

ALEUTS IN A CHANGING ALASKA:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY UNDER RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN RULE

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A Thesis

by

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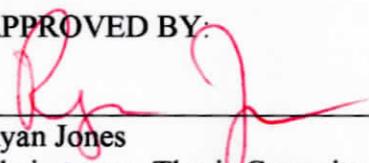
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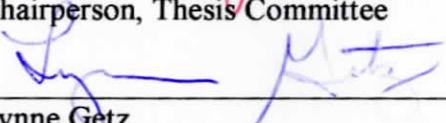
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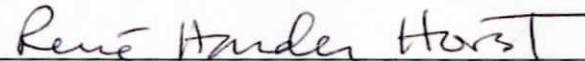
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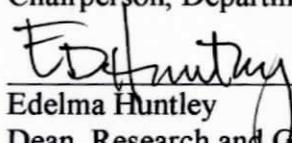
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ABSTRACT

ALEUTS IN A CHANGING ALASKA:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY UNDER RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN RULE

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Many general Alaskan histories tend to cast Aleuts as helpless victims to Russian and later American colonization of the Aleutians. After the initial violence in the mid-1700s, Aleuts have been stereotyped as lacking any power in society. However, Aleuts maintained varying amounts of power during both Russian and American rule. This study examines Aleut power during Russian rule (1741-1867) and American territorial rule, until the United States' entrance into World War II (1867-1941).

To begin, an introductory chapter places this thesis in the historiography and explains the questions this study attempts to answer. Before delving into Russian and American rule, this study examines Russian and American expansion prior to reaching Alaska. The events and experiences that occurred in Siberia and on the American frontiers shaped how hunters, traders, and clergy interacted with Aleuts. The United States and Russia developed two different methods of expansion, but many parallels are evident.

Chapters three and five examine Aleuts during the Russian and American periods. In the initial decades of contact, power fluctuated between Russians and Aleuts. Sometimes Aleuts used their power to violently attack Russians. In other situations, Aleuts willingly

traded for European goods. By 1800, Russians held a dominant position in society, but through the Russian Orthodox Church Aleuts continued to have a large amount of power.

To conclude, Aleuts were not helpless victims to European and American expansion. They maintained a varying amount of power in society. Aleut power is most effectively displayed through their religious decisions and actions. Aleuts were able to keep their power in similar ways during both Russian and American rule due to the institutions brought to the Aleutians.

DEDICATION

To my parents

Don and Margaret Kaserman

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals assisted me in writing this thesis. The graduate history program at Appalachian State molded me into the historian I am today. In particular, Dr. Ryan Jones made this thesis possible. His expertise on the Alaskan history and Russian history pushed me to strive to answer difficult questions. Dr. René Horst helped me to realize the importance of identity in indigenous studies. Dr. Lynne Getz introduced me to the theory of a middle ground and more importantly how to develop a graduate level research paper. I have grown so much due to all the professors that encouraged me to pursue my academic goals. I also want to thank my fellow graduate students for their continued support.

I have to thank the University Writing Center for the many hours consultants spent helping me refine my thesis. In particular I want to thank Steve Fogleman for proofreading every draft of every chapter of this thesis. By the end of this project, he's learned way too much about Alaskan history than any English major needs to know, but his insights from an outside perspective added immensely to the clarity of this work.

Most of all, I want to thank my parents for making me the person that I am today. I want to thank my dad for giving me the opportunities to love history. Whether it was going to the Tower of London or watching *The Great Escape*, I loved all the experiences we had as a family which sparked my curiosity of history. I want to thank my mom for being my best friend and always believing in me. Thank you for always being there to talk to and never doubting that I would finish this thesis.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Historiography

On this day the school here was opened. At present it serves twenty-two students. It was opened with the following ceremony. Having celebrated a suitable prayer service for the health of his Majesty the Emperor, with a cannon salute, I celebrated a prayer service for before the beginning of studies, including a proclamation of the "Many Years" for: (1) His Majesty the Emperor, (2) The Holy Synod and Mikhail, Bishop of Irkutsk, Nerchinsk, and Yakutst, (3) all those who desire to teach and learn, as well as all who assist this good intention. A cannon salute was fired for each. Afterwards the students, who had taken confession and had received Holy Communion on this day, kiss the cross two-by-two, and entered the school to the ringing of bells.¹

The preceding excerpt by Priest Ioann Veniaminov depicts the events of March 13, 1825, the opening day of the Orthodox school in Unalaska. This school educated the population of Unalaska for generations. What began as a Russian sponsored school remained for decades as an educational institution under American rule. Opening day was a time of celebration. The school had ties to the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Empire, but the school existed to educate the people of Unalaska: Russian and indigenous children together in the same classroom.

