 October 1929.

Filipinos who worked in the canneries testified to the racial violence they witnessed in California and Washington. Rudy Romero, for instance, while remembering Alaska Time fondly, was not ignorant of racial discrimination in the United States. He recalled that life could be less pleasant when not in Alaska. He stated that, "They [white Americans] are kind of prejudice to us, because when we first came here, why we heard lots of people that are trying to segregate people … segregate brown people from the cities." Romero said that in the Seattle area, "Filipinos and some of these white people used to fight each others in the street … Gang by gang. We gang up too, once in awhile." Romero's recollection of violence directed at him and his friends in Seattle makes his failure to mention violence or discrimination in Alaska significant. Romero was aware of and experienced racial discrimination and violence, but his memories of Alaska Time include none of those concerns.[82]

Ben Rinonos migrated to the United States for "the adventure, see the world, other places. But I like to go to school in this country … But, I don't know, something, some kind, prevented me." Already thirty-two years of age when he arrived in the United States, Rinonos was forced to choose between education and work. "There is a job in Alaska, that's all," said Rinonos, "but that's seasonal. And then we look for another kind of job around here [Seattle], before and after Alaska Time." Rinonos described the difficulty Filipinos in the United States experienced trying to find work, but in Alaska, "that's where all the Filipinos could get a job, in cannery." After Alaska Time, Rinonos often traveled to Washington and California, working as a laborer on farms. In both states Rinonos heard rumors of violence planned against Filipino workers. "We used to hear about threats and we could release ourself from it. Because we know

[82] Rudy C. Romero interviewed by Teresa Cronin, Accession No. FIL-KNG-75-4tc; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

beforehand, then we could go away from it," he recounted. Rinonos avoided confrontation, leaving before he could become the victim of racial violence. The situation in Alaska was different, however. Cannery work held little attraction for white Americas. Without the threat of white violence, Alaskeros found they had other concerns.

In 1933, a group of Alaskeros in Nushagak, Alaska, calling themselves "The Filipino Victims," sent a letter to Arthur Daly, the superintendent of PAF's Nushagak cannery. The cannery workers wrote to inform Daly that their, "Chinese … contracting party is not giving us a square deal in several very important matters." The letter referred to the Filipino Victims' "frequent complaints over this human carelessness" that PAF had previously failed to address. The Filipino Victims closed their letter with a demand for action and a perhaps not so subtle threat, writing: "We respectfully invite your attention and immediate consideration over this urgent crisis of ours before any serious consequences occur … which will inevitably take place, should our voice remain unheard and which will seriously involve the management of the P.A.F. and other responsible party." But the racial discrimination the Filipino Victims faced from their Chinese contracting party was not physical threats or intimidation. The complaints were not that the Filipino laborers were somehow being cheated out of their hard-earned money by unscrupulous labor contractors. Nor were the complaints that living conditions at the isolated Alaska cannery were unbearable.

All the complaints were about food. Specifically, the Filipino Victims protested: "(A) Insanitary kitchen and dining room; (B) Improper preparation of food … (C) Improper variation of foodstuff … (D) Commercializing the kitchen … (E) We are obliged to use the Chinese bowl and chopsticks … (F) Pans and other dishes … are not well washed … (G) Untidy appearance

[of the Chinese cooks] … (H) Dirty rags."[83] Of course, improperly prepared and served food can cause significant health problems, and the workers were justified in resenting the financial exploitation of being forced to pay for food they were supposed to receive as reimbursement for their labor. The archival record does not contain any response to the Filipino Victims' demands, but the existence of this letter suggests that in Alaska Filipinos were more concerned about food preparation than bodily violence. The difference is significant.

Compared to the racial violence faced by Filipinos in California and Washington, the culinary complaints of the Filipino Victims seem, from the distance of nearly ninety years, less pressing. Based upon the testimony of men like Romero and Rinonos, it is clear that Filipinos in Alaska knew of the racial violence Filipinos faced in the States. It therefore seems safe to assume that the Filipino Victims also knew of similar instances of racial violence along the West Coast. Indeed, it is possible some of the Filipino Victims were also victims of a Washington or California mob. It must have been a relief to spend a quarter of the year in a place where such violence could be forgotten. The letter's understated threat that serious consequences might occur if PAF took no action also indicates a level of power held by Filipino laborers in Alaska. While a migratory stoop laborer might be fired and easily replaced in the fields of California, a cannery worker, once in Alaska, was nearly irreplaceable, and this reality gave great strength to the Filipino community in Alaska, allowing these young men to revel in being Filipino once again.

As a consequence of cultural, social, and economic pressures in the Philippines, Filipino migrants to the United States during the 1920s and 1930s were almost entirely young men. In the United States, these young Filipino men created a hierarchy of masculinity based upon the

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[83] Filipino Victims to Arthur Daly, June 1933, Box 12, File 5, Archie Shiels Papers, Center for Studies of the Pacific Northwest, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

difficulty and danger of the work they performed. Alaskeros ranked at the top of this hierarchy.[84] For members of a masculine community that found itself frequently under violent physical attack in the United States, Alaska Time offered not only a respite from violence, but an opportunity to reassert one's manhood and, equally important, to reconnect with the boys.

For young Filipino men in the United States, boxing offered an escape from the challenges of life in the metropole as well as an opportunity to prove one's masculinity in front of his peers and white Americans.[85] Marino Guiang did not want to come to the United States, but in 1924 his aunt convinced him that the Philippines held no future for him, so he boarded a ship bound for Seattle. "I was lucky enough I arrived on June and July," said Guiang, "I went to Alaska, see, for two months." Finding work was difficult when Guiang returned to Seattle following the canning season, "and finally I drifted to going to boxing shows." Guiang recalled that he only watched boxing matches until one day an opponent for a boxer named Ray Woods could not be found. Being the appropriate weight to box Woods, the organizers asked Guiang if he could fight. "Sure, I could fight," recalled Guiang. "I was not never scared or anything. I was never nervous." Guiang stated that Woods won the bout via decision that day, but when promoters sought to organize a rematch, Woods demurred. "He didn't want to meet me anymore," said Guiang. He may have lost the boxing match to Woods, but Guiang had proven his manhood in front of an audience of white American men.

Guiang was not the only Filipino boxer in the Pacific Northwest at the time. "They [white Americans] like Filipinos at that time because they were so many good Filipino fighters at that time," said Guiang. "There were quite a few Filipino boys," continued Guiang, "but none of them took it, you know, really seriously like I did." Guiang did take boxing seriously. The sport

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[84] España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila*, 8.
[85] España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila*, 95.

became his primary means of financial support for much of the year. The money won was not much, but "we could get something to eat and wash our clothes," said Guiang. The poor winnings of the regional boxing circuit would not have been enough for Guiang to continue his life in the United States without the salmon cannery work, though. Every year when Alaska Time began, Guiang traveled north and worked in the canneries. But he continued boxing even during his summers in Alaska, eventually becoming the Alaska boxing champion. More than forty years later, Guiang could not help but proudly reassert the masculinity his prowess as a boxer signaled to the world. Although he weighed only 115 pounds, he regularly fought larger men and those who saw him outside the ring "couldn't believe I was a fighter, see, champion of Alaska, because I was so small." Guiang retired as a boxer and became a trainer in 1933. His boxers performed well, many becoming Golden Gloves champions. Training boxers—white, black, and Filipino—allowed Guiang to travel the United States and vacation in the Philippines.[86] Boxing provided a platform from which Guiang could proclaim his masculinity not only to Filipinos in Alaska, but to the entire United States and even the world beyond. Without Alaska Time, however, Guiang never would have had the opportunity to develop the reputation upon which his boxing success was built

Toribio M. Martin migrated to Seattle in 1926. "Right away I went to Alaska, worked for the canneries down there. We been getting $60 a month for four months work," he recalled. Martin continued, "In those days that is the best money you ever make is to go to Alaska." After Alaska Time ended, Martin described a migratory pattern that took him to Montana to pick beets and California to pick oranges. But after that, he said, "winter comes, that is the hardest part of

[86] Marino F. Guiang interviewed by Dorothy Cordova, Accession No. FIL-KNG-76-52dc; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

our life. Because there is hardly any work, you have to seek shelter with some of the boys." Not only was agricultural work not as financially rewarding as cannery work, according to Martin Filipinos were far more likely to encounter racial violence on a California farm than an Alaska cannery. Martin described out-of-work white Americans "staging riots and fights everywhere we go." Martin remembered that on one occasion a white mob stuffed a group of Filipinos in sacks and threw them in the Sacramento River. He even spoke of one attack that ended when "everything went black, you know. When I came too I found myself in the hospital." For young men who took great pride in their masculinity, such treatment surely chafed. But Alaska offered them the chance to reassert their threatened masculinity. So desperate was Martin to return to the male companionship of the canneries that one year he stowed away on board a steamship bound for Alaska. Martin managed to make it to Alaska because "some of the boys come over in my hiding place to give me something to eat." Martin's repeated use of the phrase "the boys" teems with the importance of masculine community. By 1976, old and retired, Martin wanted to return to Alaska with his wife Agnes, an Alaska Native. "I've been trying to convince her to go to Alaska, but she doesn't want to go," Martin lamented. Martin's memories of Alaska, no doubt filled with Filipino brotherhood, had a greater attraction for him than Agnes' memories of growing up in Alaska had for her.[87]

Martin's recollections of the boys and Ignacio Navarrete's perpetual bachelorhood operating a casino suggest the existence of a same-sex relationships among Alaskeros. Several scholars have noted the existence of male and transgender sex workers at the Alaska canneries,

[87] Toribio M. Martin interviewed by Dorothy Cordova, Accession No. FIL-KNG-76-44dc; Washington State Oral/Aural History Program Interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

as well as on board the transport ships to and from the canneries.[88] Separated from their homes and Filipina women, many Alaskeros may have embraced a "bachelor subculture," which occupied an important position in the gay cultural imagination of the early twentieth century. Formed primarily by transient and working-class men in urban centers, the bachelor subculture combined a "shared code of manliness" with "open displays of homosexuality" (but not at the expense of heterosexual encounters) and a rejection of the domesticity of family life. Immigrants lacking female partners of their own ethnicity formed a significant share of the bachelor subculture, which centered around poolrooms, saloons, and cellar clubrooms.[89] The isolated, masculine, transient community of Filipino laborers in Alaska lent itself to the development of sexual relationships between men.

The scarcity of evidence for same-sex sexual activity among Alaskeros, however, should caution scholars against speaking with too great a certainty regarding this specific community. The bachelor subculture, while comprised largely of transient workers like Alaskeros, found expression most often in urban centers during times of labor inactivity. If similar homosexual communities existed among Alaskeros, they would have more likely taken shape in Seattle, rather than Alaska. Additionally, the evidence of male and transgender sex workers in Alaska corresponds more closely with times of Chinese and Japanese cannery laborers, rather than the Alaskeros. This is not to say that same-sex sexual activity did not occur among Alaskeros, it certainly must have, but rather is a caution against applying evidence of behavior among members of one cultural group too quickly to members of a separate community. In fact, what

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[88] Masson and Guimary, "Asian Labor Contractors in the Alaskan Canned Salmon Industry: 1880-1937," 390-391; Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 54-55 and 113-114; and Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 36, 41, and 81.
[89] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 76-86, quotes on 79.

sketchy evidence as does exist indicates that by the time of Alaskero labor dominance in the 1930s, cannery owners and operators, fearful of venereal disease spreading to the salmon being handled and seeking to increase labor efficiency, actively drove away male and transgender prostitutes.[90] While the reality of homosexual experiences cannot be disputed (after all, the sex workers needed a clientele to be driven away from), the scarcity of evidence is another indicator that scholars need to more carefully consider the peculiarities of Alaska in all studies of the U.S. West and the Pacific Northwest in particular.

The End of Alaska Time

Alaska became a state in 1959, changing—but not ending—its imperial relationship with the United States. Although the state remained, in many ways, a U.S. colony, statehood granted Alaska certain regulatory powers that had previously been exercised by Congress, thousands of miles away in Washington D.C.[91] One of the first laws passed by the new state outlawed fish traps. Washington State had passed a similar law in 1934. These state laws, designed to help protect the health of the fisheries, spelled the end of salmon canning as a viable industry; without the traps salmon could not be caught in large enough numbers to justify canning. At the same time, improved refrigeration meant that fresh salmon could be transported directly to markets almost anywhere in the world without the need of canning. By the 1960s the salmon canning industry had almost completely disappeared.

The Filipino experience in the United States changed as well. The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 established of a quota of fifty Filipino migrants per year to the United States as part of the transition toward Philippine independence, which was granted in 1946. A new wave of

[90] Masson and Guimary, "Asian Labor Contractors in the Alaskan Canned Salmon Industry: 1880-1937," 391; and Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 55.

[91] For more on Alaska's perpetual colonial position, see Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 2d ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020).

Filipino migration began in 1965 following the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act, with Filipinos eventually becoming the largest group of Asian immigrants to the United States. But with the collapse of the salmon canning industry Alaska no longer occupied a position of importance for new generations of Filipino Americans.

For nearly forty years, however, Alaska Time had sustained the Filipino community in the United States. Alaska provided Filipinos in the United States with the financial and communal support necessary to not only survive, but to also thrive. Alaska Time shaped the Filipino experience in the United States in ways no one could have predicted. Filipinos did not migrate to the United States in order to work in the canneries. Indeed, many, perhaps most, of the first migrants embarked for the plantations of Hawai‘i. Eventually though, thousands of Filipinos found their way to the mainland, and from there to Alaska. It is more than mere coincidence that two other U.S. Pacific colonies, Hawai‘i and Alaska, served such important roles in the imperial networks that brought Filipinos to the United States and then supported their continued presence in the country. Without the draw of Hawai‘i how many fewer Filipinos would have left their old homes? Without Alaska how many would have been able to remain in their new homes? But Hawai‘i did not hold the same continuing importance for Filipinos once in the United States. Filipinos did not return to Hawai‘i year after year as they did to Alaska. The United States' northernmost colony formed the cornerstone of the Filipino migratory labor pattern in the United States. Only in Alaska could large numbers of the young Filipino men laboring in the American Far North come together to reaffirm their uniquely Filipino understanding of themselves and their masculinity at an annually appointed time.

Alaska Time was the result of the unique intersection within the U.S. Pacific world of continental and overseas empire. In order to exploit a natural resource found on the edges of the

United States' lone North American colony, an imperial network was created, quite by accident, that imported thousands of human laborers from the country's largest Pacific colony. Alaska Time was only possible because of the empire the United States built in the Pacific world.

At the same time, from the perspective of many white Americans, the presence of Filipinos in the United States revealed one of the biggest drawbacks of imperialism in an empire that retained a significant territorial basis, namely unchecked populations of foreigners. For all the historiographical talk of the search for Asian markets, which was real, such markets failed to develop in a meaningful way.[92] In practice, imperialism did not exploit markets, but natural resources. Not only was territorial possession unnecessary for such exploitation, an idea that Americans were only beginning to understand in the early twentieth century, territorial possession encouraged colonial subjects to travel to the metropole. Immigration laws could exclude or limit those most Americans considered undesirable or unassimilable, but empire undercut such policies and not only allowed colonials into the metropole, but also provided a measure of protection to such people, like Filipinos, once they were in the country.

American leaders adapted by enacting the Tydings-McDuffie Act, which guaranteed the Philippines its eventual independence and severely restricted immigration from the islands while also ensuring the continued imperialist relationship between the United States and Philippines for the remainder of the twentieth century.[93] But other colonial subjects remained in the United

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[92] No bigger proponent of so-called Open Door imperialism existed than William Appleman Williams, for whom the idea was the key to understanding U.S. empire in the twentieth century. Some of his key works include, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 50th Anniversary ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009); *The Contours of American History*, 50th Anniversary ed. (New York: Verso, 2011); *The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Conciousness in a Marketplace Society* (New York: Random House, 1969); and *Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America's Present Predicament Along with a Few Thoughts About an Alternative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[93] For more on how the United States maintained its imperialist position in the Philippines, see: H. W. Brands, *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press,

States. Alaska Natives not only remained in the Northland, their numbers made them influential. Unlike the Philippines, however, Alaska was an incorporated territory and could not be so easily disposed of. American leaders had dealt with the Alaskeros by making them not only culturally foreign, but politically foreign as well. Those leaders cold not apply the same tactic to Alaska Natives. A new approach was needed.

1992); and Nick Cullather, *Illusions of Influence: The Political Economy of United States-Philippines Relations, 1942-1960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

5 – No Reservations

On 18 December 1971, President Richard Nixon affixed his signature to Public Law 92-203, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Through ANCSA, the United States government gave Alaska's Indigenous peoples terms unheard of in U.S. history. Collectively, Alaska Natives obtained title to 44 million acres of land, roughly the size of Missouri, and received $952.5 million for the extinguishment of their land rights throughout the rest of the state; this at a time when all the Native American nations of the Lower 48 states had been paid a total of $251 million for land claims.[1] ANCSA was an Indigenous adaptation to the growing economic and demographic strength of the U.S. empire in Alaska during the twentieth century that secured Native land rights in Alaska as nowhere else in the country. The irony of ANCSA, however, was that Alaska Natives only managed to secure those rights by tethering themselves to the imperialist extractive industries that came to so fully define Alaskan politics, economy, and life in the twentieth century. While ANCSA protected Indigenous lands in Alaska, it did so by further integrating Alaska Natives into the U.S. capitalist empire.

Alaska Natives at the time were generally pleased with ANCSA; it represented all they had spent decades fighting to secure—namely a means to protect their lands, villages, and economic future. ANCSA embodied the culmination of an approach to dealing with European Americans—one that accepted marketplace profits but rejected a forfeiture of sovereignty—taken by many Alaska Natives that was, by 1971, hundreds of years old and had served Alaska's Indigenous peoples relatively well in preserving land rights and a degree of independence nearly unheard of among Indigenous people in the rest of the country. By seeking to incorporate elements of European and American economic culture into their own, albeit sometimes

[1] Donald Craig Mitchell, *Take My Land, Take My Life: The Story of Congress's Historic Settlement of Alaska Native Land Claims, 1960-1971* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2001), 168.

unwillingly, Alaska Natives successfully carved out a space for themselves in Alaskan and American culture that few could have predicted in 1867.[2] Still, many Alaska Natives born after the enactment of ANCSA have expressed dissatisfaction with the law, primarily arguing that by dividing Alaska Natives into thirteen regional and more than 200 village corporations the law interferes with traditional subsistence strategies and political infrastructures.

The efforts of Alaska Natives to create a uniquely Indigenous space within the wider framework of U.S. imperialism was not uncontested. Indeed, for a time during the early twentieth century it appeared as though Alaska Natives might find themselves placed on reservations. Surprisingly, considering the history of reservations throughout the rest of the U.S. West, in order to legally protect their access to natural resources many Alaska Natives actively campaigned *for* the creation of reservations, while it fell to capitalists and speculators to argue against the creation of reservations in Alaska. This inversion of the traditional roles of those for and against the creation of reservations was an adaptation indicative of a significant change in the U.S. empire during the twentieth century.

It should be noted that there was no normative reservation experience in the United States. The creation of reservations in the continental United States did not occur linearly nor did every Indigenous group experience the imposition of reservation life similarly, or in some cases, at all. For example, the historian Gregory Smithers refers to Cherokee removal from the Southeast to Indian Territory as a diaspora that many Cherokees saw as "the only means of preserving some semblance of Cherokee identity, or soul."[3] Frederick Hoxie argued that while the Great Sioux Agreement of 1889 "was designed to destroy what remained of the Teton bands'

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[2] See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Alaska Native groups and cultures prior to contact with Europeans.
[3] Gregory D. Smithers, *The Cherokee Diaspora: An Indigenous History of Migration, Resettlement, and Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 8.

traditional way of life," reservations eventually "became cultural homelands … centers for awareness and even for hope."[4] On the other hand, Pekka Hämäläinen describes the Great Sioux Reservation as representing the "dark side of the post-Civil War liberal order" which resulted in the Lakotas becoming a "captive people, divided, weakened, and confined to reservations that often seemed less homelands than prisons."[5] The reservation-making period itself was relatively short lived, lasting from the early 1830s to 1871, after which the U.S. government enacted several initiatives intended to eliminate reservations and assimilate Native Americans.

The Dawes Allotment Act in 1887 represented the first effort to undo reservations. Described by Alexandra Harmon as designed to "stimulate intelligent selfishness" and " redirect their [Native Americans'] political allegiance from their tribes to the American government," the Dawes Act divided much Indigenous land into individual, privately owned parcels and sold the surplus to white Americans.[6] By the late nineteenth century, many U.S. political and business leaders viewed Native Americans and the government's special recognition of their land and hunting rights as a hindrance to the furtherance of American economic prosperity. For instance, government and business leaders believed Blackfeet hunting of elk harmed Glacier National Park's tourist industry, eventually resulting in the diminishment of Blackfeet hunting and fishing rights.[7] The coming of the Great Depression, the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the

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[4] Frederick E. Hoxie, "From Prison to Homeland: The Cheyenne River Indian Reservation before WWI," *South Dakota History* 10, no. 1 (January 1979), 1 and 3.
[5] Pekka Hämäläinen, *Lakota America: A New History of Indigenous Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 381.
[6] Alexandra Harmon, *Reclaiming the Reservation: Histories of Indian Sovereignty Suppressed and Renewed* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 16. For a brief discussion on the complexity of Indigenous responses to the Dawes Act, see: Donald Fixico, "Federal and State Policies and American Indians," in *A Companion to American Indian History*, ed. Neal Salisbury and Philip J. Deloria (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 384-385
[7] Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), chapter 5.

interventionist policies of the New Deal altered the government's approach to Native land rights, for a time.

In 1934, Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), the centerpiece of what some call the Indian New Deal. The IRA reversed the Dawes Act, restored reservation sovereignty through the creation of U.S.-style tribal governments based upon written constitutions, and offered economic assistance through business loans and appropriations to purchase new lands.[8] The Navajo example demonstrates, however, that the IRA achieved mixed results, at best. According to the historian Richard White, rigidly enforced reservation boundaries, intended by well-meaning bureaucrats to keep the Navajo safe from white encroachments, restricted Navajo movement, and therefore access to needed resources, in a way that "crippled their way of life and accelerated the onset of dependency."[9] Judging the IRA to have failed, government leaders once again looked to assimilationist policies.

Following World War II, an atmosphere of individualism and faith in capitalism led U.S. leaders to embrace a policy of Indigenous self-determination known as termination. Implemented under the leadership of Dillon Myer, who had been in charge of the Japanese relocation camp program, termination aimed to assimilate Native Americans by fostering Indigenous population resettlement in cities, thereby turning Natives into American wage-earners and bringing the U.S. government's trustee relationship with Indigenous Americans to an end. Proponents of termination went so far as describe the policy as Indigenous emancipation. While many Native Americans supported voluntary acceptance of termination, they also clung to an understanding of the relationship between the federal government and Native peoples as unique and wanted to

[8] Kenneth R. Philip, "Termination: A Legacy of the Indian New Deal," *Western Historical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (April 1983), 169.
[9] Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 313.

maintain the benefits, such as tax-free land and Indigenous self-government, that the relationship fostered. The government's view by the middle of the twentieth century that Native concerns represented domestic affairs clashed with Native interpretations rooted in Indigenous identities and treaty rights—in essence foreign relations.[10] Eventually, the interpretive clash helped inspire movements for Indigenous sovereignty which undermined termination.

