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## Iñupiat Resistance and Adaptation in the North Slope Borough to United States Colonization

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Iñupiat Resistance and Adaptation in the North Slope Borough to United States Colonization

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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**Acronym Key:**

ANCSA - Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

ASNA - Arctic Slope Native Association

U.S. - United States

NSB - North Slope Borough

NARF - Native American Rights Fund

NARL - Naval Arctic Research Laboratory

ANCSA - Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

PET4 - Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4, also referring to the petroleum exploration project

TB - Tuberculosis

ONR - Office of Naval Research

TEK - Traditional Ecological Knowledge

IWC - International Whaling Commission

UIC - Ukpeaġvik Iñupiat Corporation

ASRC - Arctic Slope Regional Corporation

AFN - Alaska Federation of Natives

NMFS - National Marine Fisheries Service

AEWC - Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission

BWCA - Barrow Whaling Captains Association

NOAA - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

ANCILA - The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act

ANWR - Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

BOEM - Bureau of Ocean Energy and Management

OCSLA - Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act

SIZONet - Sea Ice Zone Observing Network

### **List of Key Dates:**

The mid-1600s - Estimated first contact with Russian fur traders

1799 - Fur trading Company: The Russian American Company was established

1823 - Monroe Doctrine Established

1860 - Report written by Russian Naval officer detailing the failing state of the Russian colony

1866 - Stoeckl was instructed to open Negotiation with The U.S regarding the purchase of Alaska

1867 - The United States purchased Alaska from Russia

1871 - Congress terminated treaty-making with Indigenous peoples

1884 - The Organic Act

1884 - District Act

1890 - Arrival of first Presbyterian missionary in Barrow

1898 - Homestead Act

1900 - Missions Act

1918 - Spanish flu killed many in the villages and communities of North Slope

The 1920s - Introduction of Western medical care to North Slope

1923 - President Harding established Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4

1944 - Establishment of the oil exploration program, PET4

1946- Navy and independent researchers establish NARL

1946 - Reverend Roy Ahmaogak was ordained

1953 - The U.S. Navy leaves Alaska and shuts down the oil exploration camp

1957 (July 7) - Alaska gained statehood

1959 - Utiaqvik, then known as Barrow, became a first-class city

1964 - Formation of the Arctic Slope Native Association (ASNA)

1965 - ASNA filed a land claim for 58 million acres of Alaska's Arctic

1966 - Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, issued a land freeze

1968 (July 18) - Atlantic Richfield announced that it discovered oil at Prudhoe Bay

1969 (February 11) - Three major oil companies announced the construction of a pipeline across Alaska

1969 (April) - Alaska announced that it would sell 400,000 additional acres of land to the oil companies

1971 - Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)

1972 - Formation of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC)

1973 - Edward vs. Mortinson

1977 - Founding of the Alaskan Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC)

1980 - The U.S. Navy shuts down NARL

1980 (December) - Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANCILA)

1984 - Old NARL buildings were turned over to UIC

1986 - North Slope Borough created the North Slope Higher Education Center

2016 (October) - City name changed from Barrow to Utqiagvik

## Introduction

The Northernmost city in the world is known as Utqiagvik, located in Alaska, once known as Barrow, and is part of the Continental United States. It is a place far removed from the lower forty-eight states in terms of its environment and culture. Many would not envision the town of Utqiagvik when they think of America, but this town in the northernmost part of the world has a unique place in American history. It is a whaling town that is deeply spiritually connected to the whale and the hunt. It has maintained its traditions throughout 130 years of U.S. colonization and continues to face that legacy of colonization today. In this paper, I explore the relationship between the United States and the Iñupiat people in the town of Utqiagvik at the North Slope Borough. Before doing so, it is important to introduce the Iñupiat people who reside at Utqiagvik in the North Slope Borough, Utqiagvik, and the systems of knowledge they use to survive.

Throughout history, the peoples residing in the Arctic north have been referred to as Eskimos, which many Indigenous peoples of Alaska consider offensive. It is a commonly used term referring to the native peoples of Alaska and the other Arctic regions, including Siberia, Canada, and Greenland.<sup>1</sup> Some are on the fence about how they feel about the term, but there is a general consensus that it is a colonial name imposed by non-Indigenous people stripping individuality away from unique cultures and tribes.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately the most important way to refer to a person or group of Indigenous people is to listen and ask what they prefer. Still, for the sake

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<sup>1</sup> "Inupiaq," Languages - Inupiaq | Alaska Native Language Center, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://uaf.edu/anlc/languages/inupiaq.php#:~:text=Thepercent20namepercent20percent22Inupiaqpercent2Cpercent22percent20meaning,particularlypercent20inpercent20thepercent20northernpercent20dialects.&text=Thepercent20plurpercent20formpercent20ofpercent20the,ofpercent20thepercent20Northpercent20Slopepercent22>.

<sup>2</sup> "Inuit or Eskimo: Which Name to Use?," Inuit or Eskimo: Which name to use? | Alaska Native Language Center, accessed May 5, 2021, [https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/resources/inuit\\_or\\_eskimo.php](https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/resources/inuit_or_eskimo.php).



of this paper, I will be using what is considered to be the most respectable and widely agreed-upon way to refer to Indigenous people of Northern Alaska. Alaskan Natives increasingly prefer to be known by the names they use in their own languages, such as Inupiaq or Yupik.<sup>3</sup> Iñupiat is the plural term to refer to people who identify as Inupiaq.<sup>4</sup> Iñupiat's direct translation to English is real people. Inupiaq is not just the name for a person of the Iñupiat people but also the name for the language spoken by the Iñupiat.<sup>5</sup> In other Arctic regions, Indigenous peoples, who were also once called the Eskimo, are known as the Inuit and Yupik. These peoples reside mainly in Greenland and Canada and are not called Iñupiat because they speak Inuit and therefore are known as Inuit.<sup>6</sup>

Utqiagvik is the largest city (and the borough seat) of the North Slope Borough in the U.S. state of Alaska and is located north of the Arctic Circle. Utqiagvik was incorporated as a first-class city, defined as a city with a population of ten thousand or more at the time of organization in 1959. As of 2015, 4,933 residents live in Utqiagvik, of which sixty-three percent are Iñupiat Iñupiaq.<sup>7</sup> The median age of residents in the borough is twenty-six.<sup>8</sup> The majority of the workers (61 percent) that live in the North Slope Borough work for the local government, which includes the city, Tribal, and the borough government.<sup>9</sup> Some state employees work for the Alaska Department of Health and Human Services and the Alaska Court System.<sup>10</sup> Most of these

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<sup>3</sup> "Inupiaq," Languages.

<sup>4</sup> "Eskimo, Inuit, and Inupiaq: Do These Terms Mean the Same Thing?," Alaskan Natives, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.alaskan-natives.com/2166/eskimo-inuit-inupiaq-terms-thing/>.

<sup>5</sup> "Eskimo, Inuit, and Inupiaq."

<sup>6</sup> "Eskimo, Inuit, and Inupiaq."

<sup>7</sup> "The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan 2019-2039," The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan 2019-2039 § (n.d.), [http://www.north-slope.org/assets/images/uploads/NSB\\_Comprehensive\\_Plan\\_2019-2039\\_Reduced.pdf](http://www.north-slope.org/assets/images/uploads/NSB_Comprehensive_Plan_2019-2039_Reduced.pdf). 6.

<sup>8</sup> "Comprehensive Plan", 271.

<sup>9</sup> "Comprehensive Plan", 271.

<sup>10</sup> "Comprehensive Plan", 271.

jobs are in Utqiagvik, the borough seat of government.<sup>11</sup> In 2016, 10 percent of residents were employed at the North Slope Borough School District, Iḷisaġvik College, ASNA, or other education or health-related organizations.<sup>12</sup> In Utqiagvik especially, there are workers in the tourism industry and support services for scientific research. These visitors support municipal services in Utqiagvik that the resident population might not have been able to support on their own.

Utqiagvik is a modern community, but whaling and subsistence hunting remain an important part of the resident's lifestyle and culture.<sup>13</sup> Fifty-five percent of all residents are employed by the public sector, while other residents run businesses that assist oil field operations as well as the federal government.<sup>14</sup> The North Slope remains the largest petroleum-producing region in Alaska.<sup>15</sup> Whaling, hunting, and other subsistence activities are how the Iñupiat sustain themselves. Subsistence activities are not oriented toward sales or profits but are focused on meeting the nutritional and clothing needs of families and communities. Some parts of the harvest are used for various clothing, skin boats, hunting implements, and traditional arts.<sup>16</sup> Many residents "who work full- or part-time continue to hunt and fish for much of their food," maintaining their subsistence lifestyle while also working in another sector of the economy.<sup>17</sup> A local member-owned cooperative, named Barrow Utilities and Electric Cooperative, provides

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<sup>11</sup> "Comprehensive Plan", 271.

<sup>12</sup> "Comprehensive Plan", 272.

<sup>13</sup> "The North Slope Borough," Official Website Of The North Slope Borough Northernmost Municipality in the United States of America, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.north-slope.org/>.

<sup>14</sup> North Slope Borough.

<sup>15</sup> "Comprehensive Plan", 271.

<sup>16</sup> Comprehensive Plan, 14.

<sup>17</sup> North Slope Borough.

utilities to residents in Utqiagvik.<sup>18</sup> The community houses several churches, schools, and a community college named Ilisagvik College.

### **Traditional Ecological Knowledge**

Understanding traditional ecological knowledge is vital to understanding the relationship that the Iñupiat people have with their land, the history of interaction between the United States government and the Iñupiat people, and ongoing scientific collaboration between the two in contemporary times. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), as defined by the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management of the United States, is a “body of evolving practical knowledge based on observations and personal experience of Indigenous residents over an extensive, multi-generational time period” that looks different for every Indigenous tribe and nation.<sup>19</sup> The term traditional ecological knowledge encompasses the multitude of knowledge systems that Indigenous peoples around the globe have used for millennia to survive and live. Traditional ecological knowledge is not a new science, and nor does it seek to replace it. Western science and traditional ecological knowledge are two separate and distinct modes of thinking.<sup>20</sup> Traditional ecological knowledge is extremely diverse in its meaning and application. It can be different even among tribes who live very close to each other.<sup>21</sup> Traditional ecological knowledge is shared through kinship and household networks, and it is not evenly distributed throughout Indigenous communities as it is a form of learning built on experiences. It is how subsistence societies are able to survive.

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<sup>19</sup> James J. Kendall et al., “Use of Traditional Knowledge by the United States Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to Support Resource Management,” *Czech Polar Reports* 7, no. 2 (January 2017): pp. 151-163, <https://doi.org/10.5817/cpr2017-2-15>.

<sup>20</sup> Kendall, *Traditional Knowledge*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Kendall, *Traditional Knowledge*, 4.

My first chapter will provide an in-depth look at the history leading up to the American colonization of Alaska, Utqiagvik, and the North Slope borough. This chapter is important in that it explains the colonial framework in which the United States was able to use Iñupiat land without consent for resource extraction. Chapter 2 explores specific examples of what this resource extraction looks like, how it shaped the political organization of the Iñupiat people, and how they adapted to a multitude of changes in the 20th century. The Third Chapter examines the legacy of the colonial presence and interference that the Iñupiat experienced in the 20th century; while also looking at a changing climate's significant role in this legacy. I then go on to examine how the Iñupiat are dealing with climate change and a new, more hopeful era of collaboration.