The historian Kent Blansett argues that the Intertribal Red Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and which continues to shape Indigenous political actions today, grew out of resistance to termination and calls to recognize Native sovereignty and home rule.[11] The Red Power movement, says Blansett, reflected a Native Nationalism that Native Americans have employed "to defend and promote their historic rights to maintain their distinct sovereignty from one another and to uphold their sovereign status apart from the interference of any colonial power or nation-state."[12] It is within this context of the ever-changing perception of reservations by white and Native Americans that Alaska Native land battles must be understood. The unique political status of Alaska, and therefore its occupants, created a space for both white Americans and Alaska Natives to test the boundaries of the U.S. government's Indigenous policies.

Whereas in the nineteenth century, capitalists and speculators could count on the federal government to remove Indigenous people from valuable land regardless of prior legal or treaty obligations, by the 1930s this was no longer the case. Corporations and Alaska Natives alike no longer believed the federal government would axiomatically support the development of business over the land rights of Native peoples. Thus, business leaders campaigned to prevent the

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[10] Kenneth R. Philip, "Dillon S. Myer and the Advent of Termination: 1950-1953," *Western Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (January 1988).
[11] Kent Blansett, *A Journey to Freedom: Richard Oakes, Alcatraz, and the Red Power Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 50-51 and 72.
[12] Blansett, *A Journey to Freedom*, 3.

establishment of reservations in Alaska. But neither did businesses interested in the exploitation of Alaska's natural resources want to own the land themselves. Instead, speculators saw continued federal ownership and leasing of Alaska's resource rich territory as the best option. While ANCSA eventually granted title to 44 million acres to Alaska's Native people, and statehood transferred 104.5 million acres to the state of Alaska, an area roughly the size of California, the federal government still owns 223.8 million acres of Alaskan land, larger than the entire state of Texas.

Such federal ownership of western lands in the United States is not a new story.[13] Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century the federal government promoted development—meaning mining, timber extraction, and cattle grazing—throughout the West by leasing federally owned land to capitalists and speculators at bargain rates.[14] This practice continued in Alaska, where the changing conceptions of a reservation's purpose and the relationship between the federal government and those who lived on Alaska's potential reservations complicated actual reservation creation. No longer conceived of as prisons, by the 1930s all parties involved—government, Indigenous, and business—understood that reservations could serve as bastions of economic power for Alaska Natives.[15]

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[13] See, Andrew C. Isenberg, *Mining California: An Ecological History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).
[14] James William Hurst argued that the "base lines" and "working principles" concerning public policy and the operation of U.S. law in the West supported relatively uninhibited access to the land and its resources in order that Americans "should realize their creative energy and exercise their liberty peculiarly in the realm of the economy to the enhancement of other values." James Willard Hurst, *Law and the Conditions of Freedom in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956), 5-6. For an expanded exploration of how such policies continue to shape the West, see: Charles F. Wilkinson, *Crossing the Next Meridian: Land, Water, and the Future of the West* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1992).
[15] In the wake of allotment many Native American tribes and nations began taking proactive steps to preserve reservation lands as uniquely tribal, often by strategically asserting Indigenous ideas of community organization. See: Emily Greenwald, *Reconfinguring the Reservation: The Nez Perces, Jicarilla Apaches, and the Dawes Act* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002); and Morris W. Foster, *Being Comanche: A Social History of an American Indian Community* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), especially chapter 3.

Considering the complexity of the history of Native land claims in Alaska, as well as the continuing debates on the topic, the paucity of works investigating Alaska Natives and their lands is unfortunate and suggestive of how the imperial imagining of Alaska as a space unfit for serious consideration continues to affect the state and its residents to this day. Investigations of Alaska Native land claims tend to come in three variations. The first follows the chronology of land claims in Alaska, culminating in ANCSA and generally portraying the settlement as a positive, if imperfect, solution for all parties.[16] The second variation follows the pattern of the first, but concludes by highlighting arguments common among Alaska Natives born after the settlement that ANCSA threatens the continued existence of traditional Alaska Native cultures.[17] The final type of investigation is a strict legal history of Alaska Native land claims.[18] While such studies are useful, they fail to tie questions of land claims in Alaska to the precedents established during the nineteenth century or position the claims within the changing contexts of the twentieth century.

Other scholars have undertaken to address specific elements of the land rights question in shorter works. Stephen Haycox has written about the specific role of the Tongass National Forest in the struggle between the federal government and Alaska Natives. Claus-M. Naske investigated how Territorial Governor Ernest Gruening opposed Alaska Native land demands in favor of economic assimilation. And most recently, Jessica Leslie Arnett investigated how

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[16] For example, see: Robert D. Arnold, *Alaska Native Land Claims* (Anchorage: Alaska Native Foundation, 1976); Donald Craig Mitchell, *Sold American: The Story of Alaska Natives and Their Land, 1867-1959* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997); and Mitchell, *Take My Land, Take My Life*.
[17] For example, see: Romana Ellen Skinner, *Alaska Native Policy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997).
[18] For example, see: David S. Case and David A. Voluck, *Alaska Natives and American Laws*, 3d ed. (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2012); and Sidney L. Harring, *Crow Dog's Case: American Indian Sovereignty, Tribal Law, and United States Law in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chapter 7.

Alaska Natives responded to new federal policies in the twentieth century, including first the Indian Reorganization Act and then the federal termination policy.[19] These scholars have added tremendously to our understanding of an extremely complicated legal matter, but no scholar has yet to attempt to explain the absence of reservations in Alaska in light of the changing nature of the U.S. empire of the early- and mid-twentieth century.

Russian America

In the sixteenth century, Russia's lack of precious metals hampered the aspiring empire's ability to trade with its European and Asian neighbors. What Russia lacked in gold or silver, however, was more than made up for in furs, which served as a substitute for hard currency. Russian hunters harvested furs from beaver, fox, and ermine (a type of weasel), but sable (a type of marten) fur was the true prize. Russia established a monopoly over Siberia's fur trade, effectively preventing English and Dutch traders and hunters from using their seaborne mobility to penetrate the Siberian fur industry. According to the Russian anthropologist Oleg V. Bychkov, the tax levied upon the income generated by the fur trade was key in restoring a fully independent Russian state as well as establishing the Romanov dynasty.[20]

So aggressively and effectively did Russian *promyshlenniki* harvest western Siberia's fur bearers that by the end of the sixteenth century the region was nearly devoid of any fur-bearing animals, forcing the *promyshlenniki* to push east across Siberia. By the close of the seventeenth

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[19] Stephen Haycox, "Economic Development and Indian Land Rights in Modern Alaska: The 1947 Tongass Timber Act," *Western Historical Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (February 1990); Claus-M. Naske, "Ernest Gruening and Alaska Native Claims," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (October 1991); and Jessica Leslie Arnett, "Unsettled Rights in Territorial Alaska: Native Land, Sovereignty, and Citizenship from the Indian Reorganization Act to Termination," *Western Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Autumn 2017).

[20] Oleg V. Bychkov, "Russian Hunters in Eastern Siberia in the Seventeeth Century: Lifestyle and Economy," *Arctic Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (1994), 73.

century, the *promyshlenniki* had reached the Pacific Ocean and sea otters had become the target of choice among the hunters.

As Russian hunters spread eastward, they brought the Russian Empire with them. The Russian Empire's estate system, in which each Russian subject had a legally defined and protected role, proved flexible enough to incorporate Indigenous Siberians. Male ethnic Russian *promyshlenniki* married or fathered children with female Siberians. Their offspring, fully recognized subjects of the Russian Empire fitting within their legally defined estate, formed the new generation of *promyshlenniki*. Russian officials encouraged Indigenous Siberian men to participate in the fur trade by either financial inducement or the kidnapping of local communities' women and children. By the time *promyshlenniki* began landing on the Aleutian Islands in the mid-eighteenth century, they had developed an economic and social pattern that ensured the furtherance of the Russian fur trade. Representatives of the Russian fur-trade industry continued this pattern of labor, both generational and coerced, when they encountered the various people referred to today as Alaska Natives.

Several Russian companies vied for control of fur hunting in Russian America, but after 1799 the imperial government granted a monopoly to the Russian American Company (RAC), which expired only upon the transfer of Russian America to the United States in 1867.[21] Leaders of the RAC made little effort to gain effective control of most of Russian America. For Russian leaders, North America never represented a place for possible large-scale settlement. Russian America was solely a source of furs, and the best hunters were the Indigenous people colonial

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[21] For more on the history of Russia in North America, see: James R. Gibson, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America: The Changing Geography of Supply of Russian America, 1784-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Owen Matthews, *Glorious Misadventures: Nikolai Rezanov and the Dream of a Russian America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

officials co-opted into their commercial enterprises through either marriage or hostage taking. Therefore, direct Russian control of North American territory rarely stretched much beyond the palisades of their settlements. This was especially true when the RAC moved its headquarters from Kodiak to present-day Sitka after the extermination of the former location's fur seal population. The Tlingits of southeast Alaska proved beyond the control of the RAC, so much so that the leading scholar of Alaska Natives' land rights, Donald Craig Mitchell, argues that, "no matter how worn the misconception, the Treaty of Purchase did not convey to the United States fee title to Alaska's 375 million acres of land."[22]

Russian businessmen, government and naval officials, and representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church created a system that drew upon the empire's experience colonizing Siberia in an effort to expand an economic system that exploited natural resources for economic profit. Thus, two elements of Russian rule concerning land policy and Alaska Natives significantly affected American attitudes toward Alaska, its Indigenous inhabitants, and interpretations of land. First, like their Russian predecessors, Americans did not initially conceive of Alaska as a land of viable white settlement until well into the twentieth century. While Alaska abounded in natural resources, the region only required enough Russians or white Americans to manage the extraction of those resources. Consequently, Russians and Americans alike failed to penetrate deeply into Alaska or in significant numbers.[23] Second, because Russians and Americans understood Alaska primarily in terms of economic possibility, rather than a land destined for

[22] Mitchell, *Sold American*, 42.
[23] Even today, of the 730,000 people who live in Alaska, nearly 400,000 reside in the Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna region, in the south of the state near the Gulf of Alaska. The interior region, including Fairbanks, is home to only about 110,000 people. The remaining population, about 220,000, lives in four other primarily coastal regions. "2019 Population Estimates by Borough, Census Area, and Economic Region," State of Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, accessed 27 February 2020. http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/.

white settlement, both states depended upon Christian missionaries and representatives to conduct much of the earliest diplomacy with Alaska Natives. Thus, while it may not have been purposeful, early U.S. actions toward the region's Native populations represented little more than imperial inheritance or borrowing of Russian policy by American representatives.[24]

Nineteenth Century Alaska

The treaty of purchase transferring Russian America to the United States guaranteed U.S. citizenship to any Russian subject who chose to remain in Alaska. Very few ethnic Russians chose to remain. But Russian America's Indigenous people were, as far as St. Petersburg was concerned, Russian subjects as well. Indigenous people were usually denied citizenship under U.S. policy. Despite the treaty's stipulation that Russian subjects had the opportunity to receive U.S. citizenship, American leaders chose not to grant citizenship to Alaska Natives, even those largely incorporated into Russian society in North America. This refusal to grant citizenship to Alaska's Native population did much to determine U.S. government policy regarding Alaska Natives and their land.

At the time of the Alaska purchase, the U.S. government and military had been, for decades, forcing Native Americans in the continental United States onto reservations. One might think that the government would have implemented a similar policy in Alaska, which appeared to have enough space to easily force Alaska Natives onto lands white Americans found undesirable. That was not the case, however. While the U.S. government's Native land policy in

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[24] Russia's experience in North America was not unique. The French in the Great Lakes region followed a similar pattern of creating colonies staffed largely by Christian missionaries and fur traders with little intension of creating large or permanent settlements. See: Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

Alaska at times reflected that practiced by the U.S. government on the mainland, it always retained a fair amount of distinctiveness.

It is important to realize that the United States created Indian removal and reservation systems in a piecemeal fashion to ensure white access to desirable lands and resources. Implied in efforts to open such lands was a sizeable white population to exploit Indigenous lands and the lands' resources. For much of Alaska's history, especially during the nineteenth century, the United States' northernmost possession lacked a white population of sufficient size to demand or enforce such a reservation system. Also, the United States government ended its system of treaty-making with Native Americans in 1871, only four years after the purchase of Alaska. Because treaties fashioned many of the reservations on the mainland, there was little time to conclude such treaties even if there had been enough white Americans in Alaska to encourage treaty and reservation making. These explanations—a miniscule white population and the ending of the treaty system—matter when considering the lack of reservations in Alaska, but the issue is far more complicated.

From 1867 to 1877, the only U.S. government presence in Alaska was the Army. When Colonel Jefferson C. Davis took command of the Department of Alaska in October 1867, his troops, like the Russians before them, found themselves greatly outnumbered and little able to project the power and will of the U.S. government beyond the range of their cannon. Unlike the Russian forces, however, the U.S. Army could more reliably call upon the assistance of U.S. Naval vessels, which both transported soldiers when needed and provided mobile and invulnerable heavy gun emplacements. It was naval power that allowed the U.S. military to more effectively begin the process of subduing Alaska's Native peoples, especially the Tlingit and Haida of southeast Alaska. Perhaps it was for this reason that command of the Alaska district

was transferred from the Army to the Revenue Cutter Service (the predecessor of the U.S. Coast Guard) from 1877 to 1879 and then to the Navy from 1879 to 1884, when Congress finally authorized an Alaskan civil government but not full territorial status.[25]

Few, if any, pushed for reservations in Alaska in the decades immediately after the purchase. Most importantly, during the earliest years of American Alaska, there simply were not enough white Americans living in Alaska to agitate for reservations, to say nothing of believing enough whites actually lived in the district to make implementing such a policy possible. An 1885 report demonstrated the tenuous nature of white authority in Alaska. Charged with reporting on the condition of Alaska's Indigenous population, the report limited itself to those living in the Alexander Archipelago, "no means of transportation being available to reach any other portion of the District."[26] Because of their miniscule population and the remoteness of many Native villages, during the nineteenth century white Americans lacked the means to force policy on most Alaska Natives.

In 1871, Congress declared, "No Indian nation or tribe within the territory of the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with whom the United States may contract by treaty."[27] Existing reservations remained in existence and the executive branch retained the power to set aside land for Native American groups, but the end of the treaty system effectively ended the creation of new reservations in the United States. The end of the treaty system also meant that the federal government never recognized Alaskan Native groups as it had Native American tribes and nations in the contiguous states. To this day, there are federally recognized villages in Alaska, but not tribes or nations, although many do refer to

[25] For more on the U.S. military governance of Alaska see Mitchell, *Sold American*, chapter 1.
[26] "Report on the Condition of the Indians," 30 June 1885, MS 0004-11-019, Alaska Territorial Secretary, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[27] Future Treaties with Indian Tribes, 25 U. S. C. § 71 (1871).

various Alaska Native groups with the familiar language of tribes and nations. Coming a mere four years after the purchase of Alaska, the end of the treaty system meant that for the remainder of the nineteenth century, U.S. officials would neither seek to establish reservations in Alaska nor treat with Alaska Native groups as autonomous sovereign peoples. The lack of precedent resulting from this new policy prohibiting treaties thus presented Alaska Natives and government officials with both difficulties and the space to experiment with unique responses to Native land claims.

Throughout nearly the entirety of Alaskan military rule, the federal government in Washington paid almost no attention to Alaska. The district surrendered its promised natural bounty with more difficulty than supporters of the purchase had predicted, causing the taste of the country's newest possession to sour in mouths of many Americans. It may be that the difficult reality of extracting Alaska's natural wealth in the years immediately following the purchase was largely responsible for the recasting of the purchase itself from one of Seward's greatest triumphs to one of folly.[28] For years after the purchase of Alaska, there simply were not enough white Americans in the Far North to force removal or reservations upon Alaska Natives, even if whites had wanted to pursue such a policy. Once white Americans discovered natural wealth in quantities great enough to attract significant migration to Alaska, however, the balance of power in the Far North rapidly shifted.

Knowledge of the presence of gold in the Alaska dates back to shortly after Russian annexation of Alaska. A focus on the harvesting of furs and Alaska's unforgiving climate combined to limit the RAC's efforts to exploit the precious metal. American boosters had lauded Alaska's untapped gold reserves to drum-up support for the purchase in 1867, but finding the

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[28] For more on the mistaken narrative of Seward's Folly, see: Michael A. Hill, "The Myth of Seward's Folly," *Western Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2019).

means to exploit the resource initially proved difficult, again largely because of Alaska's forbidding climate and remote location.[29] When prospectors discovered sizable gold deposits in the Cassiar Mountains of British Columbia in 1872, American stampeders passed through southeast Alaska on their way to the gold fields, but this initial gold rush brought few permanent white settlers to the district. Prospectors discovered gold once again in 1886, this time along Fortymile River in east-central Alaska, but this discovery also failed to bring a sizeable number of whites to Alaska. Within a few years, however, the promise of gold forever changed Alaska's population, and thus the territory itself.

The discovery of gold along the Klondike River and its tributaries in 1896 brought as many as 100,000 white prospectors, the overwhelming majority of them American, to the Alaskan-Canadian frontier. The United States had gone "gold mad" one failed prospector wrote years later.[30] By 1900, though, many prospectors had given up on the hope of finding gold in the American colony centered around Dawson, Canada, and turned their attention to new gold discoveries near Nome, Alaska, located on the southern edge of the Seward Peninsula on Alaska's western shores. Prospectors preferred Nome not only because its seaside location allowed easier access to the gold fields, but because much of the gold was found on the beach itself.[31]

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[29] Initiating a gold rush tended to be more difficult than romantic myths typically acknowledge. For more, see: Kent Curtis, "Producing a Gold Rush: National Ambitions and the Northern Rocky Mountains, 1853-1863," *Western Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 2009). For more on the specifics of the Klondike gold rush, see: Kathryn Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

[30] Arthur Arnold Dietz, *Mad Rush for Gold in Frozen North* (Los Angeles: Times-Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1914), 12.

[31] Terrence Michael Cole, "A History of the Nome Gold Rush: The Poor Man's Paradise" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1983), 100.

The arrival of white Americans to the Alaskan coast, and more tragically the smallpox they brought with them, devastated the Native population in the region; thousands of Yupiit died after coming into contact with the disease. The number of dead and dying Yupiit placed a strain upon the city of Nome that its white residents believed unreasonable. “The City of Nome cannot be expected to take care of every sick or disabled Native who is dumped within the city’s boundaries,” declared the editor of the local newspaper, the *Nome Nugget*, in 1903.[32] The pastor of Nome’s First Congregational Church, C. E. Ryberg, proposed a solution to stem the tide of needy Yupiit—create a reservation nearby upon which to place them. To that end, Ryberg, without the backing of the U.S. government, created the Quartz Creek Reservation in 1903, where as many as eighty-five Yupiit lived until 1905, when Ryberg left Nome. In 1906, the Methodist Church opened a mission and boarding school on the Sinuk River, near Nome. Eventually, more than one hundred Yupiit settled at the Sinuk Mission. By 1908, the Bureau of Education proposed removing all Yupiit from the Nome area and resettling them on an unspecified reservation away from the town. “The authorities have now under consideration the question of removing the Eskimos from the neighborhood of this city in order to save them from the contamination which almost invariably results with the lower class of whites,” reported the *Nugget*. “Not only will the Natives who are here now be sent away, if the plans fructify, but all the Natives who live away from the city will be prevented from approaching.”[33] Russians and the first Americans living in Sitka had limited Indigenous access to the town out of fear for their own safety. Forty years after the purchase, white Americans justified refusing Alaska Natives into another town in order to protect the Indigenous peoples from whites and the diseases that accompanied them. The balance of power in Alaska had shifted.

[32] *Nome Nugget*, 7 January 1903.
[33] *Nome Nugget*, 16 April 1908.

Regardless, by the time of these reservation schemes, the gold rush had mostly played itself out and white Americans were leaving the North in search of new opportunities. With few white Americans left in the area, the proposed removal of the Yupiit never happened and the Sinuk Reservation soon disappeared as well. As with the Quartz Creek Reservation, a religious group privately funded Sinuk. Without parishioners to support the financial operation of these reservations, they soon ceased to exist. The U.S. government had yet to establish any kind of coherent Native policy in Alaska.

Ryberg had drawn inspiration from the Grant Peace Policy of the late 1860s and 1870s. Under this policy, the U.S. government placed members of the Native American tribes and nations of the Great Plains on reservations administered by various Christian denominations. Officials believed that under the tutelage of Christian missionaries and by sending Native American youth to boarding schools around the country, members of the many Indigenous nations would eventually be assimilated into mainstream American society. Additionally, some proponents of the policy believed that white encroachment upon Native lands was inevitable, so by removing Native Americans from the lands white Americans wanted, violence could be avoided. The policy was abandoned in 1876 after George Custer's defeat at Little Bighorn, but as was so often the case, the rules that governed the rest of United States did not apply, or were applied differently, in Alaska.

Sheldon Jackson, more than any other individual, saw to it that an unofficial version of the Peace Policy found its way to Alaska at the end of the nineteenth century. Born in Minaville, in upstate New York, in 1834, Jackson exercised an influence on Alaskan history far greater than his five-foot stature might suggest. After graduating from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1858, the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions sent Jackson to teach at the Spencer Academy,

a boarding school on a Choctaw reservation in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). Jackson proved unsuitable as a teacher in the foreign lands of Indian Territory, so in 1859 he transferred to the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions and found himself assigned to southeast Minnesota, organizing small farm town churches. By 1869, the Board of Home Missions had placed Nebraska, Wyoming, and Colorado within Jackson's administrative jurisdiction. The region for which Jackson was responsible included thousands of Native Americans and Jackson was convinced the only way to convert those Native Americans to Christianity was through systematic education. Thus, Jackson developed a philosophy that aligned closely with proponents of the Grant Peace Plan—Native Americans needed to be moved onto reservations and then educated and civilized by Christian missionaries.[34]

The Grant Peace Policy itself, however, did not establish reservations or boarding schools in Alaska. As Mitchell argues, in Alaska "there were not enough whites who aspired to expropriate enough Native land to make forcing Natives onto reservations at gun and bayonet point worth the trouble."[35] Moreover, the question of whether or not Alaska's Indigenous peoples were Indians is one that, for white Americans in the in the late nineteenth century, was far from certain. In 1872, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Walker expressed the view held by many American leaders well into the twentieth century when he said, "I have never believed that the Natives of Alaska were Indians within the meaning of the Constitution … and I am disposed to avoid entirely the use of the word Indians as applied to them."[36] Government

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[34] For more on the specifics of Sheldon Jackson's life, see: Theodore Charles Hinckley, Jr., "The Alaska Labors of Sheldon Jackson" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1961); Norman J. Bender, *Winning the West for Christ: Sheldon Jackson and the Presbyterianism on the Rocky Mountain Frontier, 1869-1880* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1996); and Jordan Craddick, "Pandering to Glory: Sheldon Jackson's Path to Alaska" (master's thesis, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2013).
[35] Mitchell, *Sold American*, 69.
[36] F. A. Walker to Columbus Delano, 14 March 1872, 42nd Cong., 2d sess., 1872, H. Exec. Doc. 197, 35.

officials avoided clearly defining the racial categorization of Alaska Natives. Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano believed Alaska Natives to be a “semi-barbarous and uncivilized people,” but he also told Congress that, “it must be remembered that it is exceedingly doubtful whether the inhabitants of Alaska … belong to the same race or family of men as the Indians of North America.”[37] Government leaders in Washington may have hesitated to apply Native American policies in Alaska, but Sheldon Jackson did not.

Believing that the missionary policies of all American Christian denominations unnecessarily ignored Alaska Natives, Jackson campaigned to be appointed to a government position in Alaska, where he would have almost free reign to implement policies intended to educate, Christianize, and ultimately assimilate the region’s Indigenous inhabitants to white American culture. Appointed Alaska’s General Agent of Education in 1885, Jackson used federal money to establish boarding schools in Alaska that focused on teaching technical and vocational skills, as well as Christian missionary work and the irradiation of Native cultures and languages. Many years later, Esther Agibinik recalled that at the school at Unalakleet, on Alaska’s western shore, “If we speak inside the school in Eskimo, we get punished. That’s how our dialect, we lose our dialect Eskimo language at home.”[38]

[37] Letter from the Secretary of the Interior, 19 March 1872, 42nd Cong., 2d sess., 1872, H. Exec. Doc. 197, 2.
[38] Esther Agibinik interviewed by Maria Brooks, 10 December 1980 and 22 January 1981, box 1, folder 3, MS 0063, Alaska Women’s Oral History Project, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

Congress ordered the establishment of segregated schools in Alaska in 1905, four years before Jackson died.[39] Many Alaska Natives continued to attend boarding schools until the state of Alaska agreed to build public schools in rural areas in 1976. During the 1920s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs took responsibility for Alaska Native education and built three vocational boarding schools in Alaska. In 1947, the BIA consolidated these schools into one. As in the States, and as Jackson's missionary boarding schools had also emphasized, Indigenous assimilation remained the primary goal of these schools. As such, officials made little effort to acknowledge the cultural differences that existed between the students of varying Alaskan Indigenous backgrounds. For example, Virginia Allen, an Athabascan from central Alaska, recalled that administrators at the Holy Cross Mission School attempted to give her mother "an

Fig. 5-1 The Sitka Industrial and Training School, pictured here in 1887. Original opened in 1878 to teach Tlingit children, the school was renamed in honor of Sheldon Jackson in 1910. Today, the site is a National Historic Landmark. "Sitka Training School for Indian Children," ASL-P88-015, William H. Partridge Photographs, 1886-1887, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

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[39] Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920*, 2d ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 234.

Eskimo tradition." Allen said that when her mother arrived at the mission, "she didn't know what seal oil or seal meat or stuff like that was. That was what was fed to the children." Allen's mother disliked the mission's food so much she ran away when summer arrived and never went back.[40] Elizabeth Baines, a Tlinglit from Ketchikan, similarly remembered, "Used to come food I used to cry all the time because I didn't like what they gave us."[41] In reducing Alaska Natives to one undifferentiated group, Alaska's boarding school system demonstrated that white Americans were more than willing to import continental systems of Indigenous assimilation to Alaska.[42]

The discovery of large quantities of gold in Alaska changed the emphasis Americans in Alaska placed on the necessity of reservations. The influx of gold seekers also gave white Americans the numbers necessary, in conjunction with their technological advantages, to begin seriously contemplating the suitability of reservations for Alaska Natives. For example, the 1912 Alaska Republican campaign platform called for "efficient aid and protection to the natives of Alaska." Such a demand may sound benign, if perhaps paternalistic, but Republicans bracketed the call for Native legal protection with a call for greater government subsidies for placer miners and the creation of an additional U.S. Land Office in the Alaska Third Division. White Alaskans conceived of laws concerning the territory's Native populations as part of a policy for increased

[40] Virginia Allen interviewed by Maria Brooks, 29 July 1980 and 31 July 1981, box 1, folder 4, MS 0063, Alaska Women's Oral History Project, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[41] Elizabeth Baines, interviewed by Maria Brooks, 4 February 1982, box 1, folder 7, MS 0063, Alaska Women's Oral History Project, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[42] For an overview of Native American boarding schools, see: Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); and David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, 2d ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020).

development, organization, and distribution of land for the benefit of whites in Alaska. While not explicitly stated, Alaskan reservations lurked between the lines of the territory's policies.[43]

Alaskan politicians explicitly encouraged Alaska Natives to accept reservation life for their own wellbeing, shortly thereafter. Woodrow Wilson signed an Alaska railway bill into law in 1914. The railroad was to connect the southern coast of Alaska to the territory's interior. Proponents of the bill argued that the railroad would bring development to Alaska's interior, was necessary for the entire territory's development, and that agricultural and economic development trumped the land rights of the Alaska Natives who lived on lands needed for the railroad. Alaska's Congressional delegate at the time, James Wickersham, spent the summer of 1915 attempting to convince leaders of the Athabascan villages near the proposed railroad route to move to reservations. "White people [are] building railroads in this country now," Wickersham said in a meeting with village leaders. "The white men coming from the United States are going to keep taking this land until all the good land is gone, and the Indian people are going to have to move over … and when all the good land is gone, the white men are going to keep on taking more land," Wickersham warned the village leaders. To prevent this from happening, Wickersham told the assembled Athabascan leaders that Alaska Natives could accept homesteads of 160 acres. If Alaska Natives did this, they would "be just equal to the white man," and they could tell those wanting their land "to go on." Wickersham said the other option for these Alaska Natives of the interior was to request "a big reservation for all the Indians to have together" upon which, "you and your people can build an Indian town there. You could have a church, a school and an Indian Agent, an official agent of the President who would show you

[43] "Platform Adopted by the Republican Territorial Convention Assembled at Valdez, Alaska," 29 May 1912, MS 0056, box 1, folder 3, Alaska Campaign Literature, 1889-[ongoing], Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

how to plow land and raise potatoes and other crops."[44] Wickersham told the Athabascans the choice was theirs. Wickerham's honesty in this situation might be questioned, however. Four years earlier, in his private diary, Wickersham wrote that he supported reservations of two square miles, "but no more."[45] It may be that Wickersham was less than truthful with the assembled Indigenous leaders. It is also possible that the railroad and the anticipated economic development of the territory it promised changed Wickersham's views on reservations. In the end, it did not matter. The Athabascan leaders rejected both the homesteads and the reservation. "We don't wish to go on a reservation but wish to stay perfectly free just as we are now," said Krus-ah, also known as Chief Ivan of Crossjacket.[46] Reservations failed to materialize with the arrival of the railroad, but the anticipated development of Alaska meant that white Americans began to re-evaluate how Alaska Natives fit within a twentieth-century interpretation of imperial Alaska. Adaptation was needed.

The struggle over reservations in Alaska serves as a warning against reductionist racial and ethnic thinking. Popular thought tends to collapse Native Americans into a single group rather than the cacophony of peoples that truly exist. Even when distinguished from Indigenous people in the Lower 48, the very label Alaska Natives has a tendency to categorize Alaska's Native peoples as one group. The reservation fight helps to remind us that such essentializing is inaccurate, at best. Not only are all Alaska Native groups not the same, but simply being an Alaska Native, or member of any social group for that matter, does not determine what a person

[44] "Proceedings of a Council," 5 July 1915, MS-0107-38-001, Wickersham State Historic Site. Manuscripts, 1884-1970s. Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[45] "Diary of James Wickersham from October 19th 1911-May 22, 1912," 16 January 1912, MS-0107, box 3, diary 20, Wickersham State Historic Site. Manuscripts, 1884-1970s. Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[46] "Proceedings of a Council," 5 July 1915, MS-0107-38-001, Wickersham State Historic Site. Manuscripts, 1884-1970s. Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

thinks or how they act. Many Alaska Natives supported and fought hard for reservations while many others opposed them.

The passion with which Alaska Natives campaigned for or against reservations also indicates the robustness of Indigenous involvement in Alaska's political process. In 1884, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Elk v. Wilkins* that the Fourteenth Amendment did not apply to Native Americans born into Indigenous tribes recognized by the U.S. government.[47] Because Congress ended the treaty system in 1871, however, the federal government never recognized any tribes in Alaska. Therefore, in 1915, the Alaska territorial government granted Alaskan citizenship to the territory's Native people who "severed all tribal relationships and adopted the habits of civilized life."[48] The act was strengthened in 1923 when a territorial jury ruled that Charley Jones, a Tlingit who spoke no English and lived in the Indian Village near Wrangell, was a citizen and must be allowed to vote. William Paul, a Tlingit who became the first Alaska Native attorney in the territory and later became an important, if divisive, leader within the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB), heralded the verdict as a victory for Alaska Natives in that it clearly demonstrated that "there is no 'tribe of Indians' in the legal sense in Wrangell, or anywhere else where the same form of tribal organization prevails."[49] At least in southeastern Alaska, then, all Alaska Natives were territorial citizens (but not U.S. citizens) and as such, they could vote in local and territorial elections. Alaska Natives quickly put the power of citizenship to work by electing Paul as the first Alaska Native to the territorial legislature. Even white politicians in Alaska would, hereafter, have to take Native voters into account.

[47] *Elk v. Wilkins*, 112 U.S. 94 (1884). The Citizenship Act of 1924 granted U.S. citizenship to Native Americans.
[48] "Chapter 24," in *Territory of Alaska Session Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials, 1915* (Juneau: Daily Empire Print, 1915), 52-53.
[49] "Indian Citizenship Tested," *Alaska Fisherman* (Juneau), January 1924.

Metlakatla Indian Community

Despite early Indigenous resistance to the creation of reservations in Alaska, the federal government established one unique reservation in the 1890s. Unrelated to the later reservation debates, this reservation demonstrates the ad hoc, experimental, and adaptive nature of American-Indigenous relations in Alaska. The Metlakatla Indian Community (MIC), in defying Alaska's no reservation norm, exemplifies how Alaska served as an imperial laboratory in which to experiment. Created through a unique set of circumstances, Alaskan and U.S. leaders looked to Metlakatla as an example for Alaska Natives to embrace, even though the Indigenous people of the reservation are not, strictly speaking, Alaska Natives.

The story of the MIC began in Port Simpson, British Columbia, in 1857, when the Anglican missionary William Duncan arrived to convert the Tsimshian First Nations tribes of the area. Finding it difficult to "segregate his converts from the heathen group," Duncan led the Christianized Tsimshian to a new site where they built the town of Metlakatla in 1862.[50] Debates with the Anglican Church over matters of church discipline and modes of worship, as well as with the British Columbian government over who actually owned the Metlakatla townsite, drove Duncan to uproot his followers once again in 1887. After having secured the blessing of President Grover Cleveland, Duncan led the Tsimshian to Annette Island in Alaska, where they built a new town and once again called it Metlakatla.[51] The new town, populated by expatriated Canadian First Nations peoples and led by an English missionary expelled from the Anglican Church Mission Service, became the model for all future attempts to create reservations in Alaska.

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[50] William Beynon, "The Tsimshians of Metlakatla, Alaska," *American Anthropologist* 43, no. 1 (January 1941), 83.

[51] *American Indian Reservations and Trust Areas*, ed. Veronica E. Velarde Tiller (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1996), 22-23.

How Metlakatla initially became a reservation is somewhat unclear. One scholar recently claimed that Duncan petitioned Congress in 1891 to set aside Annette Island for the exclusive use of the Tsimshian of Metlakatla.[52] Older accounts, including one written by William Beynon, a member of the First Nations Gyitlan Tribe with familial ties to Metlakatla, claim that the younger residents of Metlakatla began to resent Duncan's iron-firm rule of the town. When Duncan returned to England for a visit, Presbyterian missionaries in Alaska, with support of some younger Metlakatlans, circulated a petition asking the U.S. government to take control of the island. Over the objections of Duncan, the U.S. government then created a reservation on the island under the authority of the Department of Education.[53]

The legal status of Metlakatla's inhabitants presented the U.S. government with a novel conundrum: were the Tsimshian living on Annette Island American? Because the government did not recognize Indigenous peoples as citizens, generally speaking, the easy answer to questions of Metlakatla citizenship was that the Natives on the reservation were not citizens. But Native Americans could apply for citizenship under the Dawes Act. When several Metlakatla Tsimshian petitioned to obtain U.S. citizenship, U.S. courts ruled that the inhabitants of the reservation were British subjects living under the protection of the U.S. flag, and thus not eligible

[52] Mitchell, *Sold American*, 261.
[53] Beynon, "The Tsimshians of Metlakatla, Alaska," 85.

Fig. 5-2 The salmon cannery at the Metlakatla Indian Community. The salmon cannery represented a significant source of employment and income for the MIC and served as a model for those who believed reservations in Alaska would protect Alaska Native access to natural resources and thereby help integrate Indigenous Alaskans into the American market. "Salmon Cannery," UAA-HMC-0761-F13-08, Helen Stevens Papers, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage.

for U.S. citizenship.[54] Even the Citizenship Act of 1924 failed to extend citizenship to the Metlakatla Tsimshian. The Metlakatlans who left Canada prior to 1900, and their descendants, finally received citizenship through a separate act of Congress in 1934.[55] The unique nature of the MIC and its inhabitants later resulted in reservation leaders petitioning Congress, in 1937, to grant citizenship to a single member of the community, Charles Ryan, who arrived at the reservation in 1923.[56] After more than a year of debate and political maneuvering, Congress

[54] Beynon, "The Tsimshians of Metlakatla, Alaska," 85.
[55] It is interesting to note that the law granting citizenship to the Metlakatla Tsimshian specifically referred to the reservation as the "Metlakatla Colony." 48 Stat. 667.
[56] "James Evans to A. J. Dimond," 4 February 1937, box 12, folder 158, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks; and "Washington Newsletter," 28 March 1938, box 16, folder 225, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

passed a second bill, granting citizenship to only Charles Ryan, in 1938.[57] To ensure passage of the bill for Ryan's citizenship, Alaska Delegate Anthony Dimond, who had championed both Metlakatla citizenship bills, had to ensure a hesitant Congress that no further Metlakatlan citizenship requests would be forthcoming. He was wrong. In 1941, another group of MIC members who had migrated to the reservation after 1900 considered petitioning for yet another citizenship bill. To his credit, Dimond said he was willing to take up their fight, but on several occasions warned them that "no favorable action can be expected." It appears the Metlakatlan newcomers gave up their push for citizenship.[58]

The establishment of a salmon cannery on the reservation provided a route to sustained commercial success for the Metlakatla Indian Community. Metlakatla still operates active salmon fisheries which harvest more than 1.5 million salmon a year.[59] Metlakatla's salmon cannery, protected against resource competition with white-owned businesses by reservation boundaries, became an example many Alaska Natives and white politicians sought to replicate, especially with the coming of the Great Depression.

Alaska in the Twentieth Century

As originally written, the Indian Reorganization Act did not apply to Alaska Natives, Indigenous Hawaiians, or Native Americans living in Oklahoma. Congress amended the IRA in 1936 to include Alaska Natives and Indigenous Oklahomans and also granted the Secretary of the Interior the authority to create reservations on any public land in Alaska with the consent of

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[57] "Anthony J. Dimond to Charles A. Ryan," 19 April 1938, box 12, folder 158, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[58] "Anthony J. Dimond to F. G. Johnson," 17 June 1941, box 12, folder 158, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[59] Department of Fish and Wildlife Metlakatla Indian Community, "2017 Salmon Fishery Management Plan," Metlakatla Indian Community Annette Islands Reserve, 3.

those Alaska Natives to which the reservation would apply.[60] This amendment began a decades-long battle that saw many typical players in such debates support unexpected positions.

Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier was the architect of the Indian New Deal.[61] A sociologist by training, Collier had spent years studying Native Americans and believed that assimilation threatened Indian cultures. He hoped the IRA would protect Native Americans by recognizing and protecting their cultures and economic well-being, which he identified as resting in their land. That Collier did not include Alaska Natives in his efforts to reverse the assimilationist policies of the United States is not surprising. Not only had Collier not studied Indigenous people in Alaska, it is quite likely he did not consider Alaska Natives to be Indians, much like his nineteenth-century predecessors. Well into the twentieth century, such an opinion remained common among U.S. leaders.

In 1930, the Alaska delegate to Congress, Daniel Sutherland, urged Congress to vote against a provision to finance Alaska Native educational programs through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Sutherland did not oppose the educational programs themselves; he wanted them to fall under the authority of the Bureau of Education, rather than the BIA, because Alaska Natives were not, he said, Indians. "The [Alaskan] aborigines, are not considered Indians," argued Sutherland. Moreover, he informed the members of Congress that, "the Native people of Alaska do want to come under this bureau [BIA]. They live in dread of it. They take the position that they are not in the same class with the Indians of the plains of the United States."[62] Congress

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[60] H. R. 9866, 74th Cong, 2d Sess., box 8, folder 97, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[61] For more on John Collier, see: Kenneth R. Philip, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977); and Lawrence C. Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).
[62] 71st Cong., 3d sess., 1930, 74, pt. 1, 608.

passed the bill over Sutherland's objections largely because many white politicians saw government intervention, particularly in the form of reservations, as a means to economically protect Alaska Natives and, ironically given the history of reservations on the mainland, more fully assimilate Alaska Natives into the American nation.

A 1944 article in *Indians at Work*, published by the Interior Department's Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), warned that, "The economic and social stability of the [Alaska] natives is still further jeopardized by the hunger of the whites for the lands and other resources of Alaska." The article went on to say, "The natives have no title to their lands that the white man is bound to respect, and heretofore they have been obliged to move from their ancestral homes wherever pressure has been brought."[63] The article recognized an undesirable state of affairs and offered a solution, however paternalistic, intended to protect Alaska Natives from the economic lust of white Americans—establishing reservations. If created, reservations would protect Alaska Natives because, "Whites are allowed to use the lands only under rules and regulations promulgated by the Secretary of the Interior, and are not permitted to exploit the natives and spoliate their resources," the article concluded.[64] OIA personnel did not envision Alaskan reservations as bounded areas designed to keep Indigenous people in, but rather to keep white Americans out.

Collier and his supporters, such as Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, believed reservations in Alaska would provide the territory's Indigenous peoples with economic security and freedom. Perhaps more importantly, many Alaska Natives also saw reservations as a way to protect their own wellbeing. Once Congress amended the IRA to include Alaska Natives and to

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[63] "New Reservations in Alaska," *Indians at Work: A News Sheet for Indians and the Indian Service* XII, no. 3 (September-October 1944), 7.
[64] "New Reservations in Alaska," 9.

give the Secretary of the Interior the authority to create reservations, Ickes quickly began declaring Alaska reservations.[65] The success of the MIC, especially the profitable salmon cannery operated by members of the community, convinced Ickes that the natural resources of Alaska, if protected by reservation boundaries, would easily provide the economic foundation upon which Alaska Natives could build community-wide self-sufficiency. In 1936, during the Great Depression, this possibility appeared especially attractive to representatives of the federal government.

Many Alaska Native groups petitioned for the creation of reservations in Alaska that included lands used continuously for hundreds or thousands of years as the basis of Indigenous subsistence cultures. While the intrusion of Europeans and white Americans had altered Native land use, government investigators, such as former New Mexico Supreme Court Justice Richard H. Hanna, who investigated Alaska Native land use for the Department of the Interior in 1944, found that Alaska Natives "do possess extensive aboriginal rights, only in part abandoned, and that no extinguishment of such rights has otherwise been had." Hanna went on to argue that although Congress had never negotiated or approved any treaties with Alaska Natives, the United States was still bound to respect any "Indian aboriginal claim to land." The U.S. government had two options, then: to extinguish aboriginal claims "upon payment of adequate compensation," or to "set aside for the bands of Indians here involved and other bands … a reasonable portion, of the area claimed by them where continued use and occupancy is shown." In other words, either the U.S. government must pay Alaska Natives for their lands or provide them with reservations,

[65] Ickes declared six reservations: Venetie, Karluk, Kake, Klawock, Hydaburg, and Tetlin. The Indigenous inhabitants of Kake and Klawock voted to reject reservations, however. Indigenous residents at the other locales accepted reservations, but the Supreme Court disallowed the Hydaburg and Karluk reservations, holding that their establishment had been flawed. Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 2d ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), 272-273.

not to restrict Indigenous access to the land, but to preserve it and provide Alaska Natives with the means (control of natural resources) to engaged fully in Alaska's developing economy.[66]

Under the provisions of the IRA, government officials imagined reservations as areas that protected Indigenous Americans from the covetousness of white Americans, rather than as camps in which to deposit unwanted subjects. Following World War II, however, the political atmosphere in Washington shifted. President Harry Truman did not support the IRA, desiring instead to see Native Americans more fully integrated into the United States' post-war economy.[67] Additionally, Republicans won both houses of Congress in 1946 and immediately began seeking to undermine New Deal programs.[68] In 1947, the Senate Committee on Public Lands argued against establishing reservations in Alaska, saying, "There can be no question but that Congress has assumed dominion and ownership of all lands in Alaska, except for the rights of private individuals," and that "Congress possesses the exclusive power to extinguish the right of Indian occupancy at will."[69] Eleven years after Congress had granted the Secretary of the Interior the authority to establish reservations in Alaska, the United States' economic and political situations had changed and had thus changed perceptions of reservations in Alaska.

The United States emerged comparatively unscathed from the carnage of World War II and sought to establish itself as the world's undisputed economic power. This goal reflected a

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[66] Despite the ruling, Hanna interpreted what constituted a "reasonable portion" of land through a decidedly Euro-American prism. He recommended 275,000 acres of Tongass National Forest land be set aside for reservations, less than one-tenth of the 3.3 million acres for which the Native villages of the area had petitioned. Richard H. Hanna, "Aboriginal Rights in Alaska," 1944, box 37, folder 319, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974], Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. For more on Hanna's ruling, see: Theodore Catton, *American Indians and National Forests* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 84; Mitchell, *Sold American*, 287-290; and Haycox, "Economic Development and Indian Land Rights in Modern Alaska," 29.
[67] Philip, "Dillon S. Myer and the Advent of Termination," 37.
[68] William E. Leuchtenburg, *In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 23.
[69] Senate Committee on Public Lands, Alaskan Land Titles, 80th Cong., 1947, MS 0122, folder 3, Alaska Native Rights and History Collection, 1741-1990, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

return to an imperialist vision, perhaps briefly set aside in the wake of the Great Depression, in which Alaska played an important role by supplying natural resources. The historian Odd Arne Westad argues that with the dawning of the Cold War, "the institutions of the world economic system were redesigned to fit American purposes of defeating Communism and promoting capitalist growth."[70] In Alaska, U.S. leaders did not redesign the economic structure so much as reset it to a pre-Great Depression status quo. Protected Indigenous spaces in Alaska hampered the United States' ability to best exploit Alaska's natural resources. Reservations did not restrict the territory's Indigenous peoples to within the boundaries of reservations, but did prevent whites from encroaching upon Native lands. This, Senate leaders argued, "has not only retarded but actually has prevented the development of Alaska" by giving Alaska Natives an unfair economic advantage.[71] Alaska Natives stood to profit from resources found both on and off reservation lands, while whites in Alaska could only access resources located off reservation lands. Many powerful American leaders, including Territorial Governor Ernest Gruening, began calling such policies "inverted Jim-Crowism."[72] By excluding whites, U.S. leaders feared that reservations ensured that Alaska would fail to fulfill its destiny as an imperialist storehouse of natural resources necessary for the fight against Communism.