I argue that since the United States Purchase of the Alaskan Territory from Tsarist Russia, U.S. policy has been guided by self-interest that has exploited and neglected the interests of the Iñupiat people. The goal of this paper is to explore the American colonization of Alaska, its impacts on the Iñupiat people, and what that colonization means for them today. Despite the immense obstacles the Iñupiat people have faced since the beginning of their relationship with the United States, they have adapted and persevered while creating political organizations that serve their own ends. As the Indigenous systems of knowledge are gaining more appreciation around the world, the knowledge that the Iñupiat possess of their land can be an avid tool in the fight against climate change.

## **Chapter I: History of the Iñupiat people in the North Slope Borough and Initial Phase of United States Colonization**

This section examines the history of the Iñupiat people dating from pre-European contact to the early days of Iñupiat life after the U.S. purchase of Alaska. By providing this history, I set up the background for understanding Iñupiat resistance in the following chapter, as well as the general history of colonization in Alaska. Understanding Russia's involvement in Alaska provides an answer as to why they sold Alaska to the United States and why the United States wanted to purchase the territory. The lives of the Iñupiat, who live a world away from both Washington D.C. and Saint Petersburg, were subject to both governments' actions. This history leaves the United States with the complexities of navigating decolonization and righting the injustices and crimes committed against Indigenous peoples of the past. As the chapter comes to a close, I explore colonization in the early 20th century bringing the story of the colonization of the Iñupiat closer to the Indigenous peoples in the lower forty-eight states.

### **I. Life before European Contact**

The arrival of Europeans as a colonizing force around the world set into motion the destruction, settlement, and transformation of a multitude of cultures and peoples. This is no different in the case of the Indigenous peoples in the land we now know as Alaska. The Indigenous people who reside in Utqiagvik are descendants of the aboriginal peoples who inhabited Alaska twelve thousand years ago.<sup>22</sup> Some villages on the North Slope have been occupied for thousands of years, and the land throughout the North Slope is rich with

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<sup>22</sup> Claus-M Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: a History of the 49th State* (Norman Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994) 1.

archaeological evidence of human life that is thousands of years old. Life for these people revolved around subsistence hunting, toolmaking, and sophisticated family networks.<sup>23</sup> Dog sleds were the central median of travel from as early as 1600 C.E. Iñupiat culture was kept alive through storytelling, oral history, and community meetings. Life remained largely the same until 1875 when: “the local economies were significantly altered by a combination of several interrelated factors, including European contact and the introduction of metal tools, traps, and guns to support and intensify fur trade; a reduction in human population due to disease, famine, and warfare; and a reduction in the numbers of whales” which would begin with Russian contact.

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## II. Russian Period

The first European Nation to significantly influence the lives of aboriginal inhabitants of Alaska was Imperial Russia. These Russians did not form any notable relationship with the Iñupiat, nor did their colonization penetrate the North Slope in an extensive manner, unlike America's eventual impact. Nonetheless, it is important to understand Russia's role in Alaska to understand why and how it led the United States to purchase Alaska and its relationship with the North Slope Borough. Russian rule mainly focused on the coastal areas in Southern Alaska as that sphere was pertinent to the Maritime fur trade. Russia did not become established in Alaska through any particular state interest but rather in the protection of private individuals taking part in the fur trade.<sup>25</sup> The settlement of Alaska by Russia never exceeded seven hundred persons.

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<sup>23</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> “The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan 2019-2039,” The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan 2019-2039 § (n.d.), [http://www.north-slope.org/assets/images/uploads/NSB\\_Comprehensive\\_Plan\\_2019-2039\\_Reduced.pdf](http://www.north-slope.org/assets/images/uploads/NSB_Comprehensive_Plan_2019-2039_Reduced.pdf). 6.

<sup>25</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 20.

Despite this small number, Russia's involvement in Alaska is a crucial part of the story in the colonization of the Indigenous inhabitants of Alaska as well as a valuable territory that was bargained for between world powers.

To understand the Russian colonization of the Indigenous peoples of Alaska, I will explore their role in the territory in greater detail. Danish Navigator Vitus Bering, serving Russia, made Alaska known to the Western World.<sup>26</sup> Russian presence in Alaska brought disease, weapons, religion, and different cultures to the territory. There is no exact date available as to when the first Russian fur traders made their way to Alaska, but it is believed to be around the mid-1600s.<sup>27</sup> Russians were in Alaska due to the Maritime fur trade. Russia was not the only Western power involved in the fur trade, as the English and Americans had a much smaller presence. Russian fur traders worked their way east from Kamchatka along the Aleutian Islands to the southern coast of Alaska. This trade boomed around the beginning of the 19th century but began a long decline in the 1810s due to overhunting.

The arrival of fur merchants and traders had a negative impact on the Indigenous populations on the coast of Alaska. The people that had the most exposure to the Russians were the Aleutians. These merchants were accountable to no one and abused the Aleutian people while decimating the animals for the fur trade.<sup>28</sup> Over the years, the Aleutians were eventually subjugated by the Russians as their hunters exhausted the population of animals on one island and then moved on to the next, repeating their actions.<sup>29</sup> By the 1770s, the Russian government

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<sup>26</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains: the British Fur Trade on the Pacific, 1793-1843* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 30.

became more interested in Alaskan affairs, and Russian influence in Alaskan began to extend beyond the private sphere.<sup>30</sup>

In 1799, the Russian American Company was established to gain the benefits of a single fur trading company. It gained royal permission to do so.<sup>31</sup> Paul the First, Tsar from 1796 to 1801, granted a monopoly for the new Russian American Company. He did so because the emperor and his advisers believed that a single company would strengthen their position in Russian America.<sup>32</sup> This monopoly gave the Russian American company the power to take possession of all existing Russian settlements and create new ones.<sup>33</sup> These settlements never had enough settlers for labor or access to food which caused them to rely on foreigners for resources. They also feared attacks from tribes whom they had not conquered. Americans provided support to the Russian settlements, but the Russians felt the Americans infringed upon their territory by trading with the natives which would become a deeper fear as the century progressed.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, fur trading settlements were established, and the situation of the Aleutians marginally improved as they were taken better care of by Russians. However, they lost the freedom to travel and exist in a traditional manner.

In the 1820s, the Russian Navy took over control of the Russian Fur Trading Company's assets, their settlements and then established an infrastructure for the Aleutians such as schools and hospitals.<sup>35</sup> The establishment of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 encouraged Americans to encroach upon what the Russians considered their territorial interests. Eventually, Russia ceded

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<sup>30</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 30.

<sup>31</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 31.

<sup>33</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 55.



portions of its territories to the Americans. Over the years, Labor conditions continue to deteriorate despite periods of fluctuation where the Russian Settlements thrived.

### **III. The U.S. purchase of Alaska**

As early as the late 1850s, there was interest on both the part of the Americans and the Russian government in selling Alaska to the United States (U.S.).<sup>36</sup> Russian officials and diplomats did not want a strained relationship with the United States, which was growing more likely as regulations and rules about the particulars of trade within Alaska created tensions between the Russians and Americans.<sup>37</sup> By 1858, Russians were beginning to consider selling Alaska if the Americans made another offer. In 1859, they did just that, and Senator William M. Gwin, who advocated for the sale of Alaska, conveyed the president's wishes to Russian Diplomat and Ambassador to the United States Eduard de Stoeckl regarding the Alaskan purchase of the territory.<sup>38</sup>

The Russian Foreign Ministry houses a report addressed to Russian Diplomats written in 1860 by an unknown author who had been in Russia and Alaska, likely a Russian general.<sup>39</sup> The report “paints in black colors the great misery the Russian American Company had brought on the natives of Alaska, the harm it had done to that territory, and the injury it had caused to Russian commerce” while emphasizing that the company only cared about profits that would solely benefit shareholders.<sup>40</sup> The report also mentions that the Americans who were trading and

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<sup>36</sup> Frank A. Golder, “The Purchase of Alaska,” *The American Historical Review* 25, no. 3 (1920): p. 411, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1836879>. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Golder, Purchase of Alaska, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Golder, Purchase of Alaska, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Golder, Purchase of Alaska, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Golder, Purchase of Alaska, 7.

living near Alaskan territory felt anger towards the Company, which the writer believed was straining the relationship between The U.S. and Russia.<sup>41</sup> Lastly, the report mentioned the relentlessness of the United States' desire to expand.

The Russian Representative Stoeckl met with the American Secretary of State, William H. Seward, to reopen negotiations. They agreed that the sale would be mutually beneficial to the two countries. Secretary Seward was an ardent expansionist who had attempted to purchase several territories throughout the Caribbean and even contemplated the purchase of Iceland and Greenland.<sup>42</sup> When they met again a day or two later, Secretary Seward was somewhat non-committal and reported that President Johnson was not enthusiastic but was willing to leave the affair to the judgment of the Cabinet.<sup>43</sup> Seward consulted his colleagues, and they authorized him to negotiate. On March 30th, 1867, the United States agreed to purchase Alaska for seven million and two hundred thousand dollars.

The acquisition of Alaska involved numerous negotiations and attempts from some parties within the U.S. Congress to block the transfer of money to Russia.<sup>44</sup> The Senate viewed the treaty of Alaska as an annoying interruption as the impeachment of Johnson was underway. The Senate regarded the treaty as an effort on the part of the administration to cover its blunders at home with a spectacular triumph in the field of diplomacy.<sup>45</sup> Another problem in the process of ratification was a general antipathy to Seward himself. Senators even came to the Russian minister Stoeckl in Washington D.C. and asserted that they would vote against the treaty for no

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<sup>41</sup> Golder, Purchase of Alaska, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, Buying Iceland.

<sup>43</sup> Golder, Purchase of Alaska, 11.

<sup>44</sup> Golder, Purchase of Alaska, 13.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas A. Bailey, "Why the United States Purchased Alaska," *Pacific Historical Review* 3, no. 1 (January 1934): pp. 39-49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3633456>. 45.

other reason than because it bore the Secretary's name. Despite these difficulties, the treaty was ratified in 1867.

#### **IV. Why The United States Bought Alaska**

The American public's perception of the purchase, as noted by Stoeckl, “was regarded by many as a worthless and an expensive investment” that was far removed from the daily life of the American public.<sup>46</sup> Seward was particularly interested in buying Alaska, and some reports indicate that he was the driving force for its purchase.<sup>47</sup> There were many actors at play as “Seward had to secure the approval of President Johnson and his cabinet, two-thirds of the Senate, and a majority of the House of Representatives” before the purchase could proceed.<sup>48</sup> When the press and the American people learned of the purchase of Alaska, the general reaction was disinterest but not resistance.

As they learned more, the American people generally responded favorably to the purchase of Alaska.<sup>49</sup> Secretary Seward did have some influence on the public perception of Alaska as he engaged in a campaign of education which, according to several newspapers, did sway public opinion.<sup>50</sup> Although some senators opposed the treaty on the grounds of Seward’s involvement, they did not want to go against public opinion.<sup>51</sup> The media also expressed their opinion regarding the purchase of Alaska:

“In fact, a number of newspapers called upon the senators in no uncertain terms to lay aside partisanship and vote for the good of the country. As a result of these developments, it was generally observed by April 6, 1867, almost exactly a week

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<sup>46</sup> Golder, Purchase of Alaska, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Bailey, 39.

<sup>48</sup> Bailey, 39.

<sup>49</sup> Bailey, 42.

<sup>50</sup> Bailey, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Bailey, 45.

after the purchase had been announced, that the chances of ratification, which at first had seemed poor, were decidedly better.”