Gruening vehemently opposed the creation of reservations because he believed U.S. and Alaskan policy should focus on assimilating Alaska Natives into white culture and, perhaps more importantly, the economy. While not fully convinced that Alaska Natives had a legal claim to

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[70] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 152.
[71] Senate Committee on Public Lands, Alaskan Land Titles, 80th Cong., 1947, MS 0122, folder 3, Alaska Native Rights and History Collection, 1741-1990, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[72] Ernest Gruening to Harold Ickes, 11 December 1944, box 331, Alaska Indian Reservations file, General Records of the Office of Territories and its Predecessors, 1885–1971, Record Group 126, National Archives and Records Administration.

lands, he did believe that, "If the land is rightfully theirs, as a result of aboriginal occupancy, certainly it should be theirs to have and to hold, to keep or to dispose of, and to do anything that they desire with it. They should be issued such lands in fee simple." In other words, Alaska Native land claims and ownership should be handled no differently than white land ownership. Gruening, a New Deal Democrat, bemoaned the state of affairs that he believed reservations would foist upon "these unfortunate natives," specifically an undue level of bureaucratic interference from the federal government. In particular, Gruening argued that under a reservation system, the Forest Service and Office of Indian Affairs would dictate to Alaska Natives how their lands could be used, the result being that "the poor Indians would be at the bottom of the heap. They would be in effect the low men on the totem pole, with not one but two federal bureaus on top of them." Gruening also pointed to the already lengthy record of Indigenous involvement in the Alaska Territorial Legislature as evidence that Alaska Natives had no need of the tutelage the creation of reservations implied.[73]

While Gruening grounded his primary opposition to the setting aside of protected Indigenous lands in a dedication to Alaska's economic development, which required the introduction of white-owned businesses to the territory, there is no reason to believe that he wanted to exclude Alaska Natives from the economic benefits he believed would accompany that development or any other measure of participation in Alaskan life. In a letter congratulating the Iñupiat of Barrow (now Utqiaġvik) for rejecting a proposed reservation, by a vote of 231 to 29, Gruening wrote, "This reservation proposal, in my judgement, is humiliating and degrading. The native people of Alaska are far too well along the road to development to be put back into the

[73] Ernest Gruening to Roger N. Baldwin, 27 January 1949, box 37, folder 321, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974], Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

status of 'Reservation Indians', or in this case 'Reservation Eskimos.'" Gruening believed civic and political involvement were important measures of success, and it seems fair to take Gruening at his word when he also wrote to Barrow's Iñupiat leadership, "It [the reservation system] merely sets the native people apart and drives a wedge between the races when what we need is better understanding and closer relationship … That is why I think the real achievements and gains that have been made within the last few years is the participation of natives in our Territorial government."[74] Gruening believed economic development trumped all other concerns in Alaska, and in a territory in which twenty-six percent of the population in 1950 was Indigenous, Gruening supported a policy that encouraged all Alaskans to work together for the betterment of the territory's entire population. In his mind this meant that Alaska Natives had to be fully assimilated into Alaska's community. For an avowed opponent of empire, imperialism, and colonialism like Gruening, a policy that flattened ethnic and cultural differences in favor of constructing a homogenized nation out of the ethnic, racial, and cultural discordance of the U.S. empire resonated.[75]

Some Alaska Natives noted how important the exploitation of natural resources was to the economic develop of Alaska, however, and demanded reservations in order to protect traditional Native lands. Amy Hollingstad, president of the Alaska Native Sisterhood, demanded the creation of reservations in Alaska to stop "unscrupulous white men" from seizing and exploiting Native land and fisheries and so that Indigenous people might "keep our children

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[74] Ernest Gruening to Percy Ipalook, 6 February 1950, box 37, folder 322, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974], Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[75] For discussions of nationalist insistence on idealized ethnic homogenization, see: Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Second ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983; repr., 2008); Eric J. Hobsbawn, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

warm and well fed throughout the long Alaskan winters." Corporate industry had turned Alaska Natives into "displaced persons," argued Hollingstad, for whom American promises outlined in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution had been set aside in pursuit of profit and development. "Is this done because our skins are not as light as yours?" Hollingstad asked. "Perhaps if we were wolves or bears we could have just as much protection. But we are only human beings. There are no closed seasons when it comes to skinning Alaskan natives." Hollingstad concluded by asking if the "cries of our children" might prevent Washington officials from "giving away our trees, our fisheries, our traplines, our lands, and our homes. With God's help we still hope that what our parents passed on to us we may in turn pass on to our children and our children's children forever." Only reservations, in Hollingstad's view, made such a future possible.[76]

While many Alaska Natives campaigned for the creation of reservations in the territory, white Americans, especially those associated with large extractive industries, fought to prevent the creation of Alaskan reservations. The salmon and timber industries, in particular, feared that Native land rights, protected by the federal government, would cut white capitalists out from the richest parts of Alaska. Members of the Alaska Development Board succinctly expressed this fear in a letter to Secretary of the Interior Oscar Chapman. The members voiced their opposition to the creation of reservations in Alaska, saying that reservations "threaten the whole Alaska development program."[77] The fear that reservations would hinder rather than aid economic development represented a significant shift in how businesses in the United States

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[76] Amy Hollingstad to Ruth Muskrat Bronson, 19 December 1947, box 37, folder 320, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974], Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[77] George Sundberg to Ernest Gruening, 13 January 1950, box 37, folder 322, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974], Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

viewed not only reservations, but the role and power of the federal government in enforcing the sanctity and exclusivity of aboriginal land.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Native Americans found themselves on tribal lands guaranteed to them by the government in Washington. However, whether Cherokee lands in Georgia during the first half of the nineteenth century or Sioux lands in Dakota Territory in the second half of the century, to name just the most well-known examples, promises of Native land rights had rarely been honored once white Americans discovered valuable natural resources on Indigenous lands. The discovery of gold led to the removal of the Cherokee to Indian Territory and the Lakota found their reservation lands cut in half. Whatever the feelings of American leaders toward Native Americans, in the nineteenth century dedication to the protection of Indigenous land rights crumbled before the demands of white Americans for natural resources and their accompanying wealth.[78] The struggle over reservations in Alaska demonstrates, however, that by the twentieth century, American ideas concerning the role of the government had changed, or were at least changing. This was especially true in Alaska, where Alaska Natives had comprised a significant voting bloc for over a decade by the middle of the 1930s.

Native groups from throughout Alaska weighed the pros and cons of reservations more often in light of the experiences of other Alaska Natives rather than the experiences of Native Americans on the mainland. When the members of the Arctic Slope Native Association (ASNA), an Iñupiat group based in the town formerly known as Barrow, debated how to go about demanding recognition of their land rights, they looked to the village of Tyonek in southern Alaska as a possible example to follow, with Charles Edwardsen, Jr., chairman of the ASNA

[78] For examples of the desire for natural resources justifying the removal of Native Americans, see: Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); and Jeffrey Ostler, *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

general meeting, arguing that "the Tyonek Natives had their problem settled in so short a time was [sic] because they were on a reservation."[79] Alaska Natives did not simply see reservations as a means of escaping from or isolating themselves from the rest of the United States. Reservations could offer protection and a way to profit within the U.S. empire. "It is not our intention … to restrict development of the areas [sic] resources in any way," explained ASNA Executive Director Hugh Nicholls to Lyndon Johnson. "What we do want is the maximum development of the area, with the maximum benefits to our people in the way of jobs, training programs; by the greatest feasible location of facilities within our area, so that we may become an independent, self-supporting segment of your great Society."[80]

Following statehood in 1959, most calls for reservations in Alaska ended, but questions of land rights continued. The Alaska statehood bill authorized the Alaskan state government to select and retain title to 104.5 million acres, roughly equal to the size of California. The statehood bill forbade the Alaska state government from selecting lands claimed by any Alaska Native group, however.[81] But because the federal government had never recognized Alaska Natives or most of their land claims, no one knew which lands remained legally Indigenous, and this uncertainty slowed Alaska's selection of lands. As the state of Alaska's financial solvency had always been intended to rest upon the state's ability to sell and lease the rights to the lands and natural resources of Alaska, this delay promised to wreck the new state's economy. This

[79] "General Meeting," 15 January 1966, MS 0122, folder 1, Alaska Native Rights and History Collection, 1741-1990, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[80] "Hugh Nicholls to Lyndon B. Johnson," 10 February 1966, MS 0122, folder 1, Alaska Native Rights and History Collection, 1741-1990, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections. Alaska Natives were not the only Indigenous Americans who envisioned community improvement through the development of natural resources located on Native lands. For example, see: Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).
[81] 72 Stat. 339.

crisis became especially acute in the late 1960s, after Alaska Native land claims blocked plans to build a pipeline to transport Prudhoe Bay oil some 800 miles south to Valdez.

Individuals and corporations with a stake in Alaska's oil exerted pressure on Congress to speedily find a solution to Alaska Native land claims that all found acceptable. In 1968, the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs commissioned an investigation into Alaska Native land claims that warned, "Underlying the urgency of a land settlement is the need to get on with the job of developing the economy of Alaska and of assuring Native participation in such development."[82] The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was that solution. Not only did ANCSA pay Alaska Natives an unprecedented amount of money, it dissolved the few existing reservations in Alaska (except the Metlakatla Indian Community) and created numerous regional and village Alaska Native corporations. These corporations received fee simple title to lands upon which villages existed as well as additional lands of their choosing—amounting to 44 million acres—thus preempting the land selection process of the state of Alaska.

The process of land selection and the granting of title contrasts quite clearly with federal Indigenous land policies in the rest of the country, where the title to reservation lands is held in trust by the federal government. Additionally, the amount of land to which Alaska Natives received title is mind boggling when one considers that the approximately 326 reservations in the continental United States total a mere 56.2 million acres.[83] And contrary to the claims of many Alaska Natives born after the passage of ANCSA, white political leaders did not force the settlement upon Alaska's Indigenous communities in order to destroy traditional cultures. Most Alaska Natives in the middle of the twentieth century not only approved of a land settlement

[82] *Alaska Natives and the Land*, by Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 535.
[83] U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, www.bia.gov/frequently-asked-questions, accessed 14 April 2020.

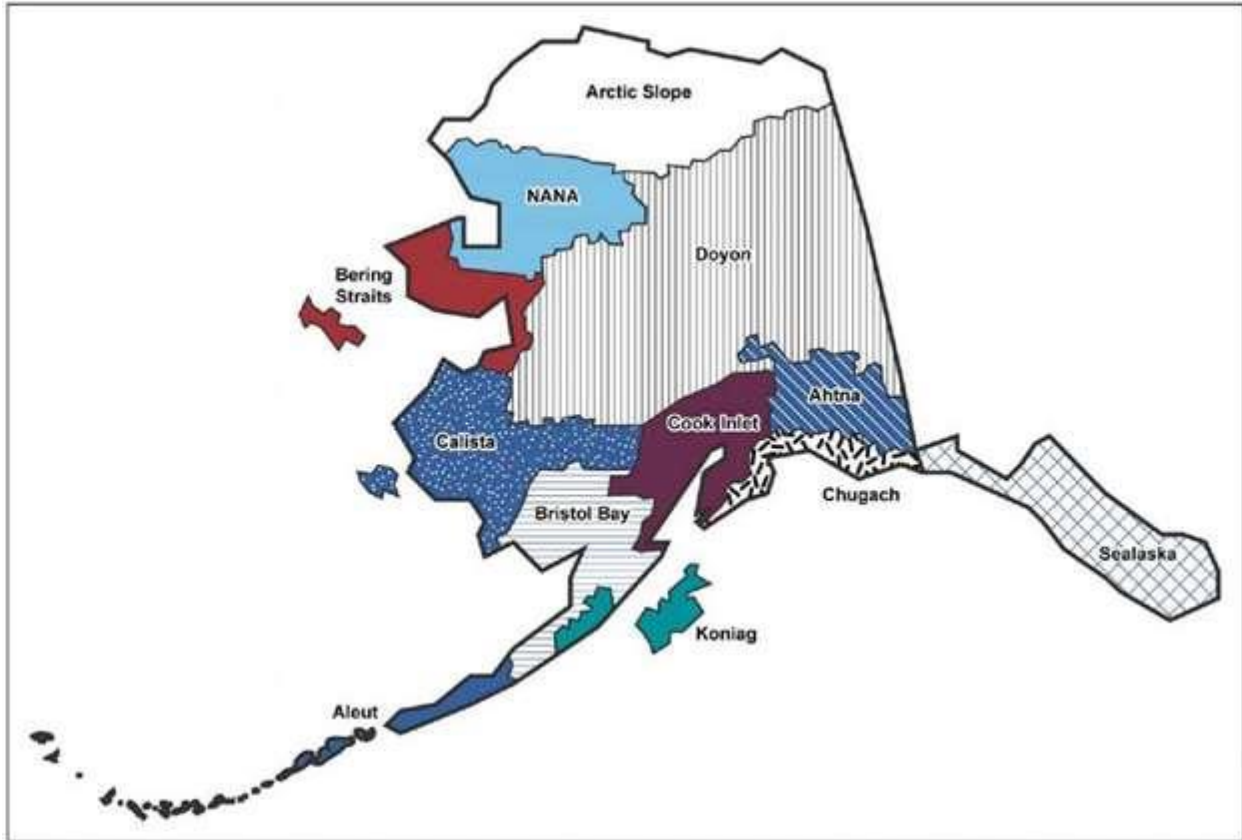

Fig. 5-3 Twelve of the thirteen regional corporations established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The corporations do not own all the land within their corporation boundaries, but rather ANCSA enrolled Alaska Natives living within the boundaries in the corresponding corporation. The thirteenth corporation, call the 13th Regional Corporation, received no land in the settlement. Alaska Natives living outside Alaska were enrolled in the 13th Regional Corporation and received only monetary compensation. Map found in: U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Regional Alaska Native Corporations: Status 40 Years after Establishment, and Future Considerations*, GAO-13-121 (Washington D.C., 2012).

similar to the one eventually passed, it was largely their own creation. Emil Notti, former president of the Alaska Native Foundation and CEO of the Alaska Native corporation Doyon Ltd., called ANCSA "the best possible resolution to the land claims issue."[84]

At the same time, there can be no question that ANCSA has diminished the vibrancy of traditional Indigenous cultures in Alaska. By requiring that Alaska Natives enroll in one of thirteen regional corporations and one of more than 200 village corporations, ANCSA has drawn

[84] Arnold, *Alaska Native Land Claims*, v. For a meticulously researched and exhaustive history of ANCSA, see: Mitchell, *Take My Land, Take My Life*.

Alaska Natives into the modern American corporate, consumer, and governmental cultures, often times far away from Alaska.[85] By tying the well-being of Alaska Natives and their villages to corporate profit margins, Alaska Natives have become just as reliant on the success of troubling extractive industries, like oil, as many white Alaskans.

Widespread support for the trans-Alaska Pipeline, the construction of which Indigenous land claims had delayed, existed in many Alaska Native communities. After the passage of ANCSA, Don Wright, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), an organization that coordinated Indigenous political and activist activities throughout the state, wrote directly to Richard Nixon saying, "I cannot overemphasize the feeling of betrayal that would occur among the Native people of Alaska if there is further delay in issuing the pipeline permit." Now that Indigenous land claims had been settled, the economic well-being of Alaska Natives demanded resource extraction proceed as rapidly as possible. In particular, Wright noted that it was "the intent of Native people" that $500 million of the legislated payments to Alaska Natives should come from royalties on mineral leases.[86] Wright's insistence on the speedy approval and construction of the pipeline, and of Indigenous intent to exploit the state's natural resources, demonstrates how ANCSA deepened the already 200-year-old commitment of many Alaska Natives to integrate into the non-Indigenous economy.

The Alaska Native regional and village corporations initially focused their business efforts in oil drilling, gas wells, and mining. More recently, corporations have invested in

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[85] As an anecdotal example, from 2009-2010, I worked for the Chenega Corporation, an Alaska Native village corporation based on Alaska's southern coast, fulfilling a security contract with the U.S. Army at Fort Carson, Colorado. Chenega has become, according to the corporation's website, "the most successful Alaska Native corporation" in large part by focusing its corporate efforts on security and military, intelligence, and operations support for the U.S. government. Chenega Corporation, https://www.chenega.com/, accessed 10 October 2020.

[86] "Wright Asks Pipeline Approval," *Tundra Times*, 10 May 1972.

tourism, government contracting, and telecommunications. Rarely, though, have the corporations' business investments provided employment for Alaska Natives themselves. Indigenous villages tend to be located on sites that made sense in the pre-ANSCA subsistence economies of many Alaska Natives. But for individuals increasing tethered to a wage-economy, these sites discourage business investment and therefore fail to provide work, even from Alaska Native corporations.[87] Gary Moore, a shareholder in Doyon Ltd., one of the most profitable Alaska Native regional corporations and the largest private landowner in Alaska, admitted that most of Doyon's investments "contribute nothing to creating self-sufficiency in any of the villages." The solution offered by Doyon CEO Morris Thompson rested on further resource extraction, such as finding a way to profitably mine a known source of gold on Doyon land 250 miles from the nearest road system.[88]

This prioritizing of modern technology and financial gain at the expense of the natural world on the part of Alaska Natives challenges uncomplicated myths of the so-called ecological Indian. Simultaneously, the limitations placed on Indigenous leaders must be recognized. When European and Indigenous Americans first encountered one another, the playing field remained fairly level. Native Americans possessed the demographic advantage, but Europeans owned the technological advantage, especially in guns. Native peoples chose to conduct trade with Europeans, but even in the seventeenth century that choice was circumscribed; every village of Native Americans understood that if they did not trade for European guns a rival village would. In this way, early imperial Europeans began to insert themselves into Indigenous communities in North America. By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had managed to curtail

[87] Mitchell, *Take My Land, Take My Life*, 534-535.
[88] "From Nomads to Shareholders Doyon Ltd. owns 12.5 million acres of Alaska wilderness and is looking for ways to develop it," *Juneau Empire*, Special Report, 1999.

the options available to Native groups living within, and surrounded by, the empire.[89] In the middle of the twentieth century, Alaska Natives managed to pry financial and land concessions out of the federal government, but their options remained limited. Alaska Native leaders negotiated the best deal they could at the time, but the capitalist worldview of government officials set the parameters within which negotiations had to be conducted. These limitations continue to shape the options available to Alaska Natives.

One of the most interesting consequences of the rejection of ANCSA by younger Alaska Natives and their allies has been the call for the state's Native peoples to withdraw from the broader Alaskan polity into ethnic enclaves—into reservations!

Such demands perhaps began when the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, an organization representing the Indigenous populations of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland, hired Canadian politician and jurist Thomas Berger, known for his work heading Canadian investigative commissions, to review ANCSA. Berger published his findings in 1985 and called for the recognition of Alaska Native tribes and political sovereignty. Berger argued that without recognition of their "tribal character," Alaska Natives are "no more than a collection of some seventy thousand individuals of various races and languages, a minority like any other, with no claim to land nor to distant institutional arrangements. But, in fact, they are tribes. If they are not tribes … they are nothing more than Natives scattered around Alaska."[90] Such sentiments have

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[89] See: Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., "Protestants, Pagans, and Sequences among the North American Indians, 1760-1860," *Ethnohistory* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1963); Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005); and Needham, *Powerlines*.

[90] Thomas Scott Berger, *Village Journey: The Report of the Alaska Native Review Commission* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 161. Kent Blansett's argument that placing Native American battles for recognition solely within the context of civil rights "oversimplify Red Power and dismiss a long legacy of Native Nationalism and resistance," carries forward Berger's observations. Blansett, *A Journey to Freedom*, 4.

grown into a movement claiming that each of Alaska's more than 200 Indigenous villages represent separate federally recognized tribes whose governing bodies possess the sovereign powers of self-government on the lands surrounding each village.[91] Although the federal government has yet to accept such arguments, this interpretation of Alaska Native tribalism has become so pervasive, that in 2017 Alaska Attorney General Jahna Lindemuth, responding to a request by Alaska Governor Bill Walker to clarify the legal status of Alaska Native governing bodies, claimed, "There are 229 federally recognized tribes in Alaska." She argued this despite the fact that the federal government has never recognized any tribes in Alaska and that the only mechanism for Indigenous recognition in the state, ANCSA, specifically acknowledges business corporations, not politically sovereign tribes. Lindemuth attempted to square this circle by arguing, "The existence of a tribal government does not require a federal determination and tribal sovereignty does not originate with the federal government." Lindemuth found herself trapped by Congress' Constitutional authority to "legislate with respect to Indian tribes," however, and concluded that "the sovereign status of tribal government, for the purpose of determining tribes relationships with states, is a question of federal law and federal recognition of a tribe is dispositive."[92] Lindemuth argued that Alaska Native villages are tribes because tribes exist independent of federal recognition, consistent with anti-colonial ideas of self-determination, while simultaneously acknowledging that federal law determines Indigenous peoples' tribal status because such status is, within the framework of the U.S. Constitution, a legal construct. Lindemuth's difficulty in clearly defining the political and legal status of Alaska Native villages is a clear reflection of the confused state of U.S.-Native relations in Alaska that is a consequence

[91] Mitchell, *Take My Land, Take My Life*, 504.
[92] Jahna Lindemuth to Bill Walker, "Legal status of tribal governments in Alaska," 19 October 2017.

of a Constitution designed to facilitate empire but interpreted by officials who refuse or are unable to acknowledge that empire.

Growing perceptions of Alaska Native villages as tribal groups, along with the increasing realization that many Native regional and village corporations do not benefit the average Alaska Native shareholder in any meaningful way, continue to gain in popularity. In 1999, Byron Mallott, the former president of both the AFN and the Sealaska Regional Corporation, representing more than twenty-two thousand Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian in southeastern Alaska, warned, "Alaska's Native peoples are coming more and more to believe that the right course for their future is to dissociate from the rest of Alaska." Such demands for reservations from Alaska Natives are rooted in a realization that despite the financial benefits of ANCSA, when viewed from a capitalist perspective, the agreement has failed to alleviate the human hardships, such as poverty, suicide, and alcoholism rates far above the national average, that have accompanied Indigenous Alaskans' partial economic assimilation during the past two hundred years.

A common critique of empires is that they are financial burdens upon governments and populations, causing scholars to ask why empires remained so popular and durable. The example of ANCSA's successes and failures demonstrates that analyzing imperialism in terms of profit to the government or people is misguided. Corporations, not states, are the intended beneficiaries of the imperialist system of the past century, most especially in the United States. Thus, when the United States of the mid-twentieth century, fully invested in corporate imperialism, sought to solve the problem of Indigenous land claims in Alaska, it should come as no surprise that the government settled on a corporate-based solution. Furthermore, it should also come as no surprise that those corporations have profited unevenly and at the expense of many Alaska

Native individuals, families, and communities. Modern imperialism is, first and foremost, a financial institution, not a social one.

Efforts to dispossess Alaska Natives of their land, either by resisting or embracing reservation policies as circumstances dictated, represent ingenious adaptations of U.S. imperial goals and policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The reservations of the nineteenth century gave way to the assimilation efforts of the twentieth century; the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act represents the culmination of such efforts. An appeal to corporate imperialism promised to solve the problem of Indigenous land claims by removing the humanity and individuality of Alaska Natives and enrolling them in corporations. The U.S. government did not force corporate enrollment upon the state's Indigenous peoples, however. Indeed, Native corporations were a Native idea that white American politicians understood and embraced. For Alaska Natives in the 1960s and 1970s, corporations represented an attempt to secure for themselves a share of the wealth generated by the U.S. empire. Now, in the twenty-first century, the social bankruptcy of capitalist imperialism has resulted in a backlash that has pushed many Alaska Natives to prefer one of the most controversial social structures of the territorial empire of the nineteenth century—reservations.

6 – Imperial Statehood

On 9 November 1955, former Alaska Territorial Governor Ernest Gruening stood before the Alaska Constitutional Convention and declared, "It is natural and proper that American leadership should lend such aid and comfort as it may to other peoples striving for self-determination and for that universally applicable tenet of American faith—government by consent of the governed." He then asked, "What more ironical, what more paradoxical, than that that very same leadership maintains Alaska as a colony?"[1] Gruening, and others like him, led a decades-long campaign aimed at securing Alaskan statehood that reached its successful conclusion on 3 January 1959, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Alaska Statehood Act, officially making Alaska the forty-ninth state. Gruening employed a powerful anti-colonial rhetoric aimed at winning the sympathy of Americans who might otherwise not think twice of Alaska or its place in the greater United States. Gruening left no question as to his views on Alaska's territorial status: U.S. territories were imperial colonies, and colonialism was completely incompatible with democracy.

Not everyone agreed with Gruening. In particular, powerful absentee capitalists and military leaders worked to preserve Alaska's colonial status. Maintaining the status quo in Alaska limited democracy in the Far North, thus ensuring the military's freedom of movement and capitalists' profits with little concern of oversight from Washington. Although eventually defeated on the question of statehood, these forces have retained their positions of preeminence in Alaska. Thus, while statehood did much to disguise imperialism in Alaska, it has not eliminated the reality of empire. Indeed, statehood has served as a veneer disguising U.S. empire

[1] Ernest Gruening, "Let Us End American Colonialism! Alaska the United States Colony: Keynote Address, Alaska Constitutional Convention," 9 November 1955, box 68, folder 405, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974], Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

and demonstrating that, in some cases at least, federalism serves as an adaptation that the United States has successfully exploited to preserve imperialism.

Studies of Alaskan statehood have been few and far between and have generally lacked a strong interpretive element. More often than not, those who have written on Alaskan statehood were either directly involved in the campaign or are current residents of Alaska. These narratives are highly descriptive, doing a good job of telling the story of how Alaska transformed from territory to state, but provide little interpretation of the meaningfulness of Alaskan statehood.[2] For scholars who have explored the role of empire and colonialism in Alaska, statehood itself has played a small role and, again, is described rather than interpreted.[3]

The key to understanding Alaskan statehood is Alaska's uninterrupted imperial relationship with the United States. Scholars—the historian Stephen Haycox perhaps being the most vocal—have generally accepted that prior to statehood Alaska was an American colony, but they have been hesitant to explore the logical conclusion that if Alaska was a colony, it must have belonged to an empire.[4] However, it is only in light of the imperial circumstances of the

[2] Examples of the first kind of narrative include: Ernest Gruening, *The Battle for Alaska Statehood* (College, AK: University of Alaska Press, 1967); and Ernest Gruening, *The State of Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1968), originally published 1954. Anti-colonialism formed the frame around which Gruening built his books, as well as emphasizing his own sizeable role in achieving statehood. Examples of the second kind of narrative include: Claus-M. Naske, *A History of Alaska Statehood* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), originally published as *An Interpretative History of Alaska* (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Company); and Claus-M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987). Naske, who taught at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) from 1969 to 2001, touched upon many important colonial themes in his studies of Alaska, including geographic isolation, race, national security, and economic imperialism, but did not explore imperialism or colonialism in any depth. More recently, Terrance Cole, who has taught at UAF since 1988, has expanded upon Naske's model by exploring the role of Fairbanks newspaper editor C. W. Snedden in the struggle for statehood. Terrence Cole, *Fighting for the Forty-Ninth Star: C. W. Snedden and the Crusade for Alaska Statehood* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Foundation, 2010).

[3] Without question, the most important work of this kind is Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 2d ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020).

[4] Julius Pratt is an important exception to the consensus. In 1951, while recognizing the colonial status of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam, Pratt wrote that while Alaska, "is an interesting transitional case

mid-twentieth century, both American and global, that we can begin to make sense of why the United States eventually granted statehood to Alaska (and Hawai‘i) while completely divesting itself of the Philippines and simultaneously maintaining a more overt imperial relationship with its other colonial possessions, including Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Panama Canal Zone (until 1999), Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Marianas Islands.

There were three important reasons why the United States dramatically changed the structure of its empire in the decades following World War II. The first was the wave of decolonization engulfing the globe in the mid-twentieth century. To maintain the country's position of global leadership, American leaders had to find a way to lessen the strength of charges that the United States was just another imperial power. Such claims, however, would have been far less worrisome without the second impetus to end U.S. colonialism—the Cold War. The United States and the Soviet Union sought to convince decolonizing Third World countries to align themselves with one of the global superpowers. The United States faced accusations of colonialism and imperialism from the leaders of decolonizing states and the Soviet Union; in the context of the Cold War, U.S. leaders believed the United States must, for the security of the country, shed its imperial shroud. Imperialism had fattened the purses of American businessmen, however. The insatiable nature of capitalism formed the third shaper of American imperial change.[5] Finding a way to end the empire without actually doing so was of great importance, but how to do so was unclear to U.S. officials. As the American empire had

… Alaska seems to belong on the nonimperialistic side of the fence." Julius W. Pratt, *America's Colonial Experiment: How the United States Gained, Governed, and in Part Gave Away a Colonial Empire* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), 391.

[5] Daniel Immerwahr argues that new "empire-killing technologies," often in the form of synthetic replacements for natural resources developed during and after World War II, played a pivotal role in turning the United States from colonization to globalization. See, Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), chapter 16.

been built in an ad hoc manner, so would it be disassembled without much of an overarching plan. Race, though, proved to be key to the decolonization effort; only those territories with large economically and politically powerful white populations would become states. In the end, only Alaska and Hawai'i proved white enough for statehood. For territories populated almost exclusively by people of color, American leaders employed political sleights of hand to satisfy demands for decolonization. But whether official decolonization was accomplished through granting statehood (Alaska and Hawai'i), creating a commonwealth (Puerto Rico), or allowing the direct election of a governor while maintaining a territory's unincorporated status (U.S. Virgin Islands), the imperialist relationship remained, in practice, little changed.[6]

The failure to pursue statehood for the United States' unincorporated territories demonstrates that Alaskan and Hawaiian statehood did not bring an end to U.S. empire. Rather, statehood simply served to hide the continuance of empire behind the symbol of a flag bearing an additional two stars, while the lived reality of many American colonial subjects, living outside the newly recognized states, hardly changed. Furthermore, even for Alaska, statehood served as little more than a veneer disguising the continued existence of imperialism in the Far North.

Security and Statehood

Alaskan residents began agitating for statehood at the beginning of the twentieth century, demanding acknowledgment of rights that decolonizing peoples later in the twentieth century would echo. The Republican platform for the 1912 territorial election included a plank for home rule, which meant an elected and empowered Alaskan legislature that could serve as "an effective instrument for enacting the will of the Alaskan people into a law and for making known to Congress our views on matters of national importance." The platform also included a plank

[6] For more on the place of race and ethnicity U.S. imperial policy, see: Hazel M. McFerson, *The Racial Dimension of American Overseas Colonial Policy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997).

calling for Alaskan control of the territory's natural resources as well as one demanding that all federal appointees in the territory be selected only from Alaska's residents.[7] As Alaska's white population grew, the demands grew as well. By 1938, while the Republican platform still called for home rule, it now clarified that home rule meant statehood, for which the Republican delegate Albert White promised to "work unceasingly."[8] But it took World War II, followed closely by Cold War concerns, to turn the question of Alaskan statehood into an issue that Americans outside the territory cared to consider in any meaningful way.[9] The two conflicts demonstrated that Alaska possessed more than merely political or rhetorical value. Statehood promoters argued that Alaska was of immense strategic military value. This value was so great, such advocates believed, that Alaska's continued colonial status threatened the forty-eight states as well. To protect the metropole, the government must grant Alaska statehood.

Anthony J. Dimond, a Democrat who served as Alaska's non-voting delegate to Congress from 1933 to 1945, began advocating for statehood almost immediately after winning office. In 1936, Dimond wrote to Secretary of the Navy Claude Swanson that "the Territory of Alaska occupies a very important position in any proper plan for national defense," because "the Pacific and not the Atlantic Ocean will probably be the scene of conflict," between the United States and

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[7] "Platform Adopted by the Republican Territorial Convention Assembled at Valdez, Alaska," 29 May 1912, MS 0056, box 1, folder 3, Alaska Campaign Literature, 1889-[ongoing], Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

[8] "Platform of the Republican Party of Alaska," 15 January 1938, MS 0056, box 1, folder 3, Alaska Campaign Literature, 1889-[ongoing], Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

[9] Gerald D. Nash argued that World War II largely ended the American West's colonial relationship with the East by refocusing the region's economy away from the exploitation of natural resources toward industrial diversification. Nash, by his own admission, largely ignores Alaska because, as it has done for so many scholars, it refuses to conform to the pattern imposed by a teleological interpretation that takes statehood nearly for granted. While the Second World War did dramatically alter Alaska's colonial position, it was national security, not industrialization, that drove the changes that did occur in Alaska, but did not include crafting an economy less focused on exploiting natural resources. See: Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).

any enemy, particularly Japan. "The possession of Alaska by any strong foreign power," said Dimond, "would be a constant menace to the safety of the United States." He argued that, "Alaska at present time is open to seizure by a very small force. It lies so far distant from the United States and from the Hawaiian Islands that defense of it from either the United States or the Hawaiian Islands would be all but impossible."[10] Dimond's positioning of Alaska within the United States' Pacific empire is of note. First, Dimond described Alaska as distant from the United States, meaning that Alaska, while a U.S. possession, was not actually a part of the American nation-state. Second, Alaskan defense, claimed Dimond, depended upon Hawai'i, another American imperial outpost. In this hierarchical conception, Alaska occupied an imperial position more peripheral than Hawai'i. Nonetheless, possession of Alaska remained vital for the protection of the United States. While Alaska had been conceived of in primarily economic imperialist terms from the time of its purchase, Dimond began the work of reconceptualizing Alaska in older terms of empire, specifically the territorial security of the metropole. Alaska possessed great natural resources, which Dimond did not fail to note, but the territory was now primarily valuable for reasons of security, not economy.

As the United States inched closer to war with Japan, Dimond continued to argue that Alaska was critical to national security. In early 1941, Dimond wrote that Alaska, while strategically invaluable to the United States, remained peripheral to the national imagination for two reasons. The first was that most Americans still believed "the idea that Alaska is almost completely a land of snow and ice, of Eskimos and igloos and of annual six month nights, and of little if any economic consequence." The second reason Americans thought so little of Alaska

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[10] Anthony J. Dimond to Claude A. Swanson, April 12, 1936, box 16, folder 226, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

was, according to Dimond, because maps showed “Alaska as a place remote from direct line of communication between the cities on the west coast of the United States and the principal cities of the eastern coast of Asia and the Japanese Archipelago.” Instead of conceiving of Alaska so peripherally, Dimond believed Americans needed to understand that, “the possession of Alaska (and by that is meant a strong, armed, military and naval possession) will insure, as much as anything can insure, the defense, not only of Alaska, but of Canada and of the United States against any attack coming from Asia.” Sounding much like Nathaniel Banks some seventy-three years earlier, Dimond continued, “It is evident that Alaska can truly be called a stepping stone between the main body of the United States and Canada on the one hand, and Asia on the other and that, with Alaska firmly in our possession and armed and defended as it should be, the chances for success of a hostile incursion across the Pacific or through Alaska is reduced to almost zero.”[11] Dimond was not yet arguing for statehood, but by describing Alaska as vital for national security he challenged the perception that the territory was merely an economic extravagance. The entire United States depended on the continued possession and defense of Alaska.[12]

Dimond believed the United States should take advantage of the Soviet Union’s wartime hardships to extend its Alaskan possessions in order to better project American power in the Pacific. In August 1941, Dimond argued that the United States should demand the Komandorski

[11] Anthony J. Dimond, “The Strategic Value of Alaska,” box 3, folder 44a, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[12] For a summary of the evolution of the idea of U.S. national security, see Andrew Preston, “Monsters Everywhere: A Genealogy of National Security,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 3 (2014).

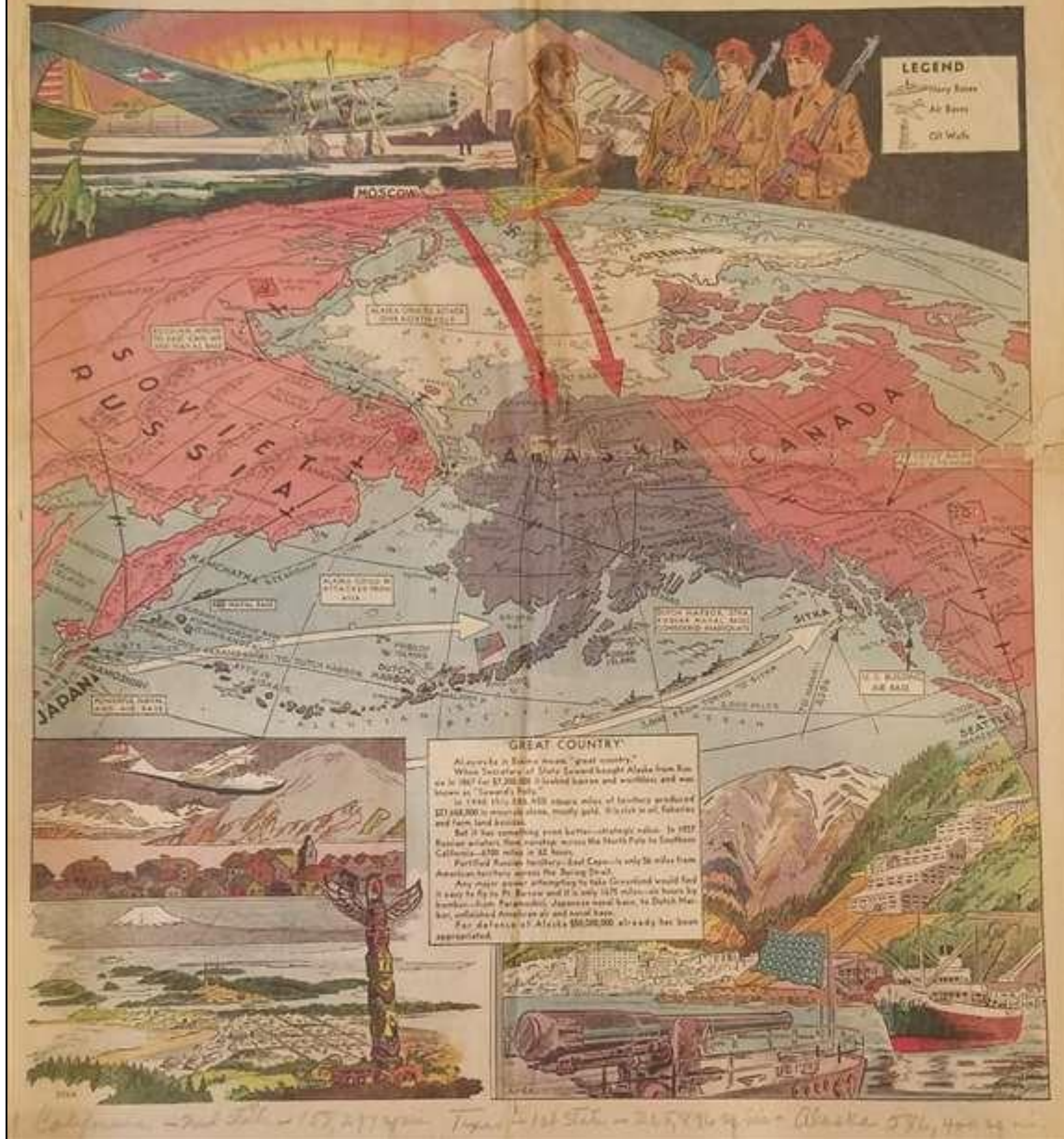

Fig. 6-1 A 1941 *Los Angeles Examiner* depiction of Alaska's importance to the United States. The text insert reads: "In 1940 this 586,000 square miles of territory produced $27,658,000 in minerals alone, mostly gold. It is rich in oil, fisheries, and farm land besides. But it has something even better—strategic value." Interestingly, the Komandorski Islands, just off the coast of Kamchatka, are the same color as Alaska, and not the Soviet Union. MS 0067, series iii, box 2, Special Newspaper Editions Related to Alaska, 1867- [ongoing], Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

Islands, only about one hundred miles off Russia's Pacific coast and which he described as "really a physical extension of the Aleutian Archipelago," as payment for aid provided to the Soviets in their fight against Germany.[13] Dimond believed the Soviets could not adequately defend the Komandorskis and that the loss of the islands to Japan would "constitute a threat to us in the North Pacific," specifically because Japanese possession of the islands would bring their military forces within two thousand miles of Seattle. On the other hand, Dimond contended that, "Armed possession and fortification of these islands by the United States would make us impregnable in that area and would complete the defense triangle, namely, the Panama Canal to Honolulu to Alaska."[14] Dimond called upon the memory of imperial Russia's weakness in the north Pacific to justify U.S. possession of the islands. Just as Russia had been too weak to defend Alaska in 1867 and had suffered a humiliating defeat to the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, so was the Soviet Union too weak to defend the Komandorski Islands in 1941. And just as Americans had seen Alaska as a stepping stone to Japan in 1867, Dimond saw the extension of Alaskan territory as a stepping stone to Japan in 1941. The only difference was the use of the stepping stone. In 1867, Alaska represented an entryway into the Japanese marketplace. In the summer of 1941, an Alaska extended by the addition of the Komandorski Islands represented a launching pad for military operations against Japan, a country, it is important to recall, with which the United States was not yet at war.

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[13] In fact, the United States and Japan fought an indecisive naval battle near the Komandorski Islands in March 1943. Samuel Eliot Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls: June 1942-April 1944*, vol. 7, *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), chapter 2.

[14] Anthony J. Dimond to V. Dwyer, August 23, 1941, box 36, folder 108, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Dimond's rhetoric of U.S. security still imagined Alaska, at this time, as a colonial possession. Indeed, Dimond grouped Alaska with Hawaiʻi and the Panama Canal as the "Pacific defense triangle" which were the "the very minimum of necessary defense for us in the Pacific."[15] In a radio interview conducted in April 1941, Dimond quoted General Billy Mitchell, regarded by many as the father of the U.S. Air Force, as having called Alaska the "most important strategic place in the world." In fact, Dimond argued that Alaska was more important to the defense of the U.S. mainland than Hawaiʻi. As had been known since at least the nineteenth century, the great circle route across the Pacific Ocean lay along the Aleutian Islands and southern Alaska. "It is, therefore, obvious," said Dimond, "that any hostile force moving against the United States from Asia would not come within two thousand miles of the Hawaiian Islands but would follow the coast of Alaska for all of that immense distance." For this reason, Dimond argued that the loss of Alaska posed a greater threat to U.S. security than the loss of either Hawaiʻi or the Panama Canal.[16]

Of course, when the Japanese military attacked the United States, Pearl Harbor was targeted, which Dimond believed to be adequately fortified. But the Japanese military command intended the Pearl Harbor attack to cripple or destroy the United States' ability to project naval power throughout the Pacific Ocean; Japanese military leaders did not intend to actually capture Hawaiʻi. On the other hand, the Japanese military did capture Alaskan territory in 1942—the islands of Attu and Kiska, located at the western end of the Aleutians. The Japanese military never attempted to use the islands as the springboard for an attack against the U.S. mainland,

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[15] Anthony J. Dimond, "The Strategic Value of Alaska," box 3, folder 44a, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[16] "Broadcast, April 14, 1941, John C. Kunkel, M. C.," box 3, folder 44a, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

however. In fact, the capture of the islands may have been strategically defensive, intended to prevent the U.S. military from using Attu and Kiska as a base for attacks against Japan. Nonetheless, the capture of the islands, part of Alaska and therefore ostensibly North American, damaged American morale during the early months of the Pacific conflict and strengthened statehood arguments in the years to come.

Dimond's use of the national defense argument aimed at more than simply building up the defenses of a colonial possession. Dimond's ultimate goal was the end of Alaska as a U.S. colony and the creation of the state of Alaska. In the tense months before the United States' entry into World War II, he saw Alaska's vital position in the United States' defense network as a way to help motivate those who did not consider Alaska as a future state to re-evaluate their position. But for Dimond, building up the defensive perimeter of Alaska was only a means to the end of Alaskan statehood. But in still conceiving of Alaska as a springboard to Asia, Dimond continued to think of Alaska in imperialist terms, only now the empire included the state of Alaska.