Thus illustrating how the people themselves came to view the purchase of Alaska favorably. The welfare of the Indigenous people in Alaska was of little concern to the American public as they contributed to the erasure of Indigenous peoples in the lower forty-eight.<sup>52</sup> The American mindset that favors expansion can perhaps in part explain the favorable attitude towards the purchase

In addition to Seward and Stoeckl, Charles Sumner, a United States senator from Massachusetts, played an essential role in ratifying the Alaska treaty. As Chairman of the powerful Senate committee on foreign relations, Sumner was in a position to make or break the treaty.<sup>53</sup> When the treaty reached the Senate floor, Sumner gave a three-hour speech in favor of the treaty. His speech highlighted the resources of the territory, unwillingness to affront Russia, fear of democrats capitalizing on the failure of the treaty, and sensitivity to growing awareness of public opinion.<sup>54</sup> All of these reasons listed in his speech pushed the treaty towards ratification. Finally, on April 9, 1867, the Senate ratified the treaty thirty-seven to two. The two negative votes came from New England that feared competition from fishing in Alaska.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, the United State’s friendship with Russia, the general positive opinion of the public, and the possible benefits of the territory paved the way for further colonization of the Iñupiat.

## **V. The Beginning of the U.S Era**

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<sup>52</sup> Bailey, 46.

<sup>53</sup> Bailey, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Bailey, 46.

<sup>55</sup> Bailey, 47.

During the Russian-led era, Americans had had limited interactions with the Iñupiat of North Slope through the whaling trade. The Native American Rights Fund states that the Russians had approached the North Slope but “had been rebuffed by the Eskimos and, because of the horrific climate, they did not push their exploration further and instead retreated south,” which would be another factor pushing significant changes to the Iñupiat lifestyle to later in the century.<sup>56</sup> Their subsistence activities and way of life had gone on unchanged during the Russian era and for several years into the U.S purchase of Alaska.<sup>57</sup> The treaty signed by the United States did not give the federal government the land itself but only the rights to control trading and to tax the proceeds from the territory.<sup>58</sup>

The Organic Act in 1884 provided a civil government for Alaska that appointed a commission to examine the Indigenous peoples residing in said territory, what lands should be reserved for use by the United States, what could be apportioned to settlers, and if education should be provided to the Indigenous peoples.<sup>59</sup> The policy of treaty-making with the indigenous peoples and the United States government was terminated in 1871. This closed any legal avenues for the Iñupiat people to resist colonization. Although the terms of treaties often weren't upheld, the formation of treaties might have allowed for negotiation and input from the Iñupiat. The Organic Act began to set up a form of government in Alaska without the consent of its original inhabitants:

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<sup>56</sup> “‘THE FIFTH DISASTER’- The Colonization of The North Slope of Alaska,” *Naive American Rights Fund: Announcements* 3, no. 1 (January 1975). 2.

<sup>57</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 2.

<sup>58</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 3.

<sup>59</sup> “Federal Indian Law for Alaska Tribes,” Early Years in Alaska after Purchase | Federal Indian Law for Alaska Tribes, accessed May 5, 2021, [https://www.uaf.edu/tribal/112/unit\\_1/earlyyearsinalaskaafterpurchase.php#:~:text=Thepercent20passagepercent20ofpercent20thepercent20first,ofpercent20thepercent20Statepercent20ofpercent20Oregon.](https://www.uaf.edu/tribal/112/unit_1/earlyyearsinalaskaafterpurchase.php#:~:text=Thepercent20passagepercent20ofpercent20thepercent20first,ofpercent20thepercent20Statepercent20ofpercent20Oregon.)

“The passage of the first Organic Act in 1884 created the District of Alaska and established a District Court. The Act provided for a judge, clerk, several commissioners, and a marshal with four deputies. The Act also designated Alaska a mining District which provided that “the Indians and other persons in said district shall not be disturbed in the possession of any lands actually in their use or occupation or now claimed by them, but the terms of which such persons may acquire title to such lands is reserved for future legislation by Congress.”<sup>60</sup>

This essentially meant that the United States was now in control of what would happen to Iñupiat land. Other changes came along with the 1884 District Act, which allowed Miners to claim land, utilizing the Townsite Act, or a Homestead under the 1898 Homestead Act, which allowed settlers to claim land for their own as well.<sup>61</sup> The Indigenous people of Alaska were beginning to experience what Indigenous peoples in the lower forty-eight were already feeling in full force. These acts are some of the first significant measures of U.S. colonization changing Iñupiat life in Alaska.

The impact of American citizens on the Iñupiat people of the North Slope was similar to the experience of Indigenous peoples across the Americas in another aspect: disease and Christianity. Colonizers brought “measles, whooping cough, diphtheria and the tuberculosis” to the North Slope.<sup>62</sup> The integration of the Indigenous peoples and settlers meant that Indigenous peoples were exposed to these foreign diseases faster than before contact. The flu of 1918 was particularly severe. In 1918 “only a few villages on the North Slope remained intact - most of the rest of the villages and camps had lost all but a few individuals.” Although the flu killed millions of people worldwide, it may never have reached the North Slope without colonization. It was not until the 1920s, when the Presbyterian mission doctors and hospital introduced Western medical

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<sup>60</sup> Early Years in Alaska.

<sup>61</sup> Early Years in Alaska.

<sup>62</sup> Early Years in Alaska.

care to the region, that the Iñupiat population could begin recovery from the devastation of diseases introduced by White people. White people not only brought their disease but the vices of their own culture. The arrival of White men changed the ways of living for the Iñupiat from how they built their houses to the introduction of alcohol and the god they worshipped.<sup>63</sup>

#### IV. Christianity

Before Christianity, Shamanism was practiced on the North Slope and by the Iñupiat people.<sup>64</sup> The first Presbyterian missionary to arrive in Barrow was in 1890.<sup>65</sup> As the Russians had limited contact with the Iñupiat, the Orthodox Church did not convert any of their population, but they did convert Aleutians.<sup>66</sup> After 1890, churches sought land and acquired it through the Missions Act of 1900, which allowed a religious denomination to acquire up to one square mile of land in Alaska.<sup>67</sup> This act caused more missionaries to make their way to the North Slope. The missionaries were from the Presbyterian Church and altered fundamental aspects of traditional Iñupiat culture such as housing, social interactions, settlement, and subsistence patterns.<sup>68</sup>

Some of the work done by the Presbyterian Church showcases the positive aspects of the United State’s purchase of Alaska. They helped the Iñupiat to recover from the 1918 flu and build infrastructure. Later in the 20th century, The Presbyterian Church continued to aid in developing the North Slope Borough. Presbyterian Iñupiat used “contacts within the national

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<sup>63</sup> Early Years in Alaska.

<sup>64</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation. *History of the Iñupiat People of the North Slope*. YouTube. Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5pqeOwbDQc>.

<sup>65</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>66</sup> Naske, *49th State*, 58.

<sup>67</sup> Early Years in Alaska.

<sup>68</sup> “The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan,” 20.

church hierarchy, to obtain funding to aid in development of the borough” showcasing Christianity’s major role in shaping the Iñupiat of the slope. One of the most far-reaching impacts of the church is the development of the Inupiaq into a written language. Iñupiat “Reverend Roy Ahmaogak, who was ordained in 1946, translated the New Testament into the Iñupiat language in the mid-1960s” which established Iñupiaq as a formal written language.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan,” 25.



## **Chapter Two: Iñupiat Resistance and Adaptation to United States**

### **Colonization in the Twentieth Century**

In this section, I will examine the history of Iñupiat resistance and adaptation to U.S. colonization in the 20th century by reviewing several significant events and changes in their communities. I will also specifically focus on the Iñupiat people residing in Utqiagvik, the North Slope Borough city seat. Looking at Utqiagvik more specifically in this chapter will illustrate the complex relationship the Iñupiat people formed with the United States in the twentieth century. The four events I will be looking at in this chapter are the arrival of the Navy and establishment of the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory (NARL), the introduction of Alaskan statehood, The Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act, and government regulation of Iñupiat subsistence hunting in the 1970s. Each event had a profound impact on the Iñupiat people of the North Slope and Utqiagvik, which provide a lens through which to understand the Iñupiat relationship to their environment and colonization.

The arrival of the Navy changed Utqiagvik irrevocably as it played a significant role in developing its economy and introducing the Iñupiat people to foreigners. The Navy's exploration of oil began an era of resource extraction from Iñupiat land. It established an apparatus in which the Navy would better navigate the North Slope to acquire resources. The collaboration between scientists and the Iñupiat resulted in a dramatic shift in their environment, extending the use of Iñupiat traditional ecological knowledge past their community to Navy personnel, scientists, and outsiders. The relationship between researchers and the Iñupiat is meaningful in that it marked a change in who benefited from indigenous knowledge. The relationships formed during the days of NARL set a precedent for what future collaborations may look like. Although the Iñupiat in

Utqiagvik benefited from the Navy's presence in some capacities, it is crucial to recognize that the Navy's presence was not designed to aid the Iñupiat.

Alaskan Statehood and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) played a different role in shaping the Iñupiat's relationship to their environment. Both events stripped the Iñupiat of land that they had access to for millennia. The positive side of these events is harder to see, except that the Iñupiat collaborated and worked together to form political organizations that protected some of their rights and still protect them today. Statehood did not address Iñupiat land claims and paved the way for the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The tragedy of these events is still prevalent despite some of the positive outcomes of Iñupiat resistance. It is important to recognize the significant achievements they have won in their battle to protect their way of life throughout the twentieth century while still acknowledging the great suffering and adversity they endured.

### **I. The Arrival of the U.S. Navy and its Impact on the Iñupiat People**

In the 1940s, the Iñupiat lifestyle was not unlike that of their ancestors. Whaling, hunting, fishing, and trapping dominated their lifestyle.<sup>70</sup> Modern goods and supplies were available but they were hard to access.<sup>71</sup> The influence of White people had caused the Iñupiat to replace their sod homes with wood-framed houses.<sup>72</sup> The houses did not have running water, gas heat, or telephones.<sup>73</sup> The Navy established NARL, operated by the Office of Naval Research for oil exploration in 1946, even though researchers and the Navy took a few years to set up the

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<sup>70</sup> Brewster, Karen. "Native Contributions To Arctic Science At Barrow, Alaska." *ARCTIC* 50, no. 3 (1997). <https://doi.org/10.14430/arctic1109>.

<sup>71</sup> Brewster 1.

<sup>72</sup> "THE FIFTH DISASTER", 3.

<sup>73</sup> Brewster 1.

physical lab and determine its mode of operations.<sup>74</sup> Oil exploration in the North Slope region is a fundamental part of the history of NARL. In 1923, “President Harding by Executive Order established Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4 in Northern Alaska, the new reserve included about half of the foothills and coastal plain of that great region and aggregated about 35,000 square miles”, which would lead to oil exploration in the 1940s.<sup>75</sup> The United States paid little attention to Northern Alaska and the oil reserves until they became involved in World War Two.<sup>76</sup> The War increased the United State’s need for petroleum. In 1944, The United States government initiated a major oil exploration program called PET4.<sup>77</sup> PET4 brought the Navy to Utiaqvik and therefore led to the establishment of NARL.<sup>78</sup> The PET4 program hired the Iñupiat, which would set the stage for their later work at NARL. NARL produced a plethora of arctic research, and the Western world widely regarded NARL for its work. By 1950, NARL supported a variety of arctic research projects of scientists from a substantial number of colleges and universities.<sup>79</sup>

The Navy’s arrival in Utqiagvik would shape the future of the community and expand the economy. The changes came in the form of infrastructure, jobs, and research. Utqiagvik was “inundated with Naval personnel, barges, and heavy equipment as the Navy constructed a village of Quonset huts and laid a gravel runway 6 km north of town” changing the layout of Utqiagvik and the Iñupiat’s environment.<sup>80</sup> The arrival of the Navy resulted in new hospital facilities, nurses’ and doctors’ quarters, schools, teachers, and apartment complexes.<sup>81</sup> Before the Navy’s

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<sup>74</sup> Shelesnyak, M.C. “The History of the Arctic Research Laboratory, Point Barrow, Alaska.” ARCTIC 1, no. 2 (1948). <https://doi.org/10.14430/arctic4004>.