The creation of a string of military strongpoints along Alaska's southern coast and the Aleutians would require regular and reliable resupply. Dimond reminded all who would listen that the only routes from the United States to Alaska were by sea or air. While geographically North American, Alaska remained a geopolitical island. So long as the U.S. retained a strong fleet in the Pacific, resupply of military forces in Alaska by sea remained easy. Dimond invoked the specter of war with Nazi Germany, however, to argue that a real possibility existed that the bulk of the Pacific fleet might find itself in the Atlantic and that, consequently, U.S. control of the sea lanes in the Pacific would become tenuous at best. For this reason, Dimond urged the construction of a highway connecting Alaska to the United States. Such a highway would ensure the resupply of U.S. defenses in Alaska, but even more important, suggested Dimond, was the

road's importance for ending Alaskan colonialism, saying, "The highway must be built if the Territory is ever to attain its full status as a member of the Union, and if the United States is ever to enjoy all of the great benefits which are certain to accrue to it in the proper settlement and development of Alaska."[17] Dimond's concerns about national defense, while real enough, encouraged the creation of a national atmosphere of fear that would welcome Alaskan statehood as an expression and extension of American military might across the north Pacific.[18]

The military's presence in Alaska could be a double-edged sword, however. As U.S. citizens, Dimond argued that Alaska's residents were entitled to military protection. But observers recognized that as a mere territory, Alaska's civil government might easily be subordinated to military control in a manner next to impossible to imagine in the States. Alaska's future territorial delegate to Congress, E. L. Bartlett, serving as the acting governor in November 1942, complained that Alaska and Hawai'i suffered unduly during World War II specifically because of their colonial status. Bartlett called the imposition of martial law in Hawai'i, due to the islands' large Japanese and Japanese-American population, a uniquely "radical deviation" from "constitutional procedure," and that once the immediacy of war had passed, U.S. legal experts would debate the policy's constitutionality.[19] That martial law had not yet been implemented in Alaska was obviously good, Bartlett believed, but he also noted that the military—not he, Gruening, or any other civilian official in Alaska—would make any decisions

[17] "Broadcast, April 14, 1941, John C. Kunkel, M. C."
[18] The Second World War did precipitate the construction of the Alaska-Canadian Highway (ALCAN), connecting Alaska to the contiguous United States, in 1942. For more on the ALCAN, see: John Virtue, *The Black Soldiers Who Built the Alaska Highway: A History of Four U.S. Army Regiments in the North, 1942-1943* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013); and K. S. Coates and W. R. Morrison, *The Alaska Highway in World War II: The U.S. Army of Occupation in Canada's Northwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).
[19] In 1946 the Supreme Court declared the imposition of martial law in Hawai'i unconstitutional. Of course, by that time the war had ended. See: Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 177-178.

concerning the imposition of martial law. Alaska's colonial status meant that the U.S. military might take command of the territory's government at any moment without consulting the governor or the elected territorial legislature. Indeed, even though Alaska never fell under martial law, Gruening and Bartlett still found themselves reined in by military control. "There are very sharp limits confining the Governor's authority," wrote Bartlett. "These limitations of authority, these strangle holds upon the power to act where action is oftentimes imperatively and immediately required, are of no interest to Army and Navy commanders." Bartlett bemoaned the fact that Alaska's colonial status limited the power of the civilian government, unlike in a state, "where the real power is vested in the governors."[20] As a colony, Alaska was, at all times, subject to federal fiat.[21]

Gruening wrote similarly when considering military power in Alaska. The territorial governor of Alaska, stated Gruening, lacked the authority and power to adequately govern the territory during a time of war. Gruening suggested that bringing the governor's lack of authority to the attention of the War Department, along with a plan to invest the position with the necessary powers—he suggested "superimposing a presidential and congressional veto power over the acts of the Governor"—would likely serve well the purposes of Alaska's citizens. Such a proactive approach was safer, believed Gruening, than "not bringing it up, and facing the

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[20] E. L. Bartlett to A. J. Dimond, 30 November 1942, box 31, folder 239, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[21] Of course, the United States government assumed more authority throughout the United States during World War II. With the significant exception of Japanese internment, however, the government used a more subtle hand in the States than in its territorial possessions. For an example of how the government co-opted the citizenry to enforce censorship, see: Michael S. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). For a broader history of American self-policing during war time in general, see: Christopher Capozzola, "The Only Badge Needed Is Your Patriotic Fervor: Vigilance, Coercion, and the Law in World War I America," *Journal of American History* 88, no. 4 (March 2002).

danger of being presented with a fait accompli on the part of the War Department."[22] But Gruening's best-case scenario still involved attempting to politically manipulate the War Department into allowing the governor to exercise power. Such a strategy essentially conceded the fact that Alaska's colonial status meant that power ultimately rested with military officers rather than civilian elected—or even appointed—officials.

Even when not threatened by war, Alaska's territorial status interfered with building its internal infrastructure, viewed as vital for statehood. In 1946, with World War II now over, Dimond wrote to George Sundborg, a consultant for the Alaska Development Board, an organization which sought to promote the growth of industry in Alaska. In his letter, Dimond complained of "instances of which I have personal knowledge where Alaska was seriously discriminated against in general legislation because of its territorial status." The Reconstruction Finance Corporation, a government corporation created by the Hoover administration in 1932 and charged with providing aid to rural banks and railroads, had initially failed to provide assistance to Alaska, Hawai'i, and Puerto Rico. Likewise, Dimond noted that legislation to guarantee bank deposits initially included only deposits made in banks within the forty-eight states. Congressional appropriations for the building of roads and expansion of education failed to include Alaska. And worst of all, said Dimond, war damage insurance, to cover any damage to private property resulting from the recent war, would not reimburse U.S. citizens living in Alaska. Only strenuous objections by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes convinced Franklin Roosevelt to finally extend coverage to citizens living in the territories. "There was no sound reason to leave the territories out [of such legislative and executive programs] in the first place,"

[22] Ernest Gruening to the Under Secretary, 19 December 1942, box 31, folder 239, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

argued Dimond. “The only excuse was that they were territories and had no political standing,” he concluded.[23] Such imperialist manifestations of empire, many Americans were coming to believe, had no place in the middle of the twentieth century.

Imperialism Versus the Cold War

While Dimond had campaigned for Alaskan statehood, Ernest Gruening was the most visible leader of the movement. Gruening had considerable experience as a U.S. colonial administrator. From 1934 to 1939, Gruening served as Director of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions (DTIP), responsible for administering Alaska, Hawai‘i, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Baker Island, Howland Island, Jarvis Island, Canton Island, Enderbury Island, and—for a brief time—the Philippines. From 1935 to 1937, Gruening also served as the Administrator of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, a New Deal agency responsible for establishing long-term economic stability in Puerto Rico. Gruening, however, came to despise his immediate supervisor, Secretary Ickes, who likewise came to loathe Gruening. According to Gruening’s biographer, both men “lacked tact, tended to personalize disputes, viewed with paranoia any attempts to trespass on their bureaucratic prerogatives, and strove to extend their own power at the expense of others within the executive branch.” In the end, Gruening and Ickes “were too alike in personality to remain on friendly terms for long.” After protracted political dueling, Ickes succeeded in having Gruening banished to Alaska, were he served as the Territorial Governor from 1939 to 1953.[24] As governor, Gruening, called by some at the time the “ablest

[23] Anthony J. Dimond to George Sundborg, July 12, 1946, box 42, folder 72, Anthony J. Dimond Papers, 1904-1953. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[24] For more on Gruening’s long government career, see: Robert David Johnson, *Ernest Gruening and the American Dissenting Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), quotes from 120.

Governor in the history of the territory," quickly made the statehood battle his own.[25] While Alaskans had been struggling for statehood for some decades before Gruening arrived on the scene, he devised the anti-colonial strategy used by statehood advocates so effectively.

Some might find it ironic that a long-time colonial official fought so long and so hard to end U.S. empire. Others might argue that it was Gruening's long service that opened his eyes to the reality of U.S. empire and inspired his opposition to it. Scholars have noted that when Roosevelt appointed Gruening director of DTIP, he remarked to the president, "This new division is really the equivalent of the British colonial office, isn't it, Mr. President," to which Roosevelt replied, "I suppose it is." "Well," Gruening continued, "a democracy shouldn't have any colonies."[26] Still, others may note that Gruening campaigned only for statehood in Alaska and Hawai'i, the two territories incorporated by the *Insular Cases* and which possessed large and economically and politically powerful white populations. Unincorporated territories, lacking white communities of significant size or power, not only remained unincorporated, but failed to generate sympathy from Gruening or Alaska's other statehood advocates. Indeed, in 1955, the chairman of the Alaska Statehood Committee referred to Alaska and Hawai'i as the United States' only territories.[27] When it came to ending colonialism, race mattered.

Gruening took steps during his tenure as governor to reduce Alaska's subordinate colonial position. The protestations of national security advocates notwithstanding, as an imperialist colony Alaska's value continued to lay primarily in its natural resources. Gruening

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[25] Unknown to George Sundborg, 22 January 1947, box 27, folder 181, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[26] In Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 157.
[27] Robert B. Atwood to Ernest Gruening, 8 October 1955, box 59, folder 180, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

recognized that Alaska's resources were valuable indeed, but believed they should be used to enrich Alaska, not the mainland. For this to happen, however, Gruening believed Alaska needed significant business and infrastructural development. But before such development could occur, Alaska needed to be able to feed its own population. As such, Gruening supported using federal money to research and develop Alaskan agriculture. Statehood was based on ideas of agricultural settlement, not resource extraction. Americans could only imagine a population worthy of statehood in the mythologized context of Westward expansion, and that meant a sizeable white population of farmers.

In 1946, the House Agricultural Subcommittee sent a team of scientists to Alaska to investigate the possibility of increased appropriations for agricultural study in Alaska. The chairman of the subcommittee, Everett M. Dirksen, informed Gruening that additional appropriations would probably not be recommended, or if they were, the funds would only be available for a "definite time" and would be subject to oversight by the Secretary of Agriculture and Congress.[28] Gruening responded by differentiating Alaska from the United States while simultaneously invoking the myth of federal neglect of Western territories and states in an attempt to justify increased federal spending that would help eliminate Alaska's colonial status.

The federal government had unjustly ignored Alaska, argued Gruening, shirking its responsibilities to explore Alaska's agricultural possibilities, especially "considering our vast area and our totally different soil and climatological conditions as compared with the States."[29] Granting statehood to Alaska, as the U.S. federal tradition required, would alleviate many of

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[28] Everett M. Dirksen to Ernest Gruening, 19 February 1947, box 27, folder 179, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[29] Ernest Gruening to Everett M. Dirksen, 25 February 1947, box 27, folder 179, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Alaska's problems, according to Gruening. Turning Alaska's residents into national voters would force the federal government to adequately care for the new state and its citizens. The irony that statehood meant more federal involvement in Alaska was apparently lost on Gruening. His reference to the "States," as opposed to the rest of the country or some similar phrase is telling, as is his comparison of Alaska's soil and climate to the mainland. The references are also reinforcing. First, Gruening intimated that Alaska's climate and soil were unlike any others found in the United States. In doing this, Gruening exoticized Alaska; the differentiation is strengthened by his direct comparison of Alaska to the States. In Gruening's phrasing, Alaska, while a U.S. territory, was not actually part of the United States. It was, in effect, a foreign land possessed and controlled by the American government, but not incorporated into the body politic. In other words, Alaska was a colony. But Gruening suggested that a state of perpetual colonialism was inconsistent with the American tradition. Gruening pointed to an American heritage in which the federal government had aided in the settlement of the U.S. West by implementing policies that encouraged white settlement, especially, according to Gruening, of would-be farmers, veterans, pioneers, and homesteaders.[30] Gruening intended his invocation of these powerful mythical settler groups to place pressure upon the federal government, forcing it to enact policies that would increase white settlement in Alaska and create a society more consistent with the United States' continental West. The development of Alaska, as a colony dependent upon the United States, was a federal responsibility, argued Gruening.[31] Once

[30] The Homestead Act of 1862 was only applied to Alaska in 1898. Although the Homestead Act was repealed in 1976, a provision allowed the Act to remain in effect in Alaska until 1986. In total, 3,277 homesteads, totaling about 360,00 acres, were conveyed in Alaska. "Homesteading," Alaska Centers: Public Lands Information, accessed 6 March 2020. https://www.alaskacenters.gov/explore/culture/history/homestead-act.

[31] Western mythology has tended to refuse to concede the importance of federal subsidizes and support in the development of the region. Only after the New Deal and the expansion of federal power that accompanied World War II could a claim like Gruening's, that federal power was hugely important to

developed, responsibility would pass to Alaska's inhabitants to maintain it as a state. But the voting power of Alaska's residents would ensure that federal dollars continued to flow north. Gruening understood U.S. empire as legitimate only when statehood was the ultimate goal of territorial acquisition. Statehood would not only secure the rights of Alaska's residents, however, it would bolster the United States' national security in the Cold War world.

Ideological conflict with the Soviet Union guaranteed that national security concerns continued to affect Alaska's value to the United States. In 1946, Gruening wrote to Bartlett, now serving as Alaska's delegate to Congress, urging him to meet with President Truman regarding the role of Alaska in a potential war with the Soviet Union. "All our thinking in connection with the defense of Alaska had been in terms of the war against Japan and had been devoted to developing the Aleutians," wrote Gruening. "Now," he continued, "the entire Arctic and Bering Sea Coast is defenseless. The valley of the Yukon, which would be a natural route into Alaska from Siberia, is entirely open." Gruening did not believe war with the Soviets to be inevitable,

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Westward expansion, be made. For more on the myth of an ineffectual federal government in the West, see: Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). For more on the increased role of the federal government in the West after World War II, see: Nash, *The American West Transformed*.

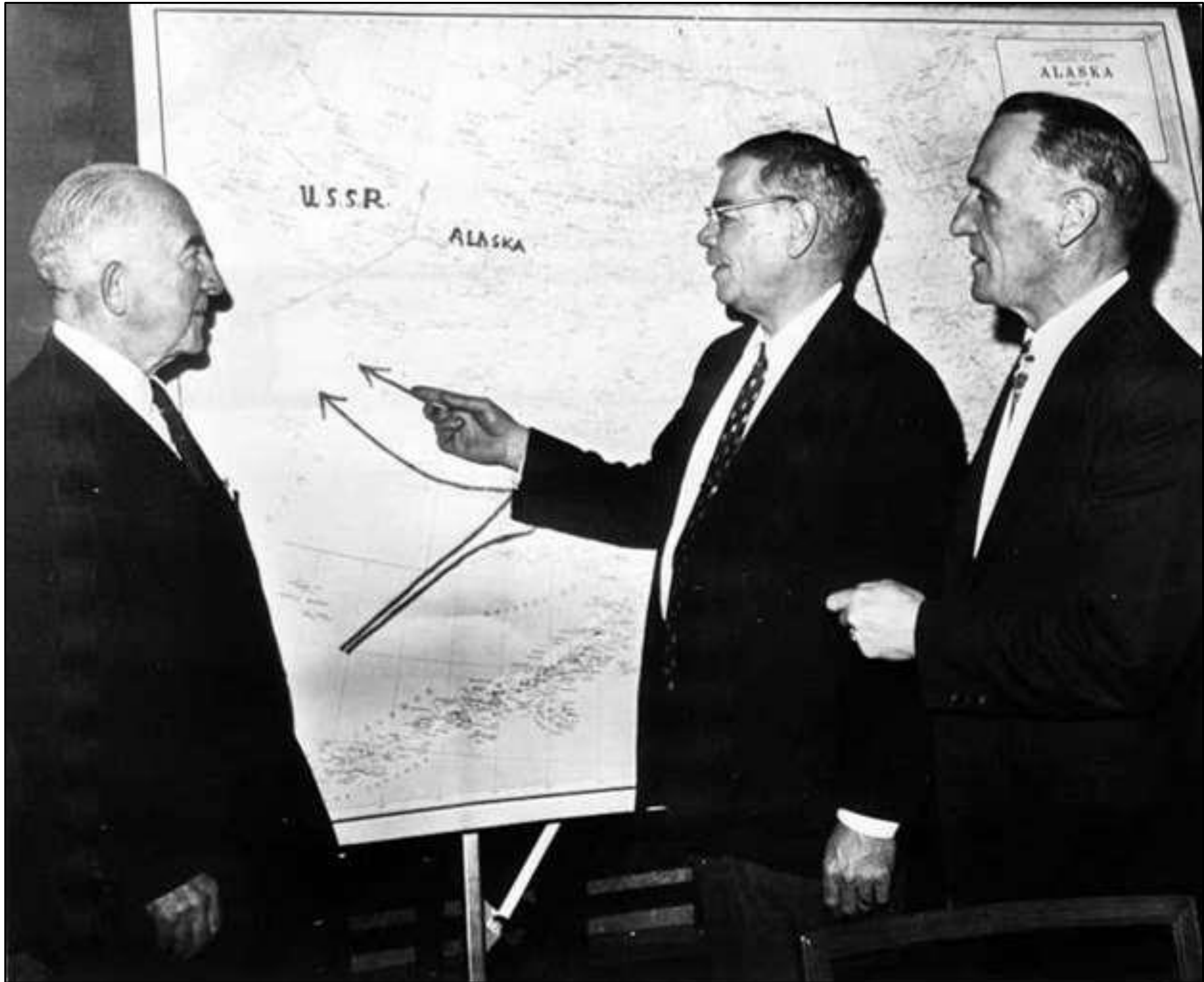

Fig. 6-2 Senator Bob Bartlett points to an arrow on a map of Alaska and the Soviet Union. Senator Ernest Gruening is on left and Representative Ralph Rivers on right. "Ernest Gruening, Bob Barlett, and Ralph Rivers," ASL-P01-3269. Alaska State Library Portrait File. Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

but "if war should come, Alaska would be the battleground. It would hold the place in the western world that Belgium has held in European wars."[32] That is to say, Alaska would serve as the path to the vital heartlands of the combatants. And just as Belgium was neither French nor German, Gruening's statement may have implied that Alaska, despite possession by both Russia and the United States at various points during its history, had never been fully either.

[32] Ernest Gruening to E. L. Bartlett, 16 March 1946, box 31, folder 239, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The military in Alaska was not viewed as unequivocally good, however. A strong U.S. military presence in Alaska might serve to not only protect Alaskans from foreign threats, but to also keep them under the United States' imperial heel. In 1947, Gruening wrote to Bartlett again, this time to warn him of rumors that both the Army and Navy planned to fight Alaskan statehood. "The argument is that they [the Army and Navy] don't want to be bothered with a state government, and want to be able to move around more freely," Gruening wrote. Despite these rumors, Gruening took comfort in the fact that Truman publicly supported Alaskan statehood and as commander-in-chief could blunt the efforts of the military.[33] Nonetheless, Gruening warned, "there is no telling what George C. Marshall might feel like saying or the new Secretary of National Defense."[34] Long experience in government had taught Gruening that the executive branch consisted of more than just the president and that as a mere territory, Alaska remained at the mercy of officials Alaskans had not elected. Gruening believed only one thing could possibly remove the colonial stigma from Alaska: "statehood—with two senators carrying the ball."[35]

Gruening argued that colonialism in Alaska threatened national security, rather than enhanced it. While the military might not have to concern itself with civilian opinion when creating its defense plans for territorial Alaska, Gruening believed the military would only mount a determined defense of Alaska if it were a state with voting citizens. So long as Alaska

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[33] Truman was the first president to endorse Alaskan statehood, primarily for the territory's "known resources of food timber and minerals of great value to the national economy." Special Message to the Congress on Alaska, 21 May 1948, Public Papers, Harry S. Truman Library. https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/105/special-message-congress-alaska

[34] Ernest Gruening to E. L. Bartlett, 11 February 1947, box 31, folder 239, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[35] Ernest Gruening to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 4 April 1950, box 31, folder 239, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

remained a territory, Congress would not provide the necessary funds to develop Alaska's infrastructure or defense, nor would the military establishment ask for them. Gruening invoked the Soviet specter to arouse concern. "Only fifty four miles from the Alaskan mainland, behind the 'iron curtain', there is tremendous activity, not merely in behalf of defense but in settlement," argued Gruening in 1949. The Soviets had a clear program of "industrial and agricultural development designed to make that large sparsely settled region of Eastern Siberia that corresponds roughly with Alaska's area, strong and populous," he continued.[36] Military and civilian strength were intertwined, according to Gruening. The United States lacked any kind of coherent vision or policy in Alaska, thereby placing the entire country at risk. Only statehood could encourage the population growth Alaska needed, and only an increased population would shore up the United States' defensive shortcomings in the Far North. The safety of the entire United States depended on Alaskan statehood.

The military continued to argue against Alaskan statehood, even after leadership within most other parts of the federal government came to support it. Eisenhower had quietly, but consistently, supported Alaskan statehood during the early years of his presidency. As the issue intensified in the mid- to late-1950s, however, he waffled on statehood because he feared the state of Alaska would hamper American national security efforts. Noting the "tremendous strategic importance of this region to our national defense," Eisenhower protested that, "Our military programs and plans oriented to this region and to the threat facing us there are premised

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[36] This statement reveals a certain contradiction in how Gruening imagined the world. On the one hand, in his mind Gruening looked east toward Europe and the Soviet Union, as most Americans probably did. On the other hand, living in Alaska forced Gruening to recognize the reality of the Soviet Union mere miles to the west. This statement also further suggests that Gruening thought of Alaska as a backdoor both into the Soviet Union from the United States and from the Soviet Union into the United States. Ernest Gruening to William Randolph Hearst, 8 August 1949, box 61, folder 229, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

upon full freedom of Federal action both for defense and for *peacetime policing action*." At this time, Eisenhower believed the "conversion of the Territory to a State cannot but raise difficult questions respecting the relationship of the military to the newly constituted State authority" that would do nothing more than impair "the freedom of movement and of action by our forces in large areas of this critical region."[37] Eisenhower understood that Alaskan statehood meant that the military would no longer have free rein to act with near complete impunity in the imperial territory, during times of war or peace.

The full Constitutional rights of the citizens living in Alaska would have to be respected once the territory attained statehood. While Americans living in territories may have been citizens, that citizenship was clearly second-class, most notable in citizens' inability to vote in presidential elections. Statehood guaranteed full citizenship, protected by the Constitution itself, rather than Congressional declaration or military fiat. It was this demand for full Constitutional citizenship that scuttled efforts to create commonwealths, like that formed in Puerto Rico in 1950, in Alaska and Hawai'i, which merely granted, in the words of the Hawai'i Statehood Committee, nothing more than "American citizenship 'on loan.'"[38] Since 1867, the military had

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[37] Dwight D. Eisenhower to A. L. Miller, 31 March 1955, box 60, folder 210, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. Emphasis added.

[38] What exactly a commonwealth is in the context of the American system remains nebulous and debated. It is clear, however, that as a commonwealth, Puerto Rico is neither a state nor fully independent. "Statehood vs. Commonwealth," box 60, folder 227, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. For more on Puerto Rico, see: Julian Go, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Elite Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico During U.S. Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall, "Between Foreign and Domestic: The Doctrine of Territorial Incorporation, Invented and Reinvented," in *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution*, ed. Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); and Lanny Thompson, "The Imperial Republic: A Comparison of the Insular Territories under U.S. Dominion after 1898," *Pacific Historical Review* 71, no. 4 (November 2002).

answered to almost no one regarding its actions and policies in Alaska. Statehood and full citizenship threatened more than eighty years of dogmatic U.S. military policy in Alaska.

Beginning in the early 1950s, Gruening and likeminded Alaskans ramped up the statehood campaign by tying together U.S. domestic and foreign policy. In 1952, U.S. diplomat and politician Averell Harriman, the son of the railroad magnate Edward Harriman who had toured Alaska with John Muir, considered running for president. Harriman possessed an impressive resume: U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union (1943-1946); U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom (1946); Secretary of Commerce (1946-1948); and Director of the Mutual Security Agency (1951-1953). While investigating the possibility of running for president, Harriman's campaign reached out to Gruening, still Alaska's governor, to determine if the territory's delegation to the Democratic National Convention would support a Harriman candidacy. Gruening informed Harriman that support from the Alaska delegation was not likely to be forthcoming. While the Alaska delegation consisted of "progressive-minded Democrats," the fact was that Alaskans, as citizens living in a territory rather than a state, could not vote for president. This unacceptable reality demanded, therefore, that the delegation members' "great concern is for statehood," wrote Gruening.[39] The delegation would almost certainly find Harriman unacceptable as a presidential candidate, opined Gruening, because his failure to join the Alaska Statehood Committee "does indicate that he has not the interest and concern for this great cause [Alaskan statehood] which is Alaska's principal objective." Gruening nonetheless believed Harriman "will make a great president" if elected. To garner support from the Alaska delegation, however, Gruening suggested that Harriman make "a clear-cut statement in favor of

[39] So great was the desire for statehood, that in 1947, Anchorage's mayor, Francis C. Bowden, described Alaskans' second-class status as being "as eunuchs among the citizens of the United States." In Gruening, *The Battle for Alaska Statehood*, 18.

the passage of the statehood bill at the earliest possible moment, and to pledge to support it vigorously should he become president." Not only would such a stance help Harriman win the support of the Alaska delegation, Gruening argued that "granting full self-government to our only two incorporated territories is wholly consonant with the foreign policy which Averell Harriman has been so ably promoting."[40] Supporting Alaskan statehood was not only good domestic politics, it was good foreign relations as well.[41]

Gruening had good reason to suggest that a potential Democratic presidential nominee support Alaskan statehood if he hoped to receive Alaskan support in 1952. Statehood was the key issue for many of the territory's residents. While Alaskans could not vote for president, they did hold territorial elections, including choosing delegates to the political conventions, where the delegates could make their voices and concerns heard. The Alaska Republican platform in 1952 once again demanded that "statehood be granted to Alaska under an enabling act providing maximum ownership and control of resources in the new state."[42] The desire for increased economic independence was front and center in the statehood campaign, but absentee capitalist interests fought Alaskan statehood so as to preserve the profits flowing out of imperialist Alaska.

Although Alaska Republicans officially supported statehood, Republicans outside the territory were less convinced that the territory should be welcomed as a full and equal member of the Union. Even within Alaska, not all Republicans supported statehood. Alaska's Republicans were, according to Gruening, "highly placed, and potent," but also stooges of absentee capital, particularly the canned salmon industry. "Actually," Gruening wrote to Hawai‘i's Congressional

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[40] Ernest Gruening to Herbert Lehman, 2 June 1952, box 355, folder 8, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.
[41] See also: Michael A. Hill, "Imperial Stepping Stone: Bridging Continental and Overseas Empire in Alaska," *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 1 (2020), 24.
[42] "Territorial Republican Platform," MS 0056, box 1, folder 5, Alaska Campaign Literature, 1889-[ongoing], Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

delegate Joseph Farrington, “the boss of the Republican party here is a semi literate individual named Al White who … is wholly an opportunist.” Alaska’s Republicans “are few, but they have some press support,” continued Gruening.[43] Republicans, even some living in the territory, feared the state of Alaska would lean heavily toward the Democratic Party, and so used every tool at their disposal to protect their party as well as their economic wellbeing.

Gruening had no illusions concerning the difficult task Alaska statehood proponents faced. Not only was hard work needed on all fronts, Gruening believed it vital to link Alaskan and Hawaiian statehood. “I am hopeful that by persistent and unremitting effort we may win the statehood battle,” he wrote in 1951 to Samuel King of the Hawai‘i Statehood Commission. “A turn of the tide of obstructionism is bound to come sooner of later, and may come sooner than we think,” Gruening continued, “but in any event that hope should not be compromised and in fact, seriously jeopardized by any diminishing of efforts in behalf of statehood. We are taking that position in regard to the Alaska Statehood Bill and I hope that Hawai‘i will have a similar attitude.” If Hawaiian statehood campaigners lessened their efforts, Alaska’s prospects for statehood would suffer. Throughout the entirety of Alaska’s statehood battle during the 1950s, Gruening and his Alaskan compatriots encouraged and worked for Hawaiian statehood as well.[44] While Alaskan statehood advocates might have failed to see U.S. empire in all its forms, there can be no doubt that they truly believed colonialism to be inconsistent with core American ideals, including democracy and liberty.

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[43] Ernest Gruening to Joseph Farrington, 8 December 1951, box 33, folder 266, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[44] Ernest Gruening to Samuel Wilder King, 16 April 1951, box 33, folder 266; Ernest Gruening to Joseph R. Farrington, 6 November 1952, box 40, folder 357; and “Alaska and the Tennessee Plan,” *Honolulu Advertiser*, 2 July 1956, box 58, folder 173, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Businesses dependent upon Alaskan resources, but headquartered outside the territory, fought strenuously against statehood. In particular, salmon canning companies and timber pulp companies feared that statehood would hamper access to natural resources or drive up the price associated with exploiting those resources. So long as Alaska's resources remained under the purview of federal agencies willing to negotiate leasing agreements beneficial to absentee capitalists' bottom line, maintaining Alaska's territorial, and therefore colonial, status suited the salmon and timber industries fine. Some critics of absentee industry even went so far as to allege collusion between absentee capitalists and members of federal bureaucracy.[45] While stopping short of such allegations, Delegate Bartlett wrote in 1954 that members of this absentee group, "for reasons of their own are not interested in the development of Alaska, do not care if the population ever increases, and insistently demand a preservation of the status quo … this group has no bona fide interest in Alaska as such."[46] As the likelihood of statehood grew in the late 1950s, the salmon canning companies campaigned to have the salmon fisheries declared to be of such international importance that the federal government should retain control of them, even after Alaskan statehood.[47] Although rejected in the final bill, the salmon canning companies successfully lobbied to have such an amendment added to an early version of the Alaska statehood bill.[48] The canning companies had reason to worry. State laws eliminating salmon

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[45] Stephen Haycox, "Economic Development and Indian Land Rights in Modern Alaska: The 1947 Tongass Timber Act," *Western Historical Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (February 1990), 23.
[46] E. L. Bartlett, "Is Alaska Territory Ready for Statehood Now?" box 40, folder 357, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[47] Roger Kent to E. L. Bartlett, 28 May 1957, box 60, folder 222, "Bartlett Reports Attempt to Take Control of Fish from Statehood Bill," 14 February 1958, box 60, folder 222; Ernest Gruening to Katherine Alexander, 29 January 1958, box 60, folder 222; and Ernest Gruening to George Sundborg, 29 January 1958, box 60, folder 216, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[48] "Memorandum from Delegate Bartlett," 15 April 1958, box 62, folder 267, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

traps crippled the canning industry in Alaska. Statehood threatened capitalists' bottom lines. The status quo, economic imperialism in Alaska, was simply good business.

Representatives of absentee capital who lived in Alaska were among the leaders of the anti-statehood party in Alaska. These men rehashed old arguments defining Alaska's value as limited to its natural resources. In a locale in which jobs often depended upon absentee capital, business representatives regularly won election to Alaska's territorial legislature, where they worked to entrench their business interests in territorial law. Gruening was determined to remove such imperialist interests from Alaska. As governor, Gruening countered the efforts of men such as O. D. Cochran, president of the Territorial Senate and the United States Smelting and Refining Company's Alaska attorney, who Gruening claimed represented his absentee employer in the legislature, rather than Alaskans. "In debating against the tax program at the last session," Gruening wrote to Harold Ickes, "he [Cochran] said inadvertently: 'My employers object to this legislation." Business representatives masquerading as representatives of the people placed the financial concerns of their companies ahead of the needs of Alaskans, ensuring the continuation of imperialist policies.

This tendency to privilege profit over people affected security as well. During the Second World War, Cochran and James V. Davis, Speaker of the Alaska House of Representatives and a stockholder in Alaska Coastal Airlines, opposed an increased military presence in Alaska for fear it would raise taxes. Gruening reported that in 1943, even after the Japanese had seized Attu and Kiska, Cochran argued against increased military spending in Alaska, asking, "Who would ever dream of Attacking Alaska? How ridiculous to spend money for armories." Likewise, Gruening accused Davis of attempting to send a "fake telegram" to Dimond stating that Alaskan labor opposed the building of new armories and that Dimond should urge Congress not to support such

expenditures.[49] Alaska's colonial status made such chicanery possible. While censorship with a light touch discolored U.S. news reporting on the mainland, in the United States' peripheral possessions censorship was far more pervasive. So strict was censorship in Alaska, that territorial legislators like Cochran did not even know that Japanese forces had attacked and seized Attu and Kiska.[50]

Although the conception of Alaska as a place unfit for significant white settlement remained strong throughout World War II, Alaskan statehood rested on growing the territory's white population. A stable population depended upon a vibrant economy based in Alaska, not the mainland, argued statehood supporters. "Alaska has for too long been regarded by too many of its residents as a temporary camp in which they might accumulate some wealth to be used and enjoyed elsewhere. Sustained economic development has in many ways been retarded by this attitude," wrote Gruening. Statehood depended upon "a sound and enduring development of the Territory," he argued. Thus, Alaska needed policies designed to keep the territory's wealth in Alaska. In short, the colonial system that encouraged absentee capitalists to invest in Alaska was a purely imperialist one, antithetical to American tradition.[51] The rights of Alaska's U.S. citizens, from Gruening's perspective, outweighed the profit rights of capitalists.

Imperialism, however, made good economic sense to the business owners outside the territory. While Alaska had failed to open the door to the mythical Asian market, it had become an important export market for Seattle businesses. Like Chicago in the Midwest and San

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[49] Ernest Gruening to Harold L. Ickes, 26 January 1943, box 28, folder 189, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[50] Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 178.
[51] Ernest Gruening, "Post-Defense Economic Development in Alaska," box 50, folder 550, Ernest Gruening Papers [1914-1974], Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Francisco in California, Seattle was an important regional imperial metropole in the Pacific Northwest and the city's businesses had important ties to Alaska reaching back to the gold rush era.[52] As many as 70,000 of the 100,000 miners who traveled to Alaska passed through Seattle, with the remainder divvied up among Tacoma, San Francisco, Portland, and Vancouver, British Columbia.[53] So important was the gold rush, and therefore Alaska, to Seattle that some have argued that the city's current success is owed almost entirely to the gold rush.[54]

By the time of the statehood debate, transporting food, not miners, was big business in Seattle. The misleadingly named Alaska Steamship Company (ASC) of Seattle had, by the 1940s, come to control all maritime transportation to Alaska. The ability of the ASC to completely control access to and from Alaska via the sea demonstrates that although North American, the unique nature of Alaska's discontiguousness meant that it was, from a very practical point of view, an island more isolated from the States than was Hawai‘i during this same time.[55] To secure the future of their shipping profits, some business leaders argued that Alaska should not receive statehood until agriculture in the territory became sufficient enough to feed its own population. Gruening and others argued that the ASC's high freight rates prevented the introduction of the very farm equipment and fertilizers that would allow Alaskan agriculture to blossom.[56] Only statehood would lower freight rates, Gruening and his allies argued. How,

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[52] Particularly in the U.S. West, urban centers have always played the role of regional imperial metropoles. See: William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991); and Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
[53] Lisa Mighetto and Marcia Montgomery, *Hard Drive to the Klondike: Promoting Seattle During the Gold Rush* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), xi.
[54] "American Survey: The Heirs of the Klondike," *The Economist* (15 February 1997), 25.
[55] During the 1940s at least three shipping companies had been servicing Hawai‘i since the early twentieth century: the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, the Matson Navigation Company, and the American-Hawaiian Steamship Company.
[56] Ernest Gruening to James W. Wilson, 17 March 1958, box 58, folder 163, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

exactly, statehood would end the shipping monopoly remained unclear, but statehood advocates fervently believed it would.

Alaskans found themselves trapped in an imperialist system they lacked the economic or political power to overcome. Supporters of statehood appealed to voters and consumers throughout the country and drummed up significant popular support. Companies like the ASC did not answer to such statehood advocates, however; the residents of Alaska remained a captive market. Thus, despite pleas from Seattle's citizens to "foster friendly relations" with "our friends to the north" rather than kowtow to "men whose interests would be better served if statehood is denied," the Seattle Chamber of Commerce never fully endorsed Alaskan statehood.[57] The closest the Seattle chamber came was adopting a resolution proclaiming the members desire to "not take actions on the pros and cons of the issue," while affirming their "continuing efforts to further the industrial and economic development of the Territory of Alaska."[58] Even in the 1950s, imperialism paid.

Statehood Achieved

By the late 1950s, many in the United States believed that the political advantages of ending empire trumped business profits, at least in territories populated primarily by those of European decent. Many Americans understood that, by the middle of the twentieth century, overt imperial practices damaged the United States' standing as an international leader. How could the United States demand that other countries respect U.S. appeals to democracy and liberty when it refused to allow self-government within its own empire? As Gruening argued in a letter to the editor of

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[57] "Comment and Opinion," *The Argus* (Seattle), 15 November 1957, box 53, folder 25, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[58] Martin J. O'Rorke to Ernest Gruening, 27 August 1957, box 53, folder 25, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Elks Magazine, "We must remove the beam from Uncle Sam's eye before operating on our neighbors' motes."[59] In an increasingly interconnected global world, Americans, despite, or perhaps because of, claims of global leadership had to take account of the beliefs and convictions of those living beyond the borders of the forty-eight states.

The international context of the Cold War, with the United States and Soviet Union jockeying for support from emerging Third World countries, pressured the United States to grant statehood to its territories—welcoming the American peripheries and their residents as full participants in the U.S. promises of liberty and democracy—or to grant the colonies their independence. The United States generally supported the "upsurge of nationalism and desire for independence" in other parts of the world, wrote a representative of *Life* to Gruening in 1955, and "there should be no clear separation between our internal and foreign policy in this field."[60] In his keynote address at the 1955 Alaska Constitutional Convention, Gruening called the U.S. territorial system a form of colonialism and argued that it was "destructive of American purpose in the world." The United States could not claim leadership of the free world when it failed to grant freedom to all those living in its own territories.[61]

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[59] Ernest Gruening to Lee C. Hickey, 17 December 1955, box 59, folder 181, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[60] Virginia Bliss to Ernest Gruening, 15 November 1955, box 59, folder 181, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[61] For more on how Cold War foreign relations affected U.S. decolonization, see: Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), especially chapters 6 and 7; Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2006*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), especially chapter 8; Jeremi Suri, "The Cold War, Decolonization, and Global Social Awakenings: Historical Intersections," *Cold War History* 6, no. 3 (August 2006); Brad Simpson, "The United States and the Curious History of Self-Determination," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 4 (September 2012); Yoichi Kibata, "The Changing International Order in Asia and Anglo-Japanese Relations: From the Mid-1950s to the Early 1960s," in *The Transformation of the International Order of Asia: Decolonization, the Cold War, and the Colombo Plan*, ed. Shigeru Akita, Gerold Krozewski, and Shoichi Watanabe (New York: Routledge, 2015); and Hideki Kan, "U.S. Cold War Policy and the Colombo Plan: A Continuing Search for Regional Cooperation in Asia in the 1950s,"

Gruening noted both Article 73 of the United Nations Charter and the 1954 Pacific Charter, in which the United States had pledged to uphold the right of self-determination. By governing Alaska (and Hawai‘i) as colonial territories, U.S. leaders forfeited their right to "lead the world into the pathway of peace."[62] Other American leaders agreed. Earlier in 1955, the State Department argued that granting Alaska statehood would, "serve to support American foreign policy and strengthen the position of the United States in international relations. This is especially true with respect to our participation in the United Nations." In particular, the State Department believed that granting statehood to Alaska and Hawai‘i would "redound to our credit among these nations of the free world [Asia, the Near East, Africa, and Latin America]," while also serving as a "stark contrast to the policies of the Soviet Union which practices a systematic denial of political liberty in the areas where it exercises control."[63] To regain the moral high ground demanded by Cold War international politics, the United States had to divest itself of its colonial possessions by granting them statehood and welcoming them into the fraternity of U.S. federalism.[64]

In arguing for statehood, Gruening adopted an almost militaristic anti-colonial tone in his keynote address. "The people of Alaska," said Gruening, "have come to see that their long standing and unceasing protests against the restrictions, discriminations and exclusions to which we are subject have been unheeded by the colonialism that has ruled Alaska for 88 years."

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in *The Transformation of the International Order of Asia: Decolonization, the Cold War, and the Colombo Plan*, ed. Shigeru Akita, Gerold Krozewski, and Shoichi Watanabe (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[62] Ernest Gruening, "Let Us End American Colonialism! Alaska the United States Colony: Keynote Address, Alaska Constitutional Convention."

[63] Thruston B. Morton to James E. Murray, 4 February 1955, box 60, folder 210, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[64] See also, Hill, "Imperial Stepping Stone," 23-25.

Drawing upon an imagined U.S. anti-imperial past, Gruening declared, "For our nation was born of revolt against colonialism. Our charters of liberty—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—embody America's opposition to colonialism and to colonialism's inevitable abuses." In the decolonizing world of the 1950s, then, it was therefore completely just and proper that the U.S. government and its leaders supported "other peoples striving for self-determination and for that universally applicable tenet of American faith—government by consent of the governed." Gruening then dropped the hammer: "What could be more ironical, then, what more paradoxical, than that the very same leadership maintain Alaska as a colony?"[65]

Gruening then went through a list of grievances comparable to those leveled against George III in the Declaration of Independence and applied an updated version of those grievances to the relationship existing between the federal government and Alaska. By refusing to transfer control of Alaska's fisheries to the territory, by refusing to repeal the Jones Act,[66] by refusing to allow Alaskans to reform the territory's land laws, by refusing to include Alaska in federal highway legislation, by imprisoning mentally challenged Alaska's like criminals "in a distant institution in the states," and by refusing to pay federal judges in Alaska a living wage, the federal government had "refused to assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good." Gruening compared the killing of the Alaska statehood bill to the Declarations' second grievance against George III: "He has forbidden his Governors to pass laws of immediate and growing importance." By failing to improve Alaska's federal judiciary, particularly the number of judges in the territory, while "increasing the number of judges in the 'mother

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[65] Ernest Gruening, "Let Us End American Colonialism! Alaska the United States Colony: Keynote Address, Alaska Constitutional Convention."

[66] The Merchant Marine Act of 1920, or Jones Act, declared that all goods transported by water between U.S. ports had to be carried on ships built in the United States, owned by U.S. citizens, and manned by U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Alaskans claimed that such requirements cost the territory and its residents millions of dollars each year.

country,' the 48 states," the federal government was guilty of the third charge against the King: the obstruction of the administration of justice. And by declaring that the defense of Alaska could be better carried out if Alaska remained a territory, the government had merely, according to Gruening, elevated the military to a position "independent and superior to the civil power." Gruening ended this denunciation of the (colonial) federal government by declaring: "Alaska is no less a colony than were those thirteen colonies along the Atlantic seaboard in 1775. The colonialism which the United States imposes on us and which we have suffered for 88 years is no less burdensome, no less unjust, than that against which they poured out their blood and treasure."[67]

Perhaps in an effort to reassure American leaders in Washington of his and his fellow Alaskans' loyalty to the United States, Gruening reassuringly added that his jeremiad did not mean the territory's citizens would soon take up arms in a bid for independence: "Let such a totally erroneous assumption be promptly corrected," he said. But Gruening tempered his effort to assuage fears by adding that, "the keepers of Alaska's colonial status should be reminded that the 18th century colonials for long years sought merely to obtain relief from abuses … before finally resolving that only independence would secure for them the 'life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.'"[68] If Gruening had intended to demonstrate his devotion to the United States, an ominous warning of rebellion after years of neglect, mirroring the situation of the original thirteen colonies, might seem an odd choice.

Gruening did not, however, intend for Alaska to secede. Gruening, and others, knew Alaska depended (and continues to depend) far too greatly on the U.S. metropole for its

[67] Ernest Gruening, "Let Us End American Colonialism! Alaska the United States Colony: Keynote Address, Alaska Constitutional Convention."
[68] Ernest Gruening, "Let Us End American Colonialism! Alaska the United States Colony: Keynote Address, Alaska Constitutional Convention."

continued existence to legitimately make a go of it as an independent nation-state; to this day, Alaska is still unable to feed itself without support from the mainland.[69] Gruening intended his warning as an anti-colonial rhetorical flourish. Gruening hoped that comparing Alaska to the thirteen colonies would generate public support for Alaska from Americans living outside the territory. He also hoped comparing the United States of the mid-twentieth century to the British Empire of the late eighteenth century might create a type of intellectual and emotional backlash in the hearts and minds of Americans—the comparison to the reviled Great Britain and King George thus stirring Americans and their leaders to act in a decidedly un-imperial manner and grant statehood to Alaska.

The Constitutional Convention at which Gruening spoke in 1955 was the first part of the Alaska Statehood Committee's "Alaska-Tennessee Plan" for statehood. Patterned after Tennessee's successful campaign for statehood in 1796, the Alaska-Tennessee Plan involved demonstrating Alaskans' desire for statehood by means of a statehood referendum, followed by the election of a representative and two senators, who would travel to Washington D.C. and campaign for statehood. Alaskans simultaneously elected their future representative and senators; one of the senators chosen was Ernest Gruening. As New Mexico Congressman Clinton Anderson described the Alaska-Tennessee plan, "The people of that area got together and just set themselves up a state."[70] In 1956, Alaskans passed a statehood referendum by a margin of more than two to one, and another in 1958 by a margin of more than five to one.[71] The goal was to

[69] Awareness of the difficulties associated with independence did not prevent one impassioned Alaskan in 1946, to declare, "Make us full partners in the Union of States, or by God, make us a free nation." In Gruening, *The Battle for Alaska Statehood*, 20.
[70] Clinton P. Anderson to George H. Lehleitner, 4 January 1956, box 58, folder 169, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
[71] "Territory of Alaska Ratification of the Constitution and Convention Ordinances," 24 April 1956, box 59, folder 180, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E.

present Congress and Eisenhower with Alaskan statehood as a *fait accompli* that could be rejected only by accepting "outraged public opinion," which Gruening and his compatriots actively sought to foment by means of hundreds of public appearances in the States and encouraging the printing of pro-statehood articles in national publications such as *Life*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*.[72] Gruening believed the Alaska-Tennessee Plan pivotal to the eventual success of the Alaska statehood campaign. In 1958, when Alex Budge, president of Castle and Cook, one of the world's biggest producers of fruits and vegetables, wrote to congratulate Gruening on the passage of the Alaska statehood bill and express his surprise that the bill passed, Gruening responded, "Why be surprised over the admission of Alaska? … If Hawaii had sent three Tennessee Plan representatives, when it drafted its Constitution, it would have had Statehood long since."[73] Only by exercising self-determination before receiving it could residents of American imperialist colonies hope to create political pressure too significant to ignore and thus force the U.S. government to grant statehood.