<sup>75</sup> John C. Reed and Andreas G. Ronhovde, *Arctic Laboratory: a History (1947-1966) of the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory at Point Barrow, Alaska* (Washington: Arctic Institute of North America, 1971).

<sup>76</sup> Reed, “Arctic Laboratory” xxiii.

<sup>77</sup> Brewster 1.

<sup>78</sup> Brewster 2.

<sup>79</sup> Reed, “Arctic Laboratory” 4.

<sup>80</sup> Brewster 1.

<sup>81</sup> Reed, “Arctic Laboratory” 28.

arrival, there were few jobs in Utqiagvik. Residents worked at the hospital, the school, the Native store, the weather bureau, or the church, but wages were low.<sup>82</sup> The Iñupiat did not rely on wages solely to support themselves as they hunted for their food, but higher wages were still appealing. The establishment of these facilities illustrates the merging complex relationship the Iñupiat had to colonization as there were positive aspects to the U.S. presence in Utqiagvik.

However, Iñupiat people living in Utqiagvik experienced discrimination from the Navy personnel and researchers at NARL and the PET4 exploration camp. Some of this prejudice stemmed from the Navy personnel's disapproval and judgment of the Iñupiat's living situation.<sup>83</sup> Throughout history, colonizers have considered themselves superior to Indigenous peoples, and this was no exception. At first, it was not easy for the Iñupiat to get jobs. The Navy had reservations about hiring them because of the prevalence of tuberculosis and the perception that they were undependable workers. Eventually, with the establishment of a healthcare program, TB testing, and a general improvement in living conditions, the Navy began hiring the Iñupiat people at a higher rate.<sup>84</sup> The Iñupiat people were hired as laborers, equipment operators, mechanics, carpenters, and guides and assistants on the Navy's survey, seismic, and mapping crews. Not surprisingly, there was a disparity in wages.

One Iñupiat woman, respected by her community, was hired to translate and interpret Inupiaq for the Navy.<sup>85</sup> She recounts the difficulties of telling her fellow Iñupiat that they would not be paid equally to the Navy men and researchers for doing the same work because they had a lower level of schooling.<sup>86</sup> This pay inequality reflects a lack of appreciation for the Iñupiat's

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<sup>82</sup> Brewster 1.

<sup>83</sup> Brewster 1.

<sup>84</sup> Brewster 1.

<sup>85</sup> Brewster 2.

<sup>86</sup> Brewster 2.

knowledge system. It also created a divide between researchers and the Iñupiat very quickly increased tensions between the two groups. The Iñupiat went to the camp to work but rarely socialized with the Navy personnel.<sup>87</sup> Navy personnel were required to stay on the military base unless granted special permission to visit the community, which was challenging to acquire.<sup>88</sup> This early history signals a shift in Iñupiat interaction with outsiders beyond their previous interaction with White people before establishing NARL. Good relationships would benefit the work at NARL, but cultural differences made the possibility of these relationships more difficult.

## **II. Relationships Between Researchers at NARL and the Iñupiat**

The Navy left in 1953 and shut down their oil exploration camp at Utqiagvik after they determined that their oil exploration program was no longer profitable.<sup>89</sup> The Navy's interest in scientific research in the Arctic remained, as they wanted to know more about how its personnel could operate in the Arctic and cold weather conditions. The remaining scientists and researchers maintained their relationship with the Iñupiat. NARL and its scientists would play an essential part in shaping the political relationships between the United States and the Iñupiat. Many scientists would study the Iñupiat, including numerous types of research that were different in their scope and purpose. After the Navy left, the transition to a research facility led to hiring more of the Iñupiat.<sup>90</sup> PET4 already set a precedent for Iñupiat employment. The Iñupiat's experience working at the Navy facility before it transitioned to a research facility made it evident to NARL researchers that they had specialized talents to make the research facility a

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<sup>87</sup> Brewster 2.

<sup>88</sup> Brewster 2.

<sup>89</sup> Brewster 3.

<sup>90</sup> Brewster 2.

success.<sup>91</sup> Their involvement in scientific research increased once the Navy recognized these talents. The relationship between NARL and the Iñupiat people was unique because it combined two knowledge systems in order for western scientists and the Iñupiat to work together.

Differences in cultures and prejudice remained at NARL throughout its tenure. There were positive and negative interactions and feelings between the Iñupiat and NARL. Many scientists viewed the Iñupiat as undependable. Some scientists and staff at NARL had difficulties with the Iñupiat and absenteeism.<sup>92</sup> Hunting as a way to support their families and community may have contributed to absenteeism. Another researcher writes that the Iñupiat needed to be supervised frequently “for there are so many little things that they are unfamiliar with and do not know how to do — things that anyone who has been his own handyman around a home does without realizing that there is a wrong way to do them or that people have never seen done.” which suggests an insensitivity to cultural differences.<sup>93</sup> The researchers' expectations of a western work ethic were perpetuating a colonial mindset by prioritizing one form of work. However, some relationships between the researchers and Iñupiat were positive.<sup>94</sup>

Dr. Laurence Irving, a physiologist from Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania and the Lab's first director, said, “The sharp observation of our Eskimo assistants has been invaluable. Combined with their keen observation, their accurate memory and ability to report observations literally is making available to us gradually the careful results of their serious study of this region,” illustrating his high regard of the Iñupiat.<sup>95</sup> His words illustrate how the researchers would have been lost without the TEK of the Iñupiat. Dr. Irving was a firm advocate of

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<sup>91</sup> Brewster 8.

<sup>92</sup> Reed, “Arctic Laboratory” 150.

<sup>93</sup> Reed, “Arctic Laboratory” 157.

<sup>94</sup> Brewster 3.

<sup>95</sup> Brewster 280.

Indigenous knowledge. His relationship with the Iñupiat people extended past them being simply colleagues as he said the “discussion of their animals and country has led me to pleasant acquaintances and friendships that I deeply appreciate. It is my feeling that by methodically seeking to increase the transfer of the unique Eskimo information to our science, our culture would be enriched.”<sup>96</sup> Dr. Max Brewer, whose 15 years at NARL made him the longest-serving director from 1956 to 1971, also recognized Indigenous talent and hired more Iñupiat during his tenure as director.<sup>97</sup> Unfortunately, his high regard for the Iñupiat was the exception rather than the rule.

The experience of Iñupiat employment at NARL showcases both obvious negatives and positives of the situation. Perhaps the negatives outweigh the positives considering many scientists did not acknowledge Iñupiat assistance in their projects despite the word of the NARL directors. Many scientists “owe their lives to their Iñupiat guides; but they also owe their successful projects and careers to the Iñupiat who shared their knowledge about the Arctic” and positively benefited the researcher’s lives.<sup>98</sup> Those who did give credit still did not recognize the full extent of Iñupiat contributions to their research. Those who did not give credit at all illustrate a harmful and tragic long-standing paradigm in which Indigenous cultures are stolen from to benefit White people and settlers. Overall, the interactions can teach us about collaboration in the present day and can be seen in the relationship of two hunters to NARL, particularly illustrating what happens when people with different knowledge systems collaborate with respect.

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<sup>96</sup> Brewster 280.

<sup>97</sup> Brewster 5.

<sup>98</sup> Brewster 279.

### III. Two Influential Hunters at NARL

Approximately 300 Iñupiat worked at NARL during its 33 years of operation.<sup>99</sup> The exchange of TEK and the introduction of outsiders can be seen in two Iñupiat Hunters: Simon Paneak and Harry Brower. Sr. Paneak learned to speak and write English when he was a young man living by a coastal trading post and worked with Director Laurence Irving for twenty years, developing a special bond.<sup>100</sup> Paneak and Irving were close friends and traveled throughout the North Slope together.<sup>101</sup> Irving considered the Iñupiat as equals and in the field and considered them to be experts.<sup>102</sup> Irving's respect toward the Iñupiat allowed the positive relationship between him and Simon to work. Paneak was compensated for his work which allowed him to provide for his family.<sup>103</sup> Paneak appreciated both his friendship and their scientific collaboration.<sup>104</sup>

Born in Barrow in 1924, Harry Brower, Sr. was the youngest son of the famous whaler and trader Charles D. Brower, author of *Fifty Years Below Zero*.<sup>105</sup> Throughout his life, he became a successful hunter, trapper, and whaling captain. He was respected and known within his community for his generosity, willingness to help others, extensive knowledge of arctic animals, and survival and traveling skills.<sup>106</sup> Director Brewer first hired Brower as a carpenter in 1957, but when he learned how much Brower knew of the land, he wanted Brower to spend more time in the field with the researchers.<sup>107</sup> Brower spent twenty-five years at NARL, and he gained

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<sup>99</sup> Brewster 279.

<sup>100</sup> Brewster 279.

<sup>101</sup> Brewster 280.

<sup>102</sup> Brewster 280.

<sup>103</sup> Brewster 280.

<sup>104</sup> Brewster 280.

<sup>105</sup> Brewster 281.

<sup>106</sup> Brewster 281.

<sup>107</sup> Brewster 281.



status as an expert within the scientific community. Harry Brower always spoke proudly about his NARL days and was pleased with the good retirement benefits he received.<sup>108</sup> He helped establish a pattern of trust between scientists and hunters.

Iñupiat hunters had developed many insights into the behavior of spring migrating Bowhead whales. Some were hesitant to share their knowledge with scientists for fear that their Bowhead information would be used against them by the federal government, the IWC, or both.<sup>109</sup> Brower came to trust researchers and share information.<sup>110</sup> Harry Brower knew a great deal about whales and whale behavior. Sharing this knowledge benefited science and helped protect the Iñupiat right to continue their subsistence whaling when, in the late 1970s, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) threatened to stop it.<sup>111</sup>

It is clear that when scientists were respectful of the Iñupiat and recognized that they were just as knowledgeable, if not more, the collaboration between the two groups could be fulfilling personally and contribute meaningfully to scientific research. The research facility indelibly changed the lives of the Iñupiat in both positive and negative ways. The positives of NARL included the close relationships and friendships the Iñupiat people developed with outsiders, the recognition of their expertise, and most importantly, improved infrastructure to Utqiagvik. The negatives include the disrespect they received from many researchers, lack of acknowledgment for their work, and ultimately their lack of voice in the establishment of NARL. Due to the circumstances of U.S colonization and the federal government's treatment of

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<sup>108</sup> Brewster 281.

<sup>109</sup> Harry Piece.

<sup>110</sup> Harry piece.

<sup>111</sup> Brewster 7.

Indigenous peoples elsewhere in the country, it is not surprising that the U.S. did not seek out Iñupiat concerns or desires regarding NARL.

The scientists at NARL's disrespect for Indigenous knowledge, in some instances, showcases why it is so essential that western scientists who want to conduct research in Indigenous territories or study indigenous people must prioritize Indigenous voices. Many scientists throughout the country still neglect to respect, include and acknowledge indigenous knowledge systems. This paradigm needs to change for the success of future collaborations between tribes and scientists, the decolonization process, and the work that needs to happen to address our warming planet.

#### **IV. Iñupiat management of NARL**

In 1980, the Navy shut down NARL deciding the research facility was too expensive and no longer wanted to support scientific research.<sup>112</sup> In 1984, after much deliberation and negotiation, the old NARL buildings were turned over to Barrow's village corporation, the Ukpeagvik Iñupiat Corporation (UIC).<sup>113</sup> Ukpeagvik Iñupiat Corporation, or UIC, is one of the 200 Alaska Native village corporations created under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA) to settle aboriginal land claims. The change in management of the NARL facility marked a new period in Utiaqvik's history. Despite these changes, Utiaqvik residents still call the area "NARL."<sup>114</sup>

Throughout the Iñupiat's management of NARL, "The North Slope Borough has become a leader in the effort to involve local people in the design and conduct of scientific

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<sup>112</sup> Brewster 282.

<sup>113</sup> Brewster 282.

<sup>114</sup> Brewster 282.

studies, recognizing that this collaboration allows them to influence and learn from projects and to show that local people have meaningful knowledge to contribute,” highlighting the continuing impact of NARL on the community today.<sup>115</sup> Science continues to be a fundamental aspect of NARL’s function. The UIC encourages visiting scientists to use the facility and provides logistical support when necessary.<sup>116</sup> The former NARL facilities house the Department of Wildlife Management of the North Slope Borough, the Iñupiat-controlled regional government in Northern Alaska.<sup>117</sup> At NARL, staff members conduct publicly mandated projects, such as the Bowhead whale census, fish studies, subsistence harvest studies, and marine mammal toxicology research, all of which are of service to Utqiagvik.<sup>118</sup> Iñisagvik College, the North Slope’s community college, operates out of UIC-NARL as well.<sup>119</sup> Iñisagvik College is a public, tribal land-grant community college in Utqiagvik, Alaska.<sup>120</sup> Changing the building to a college that provides an education rooted in the Iñupiat’s subsistence culture, which exists in harmony with nature, helps ensure Iñupiat survival.<sup>121</sup> The story of the relationship between the United States and the Iñupiat people can be seen through the history of NARL. Iñisagvik College is a direct outgrowth of the “Native American self-determination movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s” that brought Iñupiat people closer to self-determination and regaining control of their lives.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Brewster 282.

<sup>116</sup> Brewster 282.

<sup>117</sup> Brewster 282.

<sup>118</sup> Brewster 282.

<sup>119</sup> Brewster 283.

<sup>120</sup> “About Iñisagvik College,” Iñisagvik College, accessed May 6, 2021, <https://www.ilisagvik.edu/about-us/>.

<sup>121</sup> About Iñisagvik College”.

<sup>122</sup> About Iñisagvik College.”

NARL's journey perfectly illustrates the Iñupiat's people of North Slope's perseverance and resistance to colonization. A building that was once imposed on the Iñupiat people, changing their way of life, is now used to benefit the community and maintain Iñupiat culture, ensuring younger generations' success through post-secondary education. NARL's transformation into an institution that solely benefits the Iñupiat showcases the Iñupiat's adaptation to colonization by remaking colonial institutions.

## **V. Statehood and the Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act**

Ninety-two years would pass until the territory of Alaska gained statehood in 1959. This was the beginning of a decades-long struggle by the Iñupiat to maintain their culture and subsistence lifestyle. The White population living in Alaska sought freedom from the federal government's control and corporate interests in the 1950s.<sup>123</sup> This population perceived “the federal agencies and fishing and mining interests as being entities which were holding back Alaska's basic social and economic development” and viewed them as a threat to their economic development and their use of Alaska's resources.<sup>124</sup> The White population of Alaska saw statehood as a means to provide them with maximum local governmental control. Additionally, The discovery of the Swanson River oilfield in the 1950s finally gave the territory the tax base it needed to become a state which also played a role in Alaska becoming a state.

The Statehood act did not effectively address Iñupiat land claims or rights. In the 1950s, Alaska developed “single units of local government in which all local executive and administrative functions were vested for geographic areas defined by mutual economic and

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<sup>123</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 2.

<sup>124</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 3.

social interests,” changing the nature of Alaska’s government.<sup>125</sup> The framers of the Alaskan Constitution called these units “boroughs” and intended to avoid what they considered the faults of previous state constitutions.<sup>126</sup> Another important provision of the Constitution of Alaska was its provision that outlaws discrimination based on race.<sup>127</sup>

At the time of statehood- about 175,000 people, one-fifth of whom were Natives voted, on the constitutional referendum.<sup>128</sup> On July 7, 1959, Alaska became a State. Despite the prohibition outlawing of discrimination based on race, the establishment of statehood was detrimental to the Iñupiat. It furthered the colonization process and changed the land ownership patterns. It was inadequate provision when one considers the land they would lose over the second half of the century. The statehood act made it a certainty that most of the land being used by the Iñupiat would be taken from them.

The oil field reserves that the Navy had explored in the 1940s would become more accessible to Alaska through statehood. The statehood act claimed, “State and its people do agree and declare that they forever disclaim all right and title . . . to any lands or other property (including fishing rights) the right or title to which maybe held by any Indians, Eskimos or Aleuts . . .” but the federal and state government would not hold to this statement.<sup>129</sup> Statehood provided the legal framework for the United States to take land from the Iñupiat and claim royalties from Federal oil and gas leases on that same land.<sup>130</sup> PET4 was included in the United States seizure of Iñupiat land for oil. On top of the land taken for oil extraction, and before the

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<sup>125</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 4.

<sup>126</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 4.

<sup>127</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 4.

<sup>128</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 4.

<sup>129</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 6.

<sup>130</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 6.

passage of statehood, the federal government decided to declare the entire North Slope an Arctic Wildlife Refuge, which forced the Iñupiat people in the North Slope to adjust the boundaries of their hunting. Both instances of land changes angered and worried the Iñupiat. The Department of Interior did not alert the Iñupiat that their lands were being taken.<sup>131</sup> The land that the State of Alaska seized was “some of the most prime land around villages and on hunting and fishing areas.” which threatened their existence.<sup>132</sup>

Not only did the likelihood of petroleum extraction put the quality of air and water at risk, but it was also further endangered by the potential of atomic testing. The United States government wanted to detonate an atomic bomb at Point Hope. “The Atomic Energy Commission wanted to demonstrate the peaceful use of atomic energy by creating a large harbor precisely on the village site” to create an artificial boat harbor.<sup>133</sup> Point Hope is located near the end of a triangular spit, which juts 15 miles into the Chukchi Sea, 248 miles southwest of Utqiagvik.<sup>134</sup> Atomic testing had already done damage to the slope during previous testing. Testing in Siberia and the Pacific affected plants with radiation and therefore seeping into the food that the Iñupiat people were eating.<sup>135</sup> On top of the threat of radiation, another blow came to their food supply when the federal government decided to regulate hunting Eider ducks that would further damage subsistence hunting practices.<sup>136</sup> The Iñupiat were able to get the federal government to back off. This onslaught of colonial interference into their lives pushed the Iñupiat

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<sup>131</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 6.

<sup>132</sup> “Federal Indian Law for Alaska Tribes.” Alaska Statehood and build up to Alaska Native Land Claims | Federal Indian Law for Alaska Tribes. Accessed May 7, 2021. [https://www.uaf.edu/tribal/112/unit\\_2/alaskastatehoodandbuilduptoalaskanativelandclaims.php](https://www.uaf.edu/tribal/112/unit_2/alaskastatehoodandbuilduptoalaskanativelandclaims.php).

<sup>133</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 5.

<sup>134</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 5.

<sup>135</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 5.

<sup>136</sup> “Federal Indian Law.”

to action. In 1966 the Alaska Federation of Natives was formed to achieve the passage of a fair settlement.<sup>137</sup>

The Iñupiat had decided to change their nature and to fight. With its nonaggression, courtesy, and consensus, Iñupiat culture was regularly abused by White entrepreneurs and the federal government.<sup>138</sup> Iñupiat “cultural values of sharing, self-confidence, and presumption of goodwill in others were precisely what was at odds with what was not needed if the land, the whale, and the Iñupiat way of life were to survive” the American theft of their land.<sup>139</sup> In response, The Iñupiat formed a group in 1964 called the Arctic Slope Native Association (ASNA).<sup>140</sup> Formed in 1965 by founders Samuel Simmonds, Guy Okakok, Sr., and Charles 'Etok' Edwardson, Jr., ASNA was created to help protect the Arctic Slope region's lands membership which claimed aboriginal title to 56 million acres of the entire North Slope.<sup>141</sup> In 1965 under the leadership of Eben Hopson, Sr. as its first Executive Director, ASNA filed a land claim with the U.S. Department of the Interior for 58 million acres of Alaska's the Arctic.<sup>142</sup> Over time, Indigenous groups filed claims totaling 172 million acres, about one-fourth of which the state had also selected.<sup>143</sup> In 1966 the claims filed by ASNA resulted in a land freeze issued by the secretary of interior Stewart Udall. The land freeze prevented the transfer of further lands granted to the state of Alaska by the statehood act.<sup>144</sup> The state officials did not respond well to the land freeze, and Alaskan Governor Hickle objected to it because Alaska would receive

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<sup>137</sup> “Federal Indian Law.”

<sup>138</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 6.

<sup>139</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 6.

<sup>140</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation

<sup>141</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>142</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>143</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>144</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 7.

90percent of royalty revenues from Indigenous land.<sup>145</sup> Creating these groups was vital in setting up a foundation for Iñupiat resistance and self-determination for the future.

The precariousness of the Iñupiat grip on their land became even more fragile when on July 18, 1968, Atlantic Richfield announced that it had discovered oil at Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic Slope.<sup>146</sup> This oil discovery brought in petroleum companies looking to exploit this resource through drilling development and pipeline destruction.<sup>147</sup> The oil industry and the Alaskan government decided to make plans for an 800-mile trans-Alaskan pipeline. Still, Indigenous land claims put this in jeopardy as well as raised questions about leasing the land.<sup>148</sup> After receiving state permission from the appropriate authorities, on “February 11, 1969, three of the major oil companies announced that they had decided to build a \$900 million pipeline across Alaska” which would spark protest amongst the Iñupiat.<sup>149</sup> In order to settle the question of access to oil on Iñupiat land, a settlement would have to be reached. Achieving a settlement would lead to Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), the largest land claims settlement in U.S. history.<sup>150</sup> This act would shape how the Iñupiat people self-govern and hunt.

Four years of debate ensued regarding how much in cash settlements the Indigenous peoples of Alaska would receive and how much land they would retain.<sup>151</sup> AFN and ANSA (Arctic North Slope Association) increased lobbying efforts in 1970 in Washington DC for congressional legislation to settle Alaska native land claims.<sup>152</sup> The oil discovery at Prudhoe Bay

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<sup>145</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>146</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 6.

<sup>147</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 7.

<sup>148</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>149</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 7.

<sup>150</sup> “Federal Indian Law.”