The Alaska-Tennessee Plan placed pressure not only on members of Congress, but on President Eisenhower as well. Eisenhower himself was on record as saying Alaskan and Hawaiian statehood was, "in conformity with the American way of life by granting them self-government and equal voice in national affairs." Furthermore, in the same communication Eisenhower recognized the international public relations boost the admission of Alaska and

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Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks; and "Address given by Don Bullock," 3 January 1959, MS 0004-13-011, Admission Day, State of Alaska, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

[72] Geo. H. Lehleitner to Ernest Gruening, 18 May 1956, box 58, folder 165, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[73] Alex G. Budge to Ernest Gruening, 10 July 1958, box 60, folder 228 and Ernest Gruening to Alex G. Budge, 17 July 1958, box 60, folder 228, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Fig. 6-3 Senatorial supporters of Alaskan statehood hold a forty-nine-star flag and celebrate outside the Senate chamber with Alaska Governor Mike Stepovich (front center with both arms raised) and Ernest Gruening (far left) immediately after the passage of the Alaskan statehood bill. "Alaska's Governor, Mike Stepovich, and Congressional Advocates for Statehood," ASL-P01-3918. Alaska State Library Subject File. Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

Hawai'i would give the United States by showing "the world that America practices what it preaches." The Soviet threat, however, weighed heavily on Eisenhower's mind and prevented his support of actual statehood until it was nearly a foregone conclusion. Eisenhower only agreed to back Alaskan statehood with an amendment to the statehood bill that withdrew 276,000 square miles from selection by the state. Guaranteed federal control of nearly half the state provided

Eisenhower and the military the necessary freedom of movement to ensure national security.[74] After the passage of the statehood bill, Eisenhower's office released a four-page memo drawing attention to the President's public declarations supporting Alaskan statehood but failing to mention the land deal that ensured his signature on the bill.[75]

The history of Alaskan imperialism shaped the statehood ceremony, held in Juneau on 3 January 1959. In his opening invocation, the Rev. Samuel A. McPhetres, of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, invoked God's blessings upon the citizens of the country's forty-ninth state as they finally obtained the ability to "exercise the liberties and rights of free citizens."[76] William Egan, the state of Alaska's new governor, expounded upon the idea of citizenship. "Our apprenticeship is done," said Egan. "We are today full members in that great Union of sovereign States. I speak for all Alaskans when I say that we take profound pride in that membership—and in full American citizenship."[77] Don Bulluck, the special assistant to outgoing Acting Territorial Governor Waino Hendrickson, praised Alaskans for demonstrating to the world that "dedicated forthrightness, tenaciousness, and a never wavering desire of political and economic freedom will bring about the goals of freedom which one seeks."[78] The implication of all three speakers was clear; prior to 3 January 1959, Alaskans had been neither fully free nor fully citizens, and the two were intimately related. Only full citizenship, with all its associated rights and duties,

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[74] Legislative Counsel to Wilton B. Persons, 6 March 1957, Dwight D. Eisenhower's Records as President, Official File, Box 630, OF-147-D-1, Alaskan Statehood; NAID #12010354. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.
[75] Statehood for Alaska and Hawaii, 16 September 1958, Dwight D. Eisenhower's Records as President, Official File, Box 630, OF-147-D-1, Alaskan Statehood; NAID #12012412. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.
[76] "Invocation at Joint Ceremonies," 3 January 1959, MS 0004-13-011, Admission Day, State of Alaska, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[77] William A. Egan, 3 January 1959, MS 0004-13-011, Admission Day, State of Alaska, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.
[78] "Address given by Don Bullock," 3 January 1959, MS 0004-13-011, Admission Day, State of Alaska, Alaska State Library, Alaska Historical Collections.

guaranteed freedom. And only the end of the colonial system in Alaska brought full citizenship, and therefore freedom, to the state's residents. By stressing the peaceful nature of Alaskan statehood efforts, these speakers also spoke to decolonizing people around the world, urging patience and hard work. Such were the virtues that American imperialists had preached to colonial subjects dating back at least to Cuba and the Philippines in 1898. By framing statehood as an end to empire, U.S. leaders worked to solidify their leadership in the decolonizing Cold War world.

Egan's proclamation that Alaskans' apprenticeship was complete made this point quite explicitly. The concept of political apprenticeship had undergirded much nineteenth and early twentieth century U.S. and European imperialism. For example, administrators of the Philippines frequently spoke of the need for the inhabitants of that colony to undergo a protracted period of apprenticeship before being granted political independence. British and French officials spoke of the inhabitants of their possessions, for example in their Middle East protectorates, in much the same manner. Rarely, if ever, did imperialists actually define what constituted a completed apprenticeship. More often than not, it seemed as though colonized peoples never completed an appropriate apprenticeship. Either the imperialist powers refused to grant independence, or when they did, they did so in response to increasingly expensive and impolitic realities in the colonies. Essentially, despite decades of citing the need for apprenticeship, imperialists had failed to adequately teach their way of life to others around the globe. By citing Alaska as an example of a successful apprenticeship, Egan attempted to restore some legitimacy to the entire imperialist project while simultaneously—and probably without his conscious thought—ushering in a revitalized form of empire in Alaska.

The vision of Alaska as a state populated by, presumably, white Americans was different than the nineteenth and early twentieth century imperialist conceptions of Alaska. Gone or subdued were the descriptions of Alaska as a land of great natural and commercial wealth that overt imperialism might exploit. Instead, statehood advocates such as Anthony Dimond and Ernest Gruening conceptualized Alaska as a place imperialism had failed to fully develop. They argued that inclusion in the Union as a state, as an equal polity, promised greater wealth to the United States than mere exploitation could achieve.

But was that the case?

Recognition of the imperialist adaptations occurring in Alaska forces scholars to re-examine ideas of decolonization. There can be no doubt that people living in colonial possessions around the world fought for and won their independence from former imperial masters after World War II. But the Alaskan example demonstrates that in some colonies, at least, methods other than full independence were used to silence critics of empire while essentially maintaining the imperialist status quo. Extractive industry remained, and remains, king in Alaska.[79] Imperialism had been intended to allow the profits of those industries to be obtained as cheaply as possible, and for decades the imperialist empire of the U.S. West had done just that. Federal ownership of 223 million acres of Alaskan land, 52 million acres larger than the entire state of Texas, continues to allow, in fact encourages, the continuation of extractive industry in the state. Additionally, federal dollars, often in the form of military spending, continue to be of the utmost importance in Alaska, just as when Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson, arguing against statehood, noted in 1955 that, "Activities of the Armed Forces in Alaska account for a substantial portion of the present population of Alaska, and the

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[79] Stephen Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), xv and 313-318.

construction, maintenance and operation of defense installations constitute the principal activity of the territory."[80] While statehood has reduced federal involvement in Alaska to a degree, the current system continues to ensure absentee capitalists, those imperialism always aimed to enrich, continue to profit at the expense of Alaska's land and residents.

Furthermore, Alaska still cannot feed itself. The rhetoric of statehood called upon a mythologized past that included a need for agricultural settlement before statehood. The reality of Alaskan statehood has demonstrated that such settlement is unnecessary. Instead, Alaskan statehood has demonstrated that imperialism—with its emphasis on resource extraction over largescale settlement or internal development—still functions quite well. In fact, statehood without significant settlement or agriculture has greatly benefited imperialist absentee capitalists. Federalism, adapted to fit the Alaskan context, offers a new imperialist path, one that might prove even cheaper for the metropole.

With little actual prescience, American leaders found a way to adapt empire and its structures to changing national and global circumstances. Alaskan statehood allowed American leaders to remove the stigma of colonialism permeating the international struggle of the Cold War, as well as easing the financial and administrative burdens of empire, while simultaneously protecting the business interests that had driven imperialism in the first place. Absentee capitalists remained (and remain) the greatest investors in Alaska, and the state is still valuable almost solely for its natural resources. The discovery and exploitation of Alaska's North Slope oil reserves, beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, has only solidified Alaska's imperialist status

[80] C. E. Wilson to James E. Murray, 15 February 1955, box 60, folder 210, Ernest Gruening Papers, [1914-1974]. Alaska and Polar Regions Department. Elmore E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. John S. Whitehead, who taught at UAF from 1978 to 1999, goes so far as to argue that defense spending became the "base" of the Alaskan and Hawaiian economies after World War II. John S. Whitehead, *Completing the Union: Alaska, Hawai'i, and the Battle for Statehood* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 7.

into the twenty-first century. Alaska's important national security position, and the resulting centrality of the military in the lives of many Alaskans, also demonstrates that while Alaska's nomenclature has changed, from territory to state, the imperial relationship has not. Gruening was right to make comparisons between Alaska and the original thirteen colonies. But he misunderstood how statehood would affect, or not, the relationship between Alaska and the federal government. Statehood did not end the imperial relationship between Alaska and the U.S. metropoles, it made the relationship even more like its British North American predecessor. Statehood, as part of a federal government, has proven to be a veneer disguising the United States empire.

Conclusion

The musical *White Christmas* is an American holiday movie classic. Released in 1954, the film achieved tremendous box office success and is perhaps best remembered today for the song "White Christmas," the best-selling single of all time, with over 50 million copies sold.[1] Less well remembered, if anyone has noticed it all, is the scene in which Betty, played by Rosemary Clooney, tells her sister Judy, played by Vera-Ellen, that their brother Benny has "got a job in Alaska. He's been out of the country for three months."[2] The line is given quickly and Alaska is forgotten for the rest of the conversation. The point of the line is simply to establish that Benny is not in the United States; any foreign land, from the screen writer's perspective, would do. Why the writer chose Alaska specifically is unclear. What is clear is that while Alaska would not become a state for another five years, its eighty-seven years as a U.S. possession and forty-two years as a territory, at the time, were not enough to make Alaska part of the United States.

That, of course, is the point. In 1954, in the popular imagination Alaska might have been a U.S. territory, but it was not America. Alaska may have achieved statehood in 1959, but for many Alaska remains a colonial enigma. In one Google search, the most popular returns for the phrase "is Alaska," were, "bigger than Texas," "an island," and "a country." These results should not surprise. University students have asked me if Alaska is an island. Most maps of the United States, after all, display a reduced in size and disembodied Alaska in an offset box beside Hawai'i, which appears nearly as large as Alaska. Statehood may have granted Alaskans equal political rights, but it has not changed that fact that Alaska remains well on the imaginative periphery of most Americans.

[1] "'White Christmas' at 75: A Snapshot of the Most Successful Song in Music History," Billboard. https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/holiday/8071111/white-christmas-bing-crosby-history. Accessed 8 January 2021.
[2] *White Christmas*, directed by Michael Curtiz (1954; Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 2009) DVD.

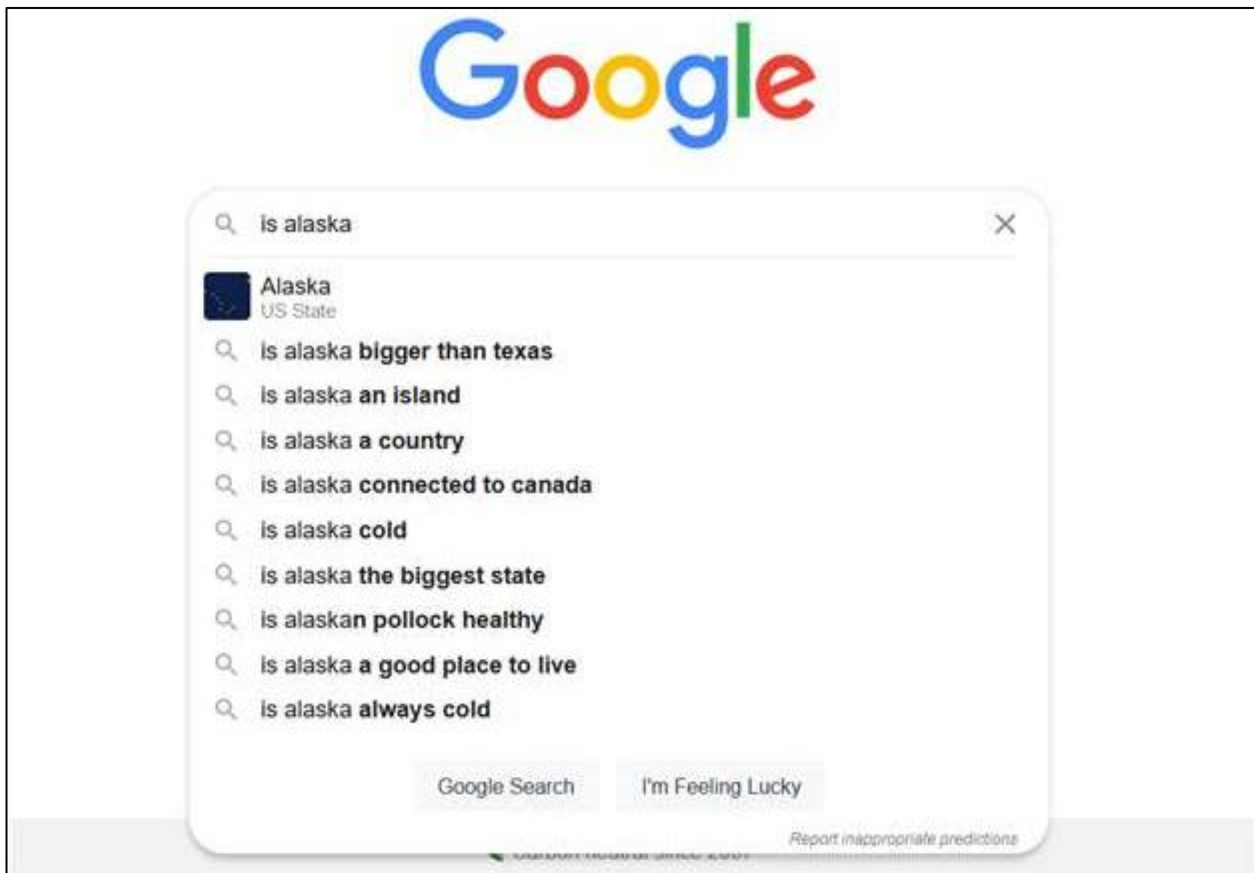

Fig. C-1 While hardly scientific, this Google search suggests familiarity with Alaska's geography and political status remain low.

Existing on the imaginative periphery does not, by itself, mean that Alaska remains an imperialist colony. But when combined with other factors, such as the importance of oil to the Alaskan and U.S. economies, the lack of internal development, the significance of the military, and the sparce population, coming to such a conclusion is difficult to avoid. Statehood, while often portrayed as the end of colonialism, does not necessarily mean the end of imperialism, understood as the exploitation of natural resources for the profit of individual investors. Whatever Ernest Gruening may have thought, simply having two Senators and a Representative in Congress guaranteed neither political nor economic equality.

In the American system, statehood is a necessary step toward ending empire, but far from the only one. The historian Gerald Nash has argued that World War II ended colonialism in the

U.S. West, saying, "It [World War II] transformed a colonial economy based on the exploitation of raw materials into a diversified economy that included industrial and technological components."[3] If that standard is applied not only to Alaska, but indeed to the rest of the United States, the persistent presence of imperialism in U.S. history becomes difficult to miss. Scholars have demonstrated how, during the twentieth century, areas like the South and the Sun Belt, in addition to the West, have transformed from regional hinterland to well-integrated and vital parts of the nation-state.[4] Historians have yet to vigorously interrogate these areas through the lens of imperialism, however. This failure reflects how world conditions during the twentieth century transformed empire from a positive good, to a necessary evil, and then an erased past.

Such interpretations of imperialism were shaped by a memory of the Great Depression, which struck at the heart of the imperialist project. Economic imperialism was supposed to provide the economic benefits of empire—exploitable natural resources and markets—without the costs associated with formal colonial administration, or at least a greatly reduced administration. The global financial crisis of the 1930s forced American leaders to re-evaluate the efficacy of such a system, especially in light of the fact that the United States never depended on its colonies for resources the way European empires depended on theirs. The United States' imperialist holdings looked far less attractive in the light of financial collapse, causing the United States to restructure its empire. The passage of legislation granting the Philippines independence is the most obvious example of the reaction against imperialism motivated by the Depression. Releasing an overwhelmingly non-white population thousands of miles away from the mainland

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[3] Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), vii.

[4] On the transformation of the South, see: James C. Cobb, *The South and America since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). On the transformation of the Sun Belt, see: Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).

from colonialism still fit within an imperialist worldview, however. Once the colony lost its financial value, the empire simply let it go, much like with the early guano islands. By the time of the Great Depression, however, Alaska presented the imperialist United States with a different problem. Namely, imperialism had never been intended for lands primarily peopled by white American citizens.[5]

Russia claimed Alaska in the eighteenth century as part of its expanding mercantile empire. Russian authorities always envisioned Alaska as a storehouse of natural resources, not as a potential home for Russian subjects. Once Alaska became a financial burden, Russia leaders wasted little time in selling it to the United States. American leaders originally understood Alaska in much the same way as their Russian predecessors. The difficulty in extracting profit from Alaska frustrated U.S. politicians and business leaders until the discovery of sizeable gold deposits near the end of the nineteenth century. Gold drew white Americans to the Far North, but as itinerant laborers and adventurers, not permanent settlers. Unlike previous U.S. possessions in the West, Americans did not imagine a future in which white Americans would settle Alaska. It was nothing more than a land to exploit for profit.

Nonetheless, gold attracted so many white Americans to Alaska that they quickly became the largest racial group in the district. In response, and in conjunction with decisions intended to reduce the power of non-whites in other U.S. colonies, the Supreme Court invented the concept of incorporated and unincorporated territories. The Court declared Alaska and Hawai‘i, possessing relatively large and powerful white populations, incorporated. The large non-white populations of the United States' other colonies destined them for unincorporated status.

[5] For more on the role of the Great Depression and the decline of U.S. imperialism, see: Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 157-159.

Incorporation brought with it the promise of future statehood, but no guarantee of when that promise might be fulfilled. Indeed, despite agitation from Alaskans for decades, national leaders demonstrated little desire to see Alaskan statehood become a reality. The imperialist status quo continued to enrich investors. Some imperial subjects, such as the Alaskeros, used imperialist networks to better their conditions, but found themselves prevented from exercising real political power in Alaska.

By the middle of the twentieth century, Alaska Natives, perhaps better than any other group of Alaskans, understood the corporate nature of Alaskan imperialism and used that understanding to secure the largest land settlement in U.S. history. However, many Indigenous Alaskans born since the settlement have discovered that intimacy with corporate imperialism has done little to actually better the lives of most Alaska Natives and as a consequence have reimagined territorial enclaves—reservations—as a preferable alternative.

Statehood only gained real traction among white Americans after World War II in the context of the Cold War and global decolonization. To better serve as a global leader and win converts to Western capitalism in the battle against Eastern communism, many Americans urged granting statehood to Alaska in order to demonstrate that the United States practiced what it preached. Granting statehood, and by extension apparent political equality, demonstrated how many Americans failed to see the connection between politics and economics. Yes, Alaskans now had two Senators, a Representative, and could vote in national elections, but the economic power in Alaska remained largely in the hands of the very same absentee capitalists who had always controlled access to the new state's natural resources.

The power of absentee interests in Alaska poses interesting questions in light of the state's hinterland relationship with Seattle. Few would argue that Seattle could claim to be the

metropole of the U.S. empire. Defining the American metropole was, and is, a tricky proposition. Is it in Washington D.C., the political center? Or perhaps the financial center of New York? What of Los Angeles, a cultural center? Perhaps the Northeast, a kind of intellectual center? Is it one of the coasts? Or both coasts? The point is not to answer these questions here, but rather to recognize that an answer is difficult to come by. The example of the imperial relationship between Seattle and Alaska demonstrates, however, that empires can have multiple metropoles, operating on different levels to unite different imperial regions. Indeed, realizing that in an empire as large and as culturally diverse as the United States, it may be pointless to ask where *the* metropole is located, but understanding where the *metropoles* might be found is far more helpful.

Imperialism in Alaska continues to work because of its great adaptability. In particular, the ability of imperialists to adapt the system to new and changing racial realities in Alaska has both protected and secured its continuance in the Far North. As Euro-Americans began to slowly overtake Alaska Natives as the territory's majority racial group, simple imperialism no longer represented an acceptable form of empire in Alaska. Imperialism was a system designed to extract profits for capitalists in the metropoles without significantly taking into account the wishes of local inhabitants. Americans accepted imperialism when those denied a political voice were Indigenous peoples—Alaska Natives, Hawaiians, or Filipinos, for example. But after World War II, this situation no longer existed in Alaska. The territory's white population remained small, but the entire population of Alaska was small. The majority of that small population was, however, very white.[6] As structured at the time, imperialism could not justify

[6] In 1960, of Alaska's 226,167 inhabitants, 174,546 were white. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1960*, vol. I, *Characteristics of the Population*. Part 3, Alaska (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963).

denying political voice and rights to white Americans. As a consequence, the conception of empire in Alaska had to adapt. Early twentieth-century imperialism would not do; the territory's white American population had to be given an official voice in the country's proceedings.

The extraction of natural resources for the profit of absentee capitalists would not, indeed could not, disappear, but Alaska began the transition away from explicitly vulgar imperialism, which primarily used indirect control to do little more than ensure the continued extraction of profitable resources, toward a new federal imperialism that more firmly incorporated an older style territorial empire, in which formal control was extended over an area to ensure the security and financial wellbeing of the metropoles. In the United States, security meant more than safety from external enemies, it also meant giving voice to citizens. To do this, the United States adapted its traditional form of government—federalism—to better disguise imperialism with a veneer of republicanism in order to protect private profit. This form of rule allowed the central government to exert control when needed, but still left much of the governance to the local population. Federalism, especially as it developed in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States, combined in nearly ideal amounts, centralized power in Washington and decentralized power in the various states, providing the United States with the legitimacy it needed to lead on the world stage.[7] Federalism, through statehood, protected the U.S. empire by obscuring it.

With statehood, the federal government passed many of its responsibilities on to the new Alaskan state government. In so doing, the national government also passed on much of the

[7] Historians of the Soviet Union and Russia grapple with questions of federalism and empire as well. They tend to argue that while federalism may not amount to a form of imperial power, it can, nonetheless, serve to limit the power of groups deemed less desirable by the state. See: Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 76-82; Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (New York: Longman, 2001), 391-392; and Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia's Empires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 364-373.

financial burden that accompanied ensuring the efficient extraction of Alaska's resources that accompanied administrative control.[8] Imperial federalism, adapted to the contexts of the mid-twentieth century, charged the states with largely bearing the burden and responsibility for administering themselves. In many ways, this system resembles the old British North American colonies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but with the added benefit that the system has an accepted mechanism to ensure the colonies (or states) and their inhabitants pay their taxes to and are represented in the imperial-federal government. In effect, this new imperial system is what many American colonists agitated for, and Parliament rejected, prior to the American War of Independence.

[8] Some of that direct control has since reverted back to the federal government, such as when Alaska proved unable to administer the state's forests, resulting in the federal government resuming its previously practiced administrative role.

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Ernest Gruening Papers [1917-1974]

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Alaska Campaign Literature, 1889-[ongoing]
Alaska Elections, 1917-[ongoing]
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Alaska Native Rights and History Collection, 1741-1990
Alaska Packers Association
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Alaska State Library Subject File
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