<sup>151</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>152</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.



provided the government with the first real incentive to pass a legal framework to reach a federally legislated settlement. ANCSA filed the *Edward vs. Mortensen* lawsuit claiming ownership of the entire North Slope of Alaska, including all of Prudhoe bay.<sup>153</sup>

ANCSA was signed into law in 1971 by Richard Nixon. ANCSA granted the Indigenous peoples of Alaska title to nearly forty million acres of land and provided them one billion dollars in direct compensation in exchange for the extinguishment of all Native claims to Alaskan lands based on aboriginal use and occupancy.<sup>154</sup> Before the signing of ANCSA, the U.S. government wanted approval from Alaskan Indigenous peoples. The AFN gathered delegates from all regions of the state to vote, and all regions agreed except for the North Slope.<sup>155</sup> The ASNA wanted it to be distributed based on land lost and not population as that would favor certain areas more than others, such as the interior, which had a larger population and would receive most of the monetary benefits.<sup>156</sup> The AFN helped work out the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and “asked for conveyance to Native villages of fee simple title to 40 million acres of land with mineral rights to be held by Native regional development corporations, and cash compensation in the amount of \$500 million” which was a low request considering the Indigenous peoples of Alaska technically owned one hundred percent of the land, and it was valued in the billions.<sup>157</sup> The ASNA would only be allowed to select five million acres of land and only after the federal and state governments made their land selections. They knew it had taken virtually all of their 56.5 million-acre Slope to sustain them in the past” and were worried about what it would mean

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<sup>153</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>154</sup> John F. Walsh, “Settling the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act,” *Stanford Law Review* 38, no. 1 (1985):227, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1228606>.

<sup>155</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>156</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>157</sup> Comprehensive Plan. 9.

for their lifestyle in the future.<sup>158</sup> Eventually, the delegates organized by the AFN approved the act with a majority vote, with only the North slope region voting against the act because it did not fairly compensate the North Slope.

To ensure the best use of the vast body of land finally awarded under the Act and distribute financial compensation among the Natives, ANCSA established a system of Native corporations.<sup>159</sup> The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act created 12 regional profit-making Alaska Native corporations and over 200 village, group, and urban corporations.<sup>160</sup> The establishment of corporations was unique in that it differed from how the Federal government established legal Indigenous territory in the lower forty-eight.<sup>161</sup> The Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) was formed in 1972.<sup>162</sup> ASRC represents the business interests of its approximately 13,000 Iñupiaq shareholders that primarily live in the eight North Slope communities. ASRC is the largest Alaskan-owned company, employing nearly 12,000 people worldwide. Enrollment in the corporation was restricted to any Alaskan of ¼ Native blood alive on or before December 18, 1971. Amendments to the ANCSA in 1991 allowed an interested party who was born on or after 1971 to join.<sup>163</sup> The complexities of ANCSA became apparent after the establishment of this act. ANCSA would require immense strength on the part of the Iñupiat to adjust to their new legal and political framework while working to maintain their culture.

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<sup>158</sup> North Slope Borough.

<sup>159</sup> Walsh, 1.

<sup>160</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>161</sup> "Federal Indian Law".

<sup>162</sup> North Slope Borough.

<sup>163</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

Two years later, the ramifications of this act were realized with a final decision on the Edward vs. Mortinson case—the sectioning of land and the monetary settlement.<sup>164</sup> The Edward vs. Mortinson case determined that the passage of ANCSA had extinguished any prior land claims the Iñupiat had to the land.<sup>165</sup> The case’s decision meant that the Iñupiat only had control over the land determined by the points in ANCSA. Fifty-five million acres were stripped down to five so Oil companies and the U.S gov could profit from oil found in the North Slope. The federal government reserved the land that the state government had not already taken.<sup>166</sup> The final monetary settlement given to the North Slope was only 22 million dollars paid over ten years.<sup>167</sup> A measly sum when compared to what they lost. The Iñupiat community, according to the ASRC, believes that ANCSA only settled land claims. In contrast, U.S. government officials believe that it decided their sovereignty, allowing them to self-govern, and determined hunting rights. As of 2005, The monetary settlement and land conveyances are complete, and ANCSA has decided that no Indian country exists in Alaska.<sup>168</sup>

The legacy of ANCSA is complex. Almost every Congress has amended ANCSA since its passage to alter the terms of the settlement and also to reduce the likelihood of losing the land.<sup>169</sup> Some view it as an "act of 'assimilation' or even 'termination,' while others see it as an experiment.<sup>170</sup> Despite the complexity of ANCSA, it is clear that there is a legacy of strong determination on behalf of the Iñupiat people to fight for a version of ANCSA that would most benefit their people. ANCSA's stipulations and the legal battle leading up to it required a

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<sup>164</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>165</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>166</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>167</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>168</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>169</sup> “Federal Indian Law.”

<sup>170</sup> “Federal Indian Law.”

tremendous amount of hard work and pain from the Iñupiat people. It gave them a framework for colonial resistance today with the establishment of corporations, albeit still being subject to Alaska state corporation law and the stipulations of ANCSA. Amendments to ANCSA over the years have clarified some of the unclear parts of the act and improved the Iñupiat's ability to self-govern, albeit while still dealing with a history of colonization. ANCSA imposes a complex capitalistic legal framework on the Iñupiat people to gain land they once used without regulation or a capitalist system. Yet, it also employs thousands in the North Slope who work for the interest of the people of North Slope. The Iñupiat people of the North Slope were not happy with the version of ANCSA passed in 1972, so they took further action to maintain their culture.

## **VI. Formation of the Borough**

When it became apparent that the proposed settlements would leave ASNA without valuable resources such as Prudhoe Bay, ASNA began to explore another option - creating a borough under Alaska state law.<sup>171</sup> To counter the United State's infringement on their land and culture, the Iñupiat used the Alaska state constitution to benefit their interests. They began establishing the North Slope as its own local government to protect themselves from corporate, state, and federal interests.<sup>172</sup> The legal process to become a borough would take about a year and face some bumps along the way.<sup>173</sup> The primary obstacle that issue arose was opposition from "seven of the world's largest oil companies with substantial investments at Prudhoe Bay filed a lawsuit to stop the Iñupiat's formation of "the incipient North Slope Borough" illustrating how that every step the Iñupiat would take to improve their self-determination would be met

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<sup>171</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>172</sup> Comprehensive Plan, 9.

<sup>173</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 11.

with strong resistance from capital or governmental interests.<sup>174</sup> Their land was a ticket to incredible profit for the oil companies, which meant that the oil companies would fight Iñupiat for their land. The oil companies cited hollow reasons as opposition to the creation of the North Slope Borough. These reasons included technical deficiencies in the record, that the new borough's assembly would not be properly apportioned or that the companies would have to bear the tax burdens and would get no benefit from the local government.<sup>175</sup> The election to certify the North Slope as a borough eventually passed, but the oil companies continued to oppose it. The opposition from the oil companies came to an end when "the Superior Court issued a memorandum decision on January 19, 1973" that agreed with the Iñupiat on every point, rejecting all the oil companies' claims.<sup>176</sup> After one appeal on behalf of the oil companies, the Iñupiat emerged victoriously.<sup>177</sup> They had won, but the forces of colonization would not relent.

Unfortunately, the oil companies did not give up and eventually sued Alaska. In turn, the state called a special session which was extremely rare. Due to the pressure placed on the state by the oil companies, the legislature placed limitations on the power of the North Slope Borough to tax the oil companies.<sup>178</sup> It is disappointing that after so much effort to reach self-determination that the oil companies could succeed in this blatant land grab.

Despite these difficulties, the Iñupiat continued to struggle to maintain their land and culture every step of the way. They challenged the almost one-hundred-year relationship with the United States. As the Utqiagvik home website says, "It was the first time Native Americans had taken control of their destiny through the use of municipal government" and worked toward a

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<sup>174</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 11.

<sup>175</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 11.

<sup>176</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 11.

<sup>177</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 11.

<sup>178</sup> THE FIFTH DISASTER, 13

goal of complete self-determination.<sup>179</sup> It was, and remains, one of the boldest moves ever made by an Indigenous people to regain control of their lives and future. Establishing the borough provided the Iñupiat with the ability to tax oil and gas infrastructure within its borders. This revenue allows the borough to build roads, operate schools, and fund other public services such as health clinics and fire departments. Most importantly, it gave the Iñupiat a greater chance to maintain their subsistence culture and lifestyle.

## **VII. Iñupiat Subsistence Lifestyle and Government Interference**

The subsistence lifestyle of the Iñupiat living in Utqiagvik and the North slope has remained an integral part of their way of life. Although ANCSA's formally stripped the Iñupiat of their land claims and cut their territory in half, they preserved. Statehood, ANCSA, and the borough's formation are part of a larger narrative; The Iñupiat's struggle to maintain their traditional way of life, knowledge systems, and connection nature. The hunt and its spiritual relevance to the Iñupiat changed and was made easier with the introduction of new technology. The Iñupiat hold a holistic and reverential view of their environment. They view the North Slope lands as a garden that has nourished them for millennia.<sup>180</sup> The Iñupiat are able to survive the incredibly harsh environment of the North Slope through cooperation amongst themselves.<sup>181</sup> To ensure survival, the Iñupiat are a hunting society, but they respect and cherish the animals they use for survival, recognizing the nourishment they provide.

The fishing, whaling, and hunting areas of the NSB cover over a 94,000 square mile area, and hunters must cover considerable ground to harvest marine mammals and terrestrial

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<sup>179</sup> North Slope Borough.

<sup>180</sup> North Slope Borough.

<sup>181</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

animals.<sup>182</sup> Today the Iñupiat use snowmachines, boats, and ATVs while also using their earnings for their maintenance and repair.<sup>183</sup> The ASRC provides time off to its employees to participate in the subsistence hunt showcasing how the Iñupiat maintain their culture while adapting to a different and globalized world.<sup>184</sup> They take pride in their traditional way of life. Women in the Iñupiat sew the skins together and prepare parkas and other clothing items to keep hunters warm.<sup>185</sup> Loss of wage income related to decreased oil development and revenues on the North Slope, over time, may reduce the ability for residents to afford modern hunting equipment.<sup>186</sup> The whale hunt is a long process that brings the community together and faces many dangers such as treacherous sea ice and polar bears.

While caribou, fish, and waterfowl are part of the subsistence diet, the Bowhead whale is the foundation of the Iñupiat diet.<sup>187</sup> The coastal villages of Point Hope, Point Lay, Wainwright, and Utqiagvik participate in whaling hunting and typically begin annual spring whale hunts in early May.<sup>188</sup> The Bowhead whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) is considered the most critical marine mammal by Iñupiaq residents of the North Slope.<sup>189</sup> Bowhead whales are gigantic, and this is in part why the community reveres them.<sup>190</sup> There is a deeply spiritual connection that the community has to whales. Many believe that a whale will recognize that the Iñupiat have worked hard and they will sacrifice themselves to the hunters to feed the Iñupiat.<sup>191</sup> In the view of the community, the whale offers itself because it knows that they utilize will take good care of its

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<sup>182</sup> Comprehensive Plan, 14.

<sup>183</sup> Comprehensive Plan, 14.

<sup>184</sup> Comprehensive Plan, 15.

<sup>185</sup> Comprehensive Plan, 15.

<sup>186</sup> Comprehensive Plan, 16.

<sup>187</sup> Comprehensive Plan, 16.

<sup>188</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 4.

<sup>189</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 5.

<sup>190</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 6.

<sup>191</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

meat, that the feeling of the crew is good, that they will store it in clean cellars and share it throughout the community for months to come.<sup>192</sup>

The TEK that allows hunters to obtain whales and nourish the community is a testament to the significant differences between how the rest of the country views and eats meat, which is without regard, and how the Iñupiat view and eat animals. The kill is a sacred moment, and prayers of thanks are given as the journey to bring the whale back to shore is also arduous and exposes the Iñupiat to the elements.<sup>193</sup> TEK is instrumental to every step of the process. Older crew members teach younger crew members how to properly hunt and catch a whale, ensuring the hunting techniques are passed down to the next generation.<sup>194</sup>

When food is scarce, the food provided by the whale ties the community together through a system of sharing.<sup>195</sup> Traditional knowledge passed down through the years showcases precisely how the Iñupiat should prepare the whale.<sup>196</sup> The food will even help beyond the village as “most of the whale products are consumed by members of whaling villages, up to 10,000 Eskimos and Indians living in the interior supplement their diets with whale meat,” ensuring that every member of the community close and far has enough to eat.<sup>197</sup> Whale meat, substituted by other meat such as rabbit, provides the Iñupiat with a balanced diet.<sup>198</sup> Once the whale is on the shore, dangers do not disappear, as ice could break up and cast people into the sea.<sup>199</sup> The loss of the Bowhead whale from the Iñupiat diet can not be quantified. It holds immense spiritual,

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<sup>192</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>193</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>194</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>195</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>196</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>197</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 4.

<sup>198</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 6.

<sup>199</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.



nutritional, and cultural value. To lose the Bowhead whale would be to erase a large part of Iñupiat culture. It also serves the Iñupiat people with jobs and taking away that which they need to survive means they have to seek other employment, which often pulls them away from their community.

The establishment of statehood would affect the Iñupiat relationship with the Bowhead whale as the state of Alaska, now connected to the United States, would control their subsistence hunting with greater legal control. The subsistence harvest in Alaska is regulated by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and because that agency has regulatory authority over whales in the U.S. waters, it can regulate whaling in traditional Iñupiat hunting grounds.<sup>200</sup> The IWC originated in 1946, when fourteen nations, including all major whaling nations, formed the International Whaling Commission.<sup>201</sup> In 1977, the IWC determined that the BCB stock (the Bowhead whale) was extremely low in population size.<sup>202</sup> Worries over the impacts of subsistence hunting and the small population size had the IWC set the subsistence harvest quota to zero.<sup>203</sup> On December 7, 1977, the IWC changed its position to permit subsistence hunting by Alaskan natives of a limited number of Bowhead whales, but the controversy was not settled.<sup>204</sup> This declaration caused great concern among the Iñupiat.

In response to this marked increase in outsiders' involvement with the Iñupiat Bowhead subsistence harvest, the hunters formed the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC). At the time of its founding (1977), the AEWC represented Bowhead whale hunters in the villages of

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<sup>200</sup> Preston Michie, "Alaskan Natives: Eskimos and Bowhead Whales: An Inquiry into Cultural and Environmental Values That Clash in Courts of Law," *American Indian Law Review* 7, no. 1 (1979): p. 79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20068099>.

<sup>201</sup> Preston, "Alaskan Natives," 16.

<sup>202</sup> Preston, "Alaskan Natives," 22.

<sup>203</sup> Preston, "Alaskan Natives," 22.

<sup>204</sup> Preston, "Alaskan Natives," 28.

Gambell, Savoonga, Kivalina, Wales, Point Hope, Wainwright, Utiaqvik, Nuiqsut, and Kaktovik.

<sup>205</sup> The formation of this group marked “the first time in recorded Eskimo history that Alaska Eskimo whaling captains from nine remote whaling villages gathered in one place to discuss how the Eskimo community might respond to the International Whaling Commission's ban on subsistence hunting of the Bowhead whale.” and fight for their way of life.<sup>206</sup> The group felt an urgency to correct the misinformation surrounding their hunting methods. The group had three stated goals:

(1) Ensure that Bowhead whale hunting was conducted in a traditional, non-wasteful manner; (2) To communicate to the outside world the facts concerning Bowhead whale hunting, the way it was done, the centrality of the hunt to the cultural and nutritional needs of the Eskimo, the Eskimo's knowledge of the whale, and the reasons why any moratorium on such hunting would have disastrous impact upon the Eskimo community; and (3) To promote extensive scientific research on the Bowhead whale so as to insure its continued existence without unnecessary disruption to Eskimo society

The AWEC specified that Iñupiat hunters should only use traditional methods to hunt Bowhead whales, including harpooning, darting, and shoulder guns, while also adhering to specific hunting practices. If whalers violated the guidelines set by the AEWC, they might prohibit them from hunting and fine them.<sup>207</sup>

The formation of this group can be seen as an act of colonial resistance. The depleted whale populations were the result of 300 years of whaling by European nations. Until 1914 unrestricted commercial whaling significantly reduced the Bowhead whale population leaving only five small recognized populations.<sup>208</sup> The burden of overfishing should not be borne by

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<sup>205</sup> Preston, “Alaskan Natives,” 33.

<sup>206</sup> Preston, “Alaskan Natives,” 33.

<sup>207</sup> Preston, “Alaskan Natives,” 34.

<sup>208</sup> Thomas F Albert, “The Influence of Harry Brower, Sr., an Iñupiaq Eskimo ...,” accessed May 7, 2021, <http://www.north-slope.org/assets/images/uploads/Thepercent20Influencepercent20ofpercent20Harrypercent20Brower,percent20Sr..pdf>.

people whose culture and lifestyle are dependent on whaling and who did contribute to their endangerment. Now, although conservationists were not malicious, they were misguided in restricting Indigenous whaling efforts. The AEWEC felt that Bowhead population size estimates based primarily upon visual sightings by observers at the seaward edge of the shore fast ice off Utqiagvik were unreliable and were strongly biased downward.<sup>209</sup> The AEWEC and individual hunters believed that the census estimates of approximately 2000 Bowheads were much too low based on their own experience as hunters and their TEK.<sup>210</sup>

The AEWEC functions as a non-profit corporation, intending to protect Bowhead whales, their habitat, and Indigenous subsistence uses of Bowhead whales.<sup>211</sup> The AEWEC has immense influence regarding decisions about Bowhead whales on the local, regional, national and international interests. Since 1981, AEWEC has managed the Bowhead whale subsistence hunt locally through a cooperative agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at the U.S. Department of Commerce.<sup>212</sup> The AEWEC oversaw a census effort in 1981 but then turned over responsibility for subsequent census efforts to the North Slope Borough.<sup>213</sup>

The importance of TEK in this situation is illustrated in Harry Brower Jr.'s words: "We don't have our certifications and credentials like scientists, But even to prepare to hunt whales is to be intimately familiar with the seasonal cycles of the Arctic" showcasing western scientists and officials disregard for Indigenous people's relationship with their environment.<sup>214</sup> The

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<sup>209</sup> Albert, 2.

<sup>210</sup> Albert, 3.

<sup>211</sup> "The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan," 119.

<sup>212</sup> "The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan," 119.

<sup>213</sup> "The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan," 120.

<sup>214</sup> Albert, 5.

Iñupiat management of the Bowhead whale census indicates one more step toward reclaiming self-determination. They are not the problem when it comes to the treatment of animals, but rather the blame lies with a capitalist system that encouraged overfishing. Reclaiming their land through the establishment of the North Slope Borough and using that newly formed government apparatus to manage Bowhead whale science showcases Iñupiat colonial resistance.

## **IX. Changing Language and Education**

The Iñupiat fight to maintain their language as an act of colonial resistance. Through self-determination, the Iñupiat have been reclaiming their culture through language education. Loss of language is a consequence of colonization's effect on Iñupiat education. The number of fluent Iñupiaq speakers on the North Slope is declining rapidly.<sup>215</sup> Iñupiaq is considered an endangered language, and the North Slope Borough places immense importance on “expanding fluency” to maintain their cultural values.<sup>216</sup> The Iñupiat's relationship with their language is a relationship with their culture and, by extension, their land. The Iñupiat are continuing their self-determination by working to reclaim their language through a variety of programs. Not only is the maintenance of their language through education important, but the reclamation of Iñupiat names.

Language is important. In October of 2016, a slim majority of city voters decided to change the city's name from Barrow to Utqiagvik. “Utqiagvik” means “place.” Many view the change to the name as a reclamation of their culture.<sup>217</sup> Barrow was named after Sir John

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<sup>215</sup> “The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan, 20.

<sup>216</sup> “The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan, 20.

<sup>217</sup> Rebecca Hersher, “Barrow, Alaska, Changes Its Name Back To Its Original 'Utqiagvik',” NPR (NPR, December 1, 2016).

Barrow, a civil servant in the British Royal Navy who was a big supporter of Arctic exploration.

<sup>218</sup> Barrow never traveled to Alaska but Captain. Frederick William Beechey did and honored Barrow by naming the town after him.<sup>219</sup> The most prominent supporters of the name change were young people, while the older residents were generally opposed to the change.<sup>220</sup> Many older residents did not want the change as they grew up in Barrow and have always known that town is called Ukpiagvik, which means the place where the snowy owl rests. They felt that too many documents, signs, and titles would have to be changed, making a big adjustment.

Utqiagvik means a place to gather wild roots.<sup>221</sup> There is even more controversy when it comes to what the exact name should be. Some want the traditional name Ukpiagvik instead of Utqiagvik.<sup>222</sup> Some say that snowy owls were never hunted while others do, “Harcharek, the council member, researched old documents and believes Utqiagvik is correct for greater Barrow. That name gradually became the accepted one over Ukpiagvik, an elder said at a conference in 1978, transcripts of which are cited by both sides.”<sup>223</sup> City council member Qaiyaan Harcharek said, “Here are some folks that are afraid of change and change is oftentimes a daunting task and I believe it stems back to how well of a job that the missionaries and the Western folks in BIA schools, how good of a job they did at assimilating our people” further illustrating the division over the name.<sup>224</sup> Although the people are divided on precisely what their town should be called, the debate showcases reclamation of the Iñupiaq language.

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<sup>218</sup> Hersher.

<sup>219</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>220</sup> Hersher.

<sup>221</sup> Lisa Demer, “Utqiagvik? Barrow? Name Change Brings Tension, Division,” Anchorage Daily News (Anchorage Daily News, December 2, 2017), <https://www.adn.com/features/alaska-news/2016/12/17/utqiagvik-barrow-north-slope-name-change-brings-tension-division/>.

<sup>222</sup> Demer.

<sup>223</sup> Demer.

<sup>224</sup> Demer.

The changing nature of education at the North Slope Borough showcases Iñupiat adaptation and resistance to colonization. The development of a schooling system in the North Slope Borough is significant as children are no longer sent away to be schooled, which separated them from their culture.<sup>225</sup> The creation of Iḷisaḡvik college at NARL in the 1980s was the reclamation of a once colonial space into an institution now working to serve the North Slope. Throughout the years since its founding, the college has expanded its programs. In 1986, the North Slope Borough created the North Slope Higher Education Center, a cooperative effort between the North Slope Borough and the University of Alaska Fairbanks.<sup>226</sup> Arctic Sivunmun Iḷisaḡvik College merged with the Mayor’s Workforce Development Program in 1993, adding facilities and resources to support the growing number of vocational education opportunities available at the college.<sup>227</sup> Iḷisaḡvik achieved accreditation from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities in 2003. In 2006, it also became the first and only federally recognized tribal college in Alaska.<sup>228</sup>

Iḷisaḡvik College weaves Iñupiaq values into all of its teachings, working to maintain Iñupiat culture to create the next generation of Iñupiaq leaders. By helping to strengthen the language and traditions of the Iñupiat, Iḷisaḡvik fulfills its role as a distinctly Indigenous institution that aims to enhance the local culture while helping its students gain a foothold in the economy of the 21st century.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

<sup>226</sup> “About Iḷisaḡvik College,” Iisavik College, accessed May 6, 2021, <https://www.ilisagvik.edu/about-us/>.

<sup>227</sup> “About Iḷisaḡvik College.”

<sup>228</sup> “About Iḷisaḡvik College.”

<sup>229</sup> “About Iḷisaḡvik College.”

## **Chapter Three: Resistance to Colonization in Recent Times in Response to Climate Change**

The Iñupiat are on the frontlines of climate change. Climate change is an ongoing form of colonization and the latest change that the Iñupiat will have to adapt around. The Iñupiat lifestyle contributes virtually nothing to carbon emissions. The Iñupiat already feels climate change daily. It is a force that they will have to navigate with no prior history to draw on except their strength to adapt to unprecedented changes. They have to reduce their economic dependence on extractive industries, particularly oil production. The Iñupiat cannot fight the threats that climate change poses to their way of life on their own. They must collaborate with a federal government that was imposed upon them more than a century ago to make change. To understand what this collaboration may look like, I examine the Ocean Bureau of Energy Managements' work with the people of the North Slope. Examining this collaboration provides a framework for how scientists and the federal government can respectfully collaborate with the people of the North Slope to address climate change-related obstacles. Even with the possibility of successful collaborations, the question remains whether the effects of climate change will force the Iñupiat to abandon aspects of their culture.

### **I. Climate Change and the Borough today**

The Iñupiat have had, and continue to have, a tremendous capacity to persevere and adapt to change. Throughout the hardships imposed on the North Slope throughout the twentieth century, the Iñupiat have retained their hunting, fishing, gathering, and sharing skills, and most importantly, their social networks. A changing environment threatens these cultural traditions.

Utqiagvik is among the fastest-warming cities in the nation thanks to human-induced climate change.<sup>230</sup> In 2019, Utqiagvik's average temperature was 20.8 degrees; and four out of the five warmest years on record for Utqiagvik have occurred in the past five years, showcasing the warming climate in one of the coldest places on earth.<sup>231</sup> The exceptional rate of warming is primarily driven by a loss of nearby sea ice in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas, which is itself tied to climate change.<sup>232</sup> As the northernmost city in the country, Utiaqvik will feel the recession of ice the most profoundly and witness changing migratory patterns of their animals as a result. The Iñupiat recognize this and are working to create solutions for their future.

The North Slope Borough 2018-2039 Plan, which is cited earlier in this paper, addresses technological advancements, development, and climate change for the next 30 years.<sup>233</sup> The plan is kept up to date to address changing circumstances that the Borough may face, including climate change through the lens of its economy, infrastructure, and the NSB's relationship with the United States government.<sup>234</sup> Not all of these issues are connected to climate change as of now, but as time goes on, they will be exacerbated and undoubtedly shaped by a warming climate.

The physical effects of climate change are already being felt and seen by the Iñupiat people. The recent, dramatic retreat of Arctic sea ice is the most profound change. As the ice melts, the hunt for whales and caribou becomes more difficult because the waters become more

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<sup>230</sup> Matthew Cappucci, "America's Northernmost City Just Recorded Its First Record-Low Temperature in 13 Years," The Washington Post (WP Company, April 30, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2020/04/30/americas-northernmost-city-just-recorded-its-first-record-low-temperature-13-years/>.

<sup>231</sup> Cappucci America's Northernmost City.

<sup>232</sup> Cappucci America's Northernmost City.

<sup>233</sup> Comprehensive Plan, 79.

<sup>234</sup> Comprehensive Plan, 79.



treacherous and the ice patterns more unpredictable. A generation ago, the first “shorefast” ice would form in October, creating miles-wide platforms from land to sea that were stable from early November until mid-July.<sup>235</sup> Shorefast is sea ice that is “fastened” to the coastline, to the seafloor along shoals, or grounded icebergs.<sup>236</sup> These platforms allowed for ease of hunting. The shore fast ice firms up later in the fall, and it breaks up weeks earlier in the spring. As the climate changes, the animals also grow more scarce, affecting the Iñupiat hunting yields. Once the food is attained, climate change affects its storage. It causes traditional underground ice cellars to fail, in turn causing the meat within the cellars to rot.<sup>237</sup> The warming climate affects every step of the hunting process. Subsistence hunting makes up a considerable part of the Iñupiat culture, so as climate change erodes the hunting process, the cultures deteriorate along with it.

Due to Slope’s history with Oil interests, as detailed in the previous chapter, the North Slope economy is in part reliant on fossil fuels.<sup>238</sup> The NSB’s primary revenue source is from oil and gas leasing of their lands.<sup>239</sup> The Borough and Iñupiat people are put in a difficult position as fossil fuels, and specific aspects of development were forced on the community through colonization. Before European contact, the Iñupiat were self-sufficient, living in relative harmony with nature. The economic paradigm that plagues many tribes and Indigenous peoples throughout the United States is a reliance on the very extraction methods that are ultimately destroying their resources and home. This dependence is in direct contrast with their goals to mitigate the effects of climate change which pose an immense threat to their subsistence lifestyle,

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<sup>235</sup> Maddie Stone, “Why Climate Scientists Depend on Alaska's Indigenous Communities Now More Than Ever,” Gizmodo, October 11, 2017.

<https://gizmodo.com/why-climate-scientists-depend-on-alaska-s-Indigenous-co-1798335127>.

<sup>236</sup> Stone.

<sup>237</sup> “The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan,” 83.

<sup>238</sup> “The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan,” 177.

<sup>239</sup> “The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan,” 310.

food security, and safety.<sup>240</sup> Despite the difficulty of this predicament, The NSB is committed to ensuring that any leasing and development activity is done in an environmentally and culturally responsive way, with minimal impact on its residents' traditional and subsistence way of life.<sup>241</sup>

The NSB recognizes the difficulties that reliance on oil and natural gas causes and sees the lack of access to renewable resources as an issue their community faces<sup>242</sup>. In the comprehensive plan, the borough sets out many solutions and proposals to address their issues with climate change at the forefront of their minds. The community will need to partner with scientists, the state and federal government to adjust to their changing environment. The shift to renewable energy is an issue that the North Slope will have to navigate for years to come and will require collaboration on many fronts, and in some aspects, has already begun.

Scientists interested in climate change come to the North Slope to conduct research continuing the pattern of scientific research since the days of NARL. Despite decades of scientist and Iñupiat relationships at the NSB, the perfect formula of respect and balance between Western science and TEK has yet to be established. A history of colonization and disrespect still pervades the interactions between outsiders and Iñupiat. The relationships and time required to gain the true benefits of sharing traditional ecological knowledge can take years.<sup>243</sup> Many scientists are not willing to put in the time required to build a rapport with a village. This causes many scientists to come and go leaving the communities feeling like they do not get much out of the relationship and exchange. Scientists working with Indigenous knowledge, meanwhile, struggle with skepticism from the academic community.<sup>244</sup> This paradigm has to change to address

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<sup>240</sup> "The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan," 178.

<sup>241</sup> "The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan," 310.

<sup>242</sup> "The North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan," 52.

<sup>243</sup> Stone.

<sup>244</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 16..

climate change. More and more scientists recognize the valuable role that traditional ecological knowledge can and must play in learning about and protecting our environment.

An important example of the Iñupiat and a government agency working together on scientific projects is the collaboration between Iñupiat and the Bureau of Ocean Energy and Management. The Bureau of Ocean Energy and Management (BOEM) is a good example to observe an organization incorporating Indigenous learning systems into their decisions and respecting the input of Indigenous peoples. Section 20 of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) confirms BOEM the authority to develop and oversee research to inform environmental review, management, and policy decisions for the development of resources of the OCS.<sup>245</sup> The BOEM states that it treats “traditional knowledge and science as distinct and complementary knowledge systems.”<sup>246</sup> The BOEM believes expected outcomes of using both traditional and scientific knowledge include: improved decision-making through the more complete and inclusive application of the available information and increased involvement of people in resource management decisions that may affect their way of life.<sup>247</sup> BOEM gains access to traditional ecological knowledge through written letters and comments during community meetings, public hearings, and discussions with Indigenous hunters and fishers from the North Slope.

BOEM, through its government-to-government relationship with Alaska Native tribes and Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) Corporations, formally consults with tribal and ANCSA leaders to hear TEK.<sup>248</sup> An example of the BOEM incorporating traditional

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<sup>245</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 17.

<sup>246</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 20.

<sup>247</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 21.

<sup>248</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 25.

ecological knowledge into their decision-making process involved the issue of anthropogenic noise.<sup>249</sup> The Iñupiat people expressed concerns about anthropogenic noise from seismic exploration, vessel traffic, aircraft, and drilling that disturbs whales and other marine mammals, causing them to deflect their movement patterns farther out to sea. It is of great concern to the Indigenous people in the Arctic as it affects their food supply and can result in more expensive and dangerous subsistence hunting trips during which subsistence hunters may be exposed to greater risks. The BOEM incorporated the Iñupiat concerns about anthropogenic noise into their research and management of the OCS. Overall this process outlined by the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management showcases what a respectful collaboration should look like even if it may not always be followed in practice. Nonetheless, exchanges regarding climate change can be informed by this process, and for the purposes of this paper, illustrate a general attitude of respect that other institutions should maintain during collaborations.

The hope is that more and more governmental and non-governmental actors will work with North Slope to fight the encroaching dangers of climate change while prioritizing Indigenous voices. Successful collaborations are the only way for Iñupiat to adapt to the changes that are coming. The Iñupiat are the victims of climate change and do not contribute to its presence. This tragic fact does not change that major changes around the globe are inevitable. It remains to be seen how the Iñupiat will adapt and adjust to these changes.

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<sup>249</sup> Kendall, Traditional Knowledge, 26.

**Conclusion:**

The United States purchase of the Alaskan Territory from Tsarist Russia and the successive U.S. colonial policies would forever alter the lives of the Iñupiat people. The Iñupiat have persevered throughout the past 180 years to hold onto their land and culture. Through the initial phase of the U.S purchase of Alaska to Statehood, the Iñupiat people had to adapt to enormous change that was both unexpected and continuous. This initial phase led to statehood bringing the Iñupiat people into a nation that would continually disregard and disrespect their interests.

The laws and acts that followed Statehood forced the Iñupiat to confront their nature and fight back. All the while navigating relationships with scientists at NARL. This paper sought to explore the American colonization of Alaska and how the Iñupiat adapted and persevered while creating political organizations that serve their own ends. Some of the institutions that were established to ensure Iñupiat self-determination are groundbreaking in that they set up a framework for colonial resistance that is unique throughout the nation. The Iñupiat were able to maintain their culture through education initiatives that reshaped the colonial buildings and institutions imposed upon them. The exchange of TEK between scientists, agencies, and Iñupiat people provides a guide for what future collaborations surrounding climate change can look like.

The wasteful and unregulated extraction of resources around the world has precipitated human-made climate change. The Indigenous peoples worldwide are the least responsible for our warming planet, but we will be some of the first to feel the incoming natural disasters. Their adaptation and perseverance will continue to be put to the test as global warming continues. I hope that the Iñupiat people of the North Slope can retain their way of life as much as possible

and remain in their homeland. I am hopeful that this is a real possibility as forces worldwide are working to mitigate the worst effects of climate change.

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