This thesis will examine more than just Russian Orthodox schools. It will study how the Aleuts, the indigenous group residing on the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, changed aspects

¹ Saint Metropolitan of Moscow Innokentii, *Journals of the Priest Ioann Veniaminov in Alaska, 1823-1836*, (Fairbanks, Alaska: University of Alaska Press, 1993), 25-26.

of their lifestyle to fit with a changing world. Although Alaska's colonizers held much of the power in society, the Aleuts maintained varying amounts of control in different social institutions during both Russian and American rule. Beginning in the 1740s, Aleuts struggled to find a balance of power with the incoming Russian population. Initially violently resistant to incoming Russians, Aleuts conceded to working in Russian operated industries including sea otter hunting. Through religion, Aleuts maintained more control over changes to spirituality and traditional customs. During the American period, starting in 1867, Aleuts again maintained a certain amount of control over certain changes to their lifestyle. In trade, Aleuts purchased new available technologies. In industry, Aleuts shifted with the rest of Alaskan society to more profitable industries such as salmon fishing and canning. The most effective demonstration of Aleut power occurred in religion, when Aleuts refused to convert to Methodism. Instead of adopting Methodism, which attempted to totally remove traditional culture, the Aleuts stayed with the Orthodox Church. Overall, this thesis will demonstrate that the Aleuts were active participants in changes to Alaskan society under both Russian and American rule.

These ideas of cultural change among the Aleuts are related to identity, as discussed in anthropologist Kay Warren's article "Transforming Memories and Histories." Here, Warren utilizes evidence from the Mayan culture to analyze academic points of view on ethnic identity. For Warren, indigenous culture never remained static and even the most traditional indigenous rituals are continually reinvented. Following in the same line of thought, the conquest of the new world "was not a singular event that reduced heterogeneous and stratified indigenous populations into a homogenous subservient underclass. Rather, it is

best seen as a complex and uneven process.”² The indigenous people of North and South America do not and did not have only one identity. Indigenous groups can have several identities including an ethnic identity, a national identity, and any number of identities that depended on what community a group belongs to.³ In the situation of the Aleuts, they have an ethnic identity that has continually evolved. During the Russian period, Aleuts created a national identity to fit with Russian colonial rule. After 1867, the Aleuts began to form a national identity under American rule. Even though aspects of Aleut culture have dramatically changed over time, these changes have been gradual modifications to identities.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. This first chapter serves as an introduction to the argument and recounts the historiography of works concerning the Aleuts. The second chapter analyzes the formation of Russian imperial policies of conquest including the treatment of indigenous groups. For many, including Russian historian James Forsyth, Russia’s expansion into Alaska served as a continuation of Russia’s imperial conquest of Siberia. The possibility of wealth from furs expedited Russia’s Siberian expansion. As furs became depleted, *promyshlenniki*, Russian and Cossack hunters, would move to new hunting grounds farther and farther east. These expansions led to more interaction with indigenous groups. Along with *promyshlenniki*, the Russian Orthodox Church developed an understanding of how to interact with natives. While *promyshlenniki* focused on profits, the church focused on conversions; each established patterns of action that would continue in Alaska. Chapter three examines interactions between Aleuts and Russians. During this period, Aleuts both resisted and later conformed to newly imposed Russian rule. For twenty

² Kay B. Warren, "Transforming Memories and Histories: The Meaning of Ethnic Resurgence for Mayan Indians," in *Americas: New Interpretive Essays*, ed. Alfred C. Stepan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 190-191.

³ *Ibid*, 190-204.

years, the Aleuts violently resisted advancing *promyshlenniki*. Through religion, Aleuts maintained more control over changes to their spirituality and traditional customs than in industry or trade.

The second half of this thesis parallels the Russian chapters, but focuses on the situation since the American purchase of Alaska. Chapter four examines the origins of American policies and actions towards Native Americans prior to the United States' purchase of Alaska in 1867. Just as events in Siberia shaped Russia's policies towards natives, American policies were formed due to interactions with Native Americans in the contiguous United States. This American path of expansion led to a system of various methods to deal with native Alaskans. The American government, religious missions, and private companies all played a role in the expansion of the United States into Aleut territory. Continuing on, chapter five will examine the Aleuts' uses of power in response to the growing amount of American industry and culture in Alaska. As during Russian rule, Aleuts engaged in growing industries. Through religion, Aleuts demonstrated their power in society by refusing to convert to Methodism, a Protestant faith that aimed to "civilize" the Aleuts by removing all vestiges of the indigenous culture. Instead of converting to Methodism, the Aleuts continued to pray with the orthodox faith. Chapter six will sum up conclusions made in this thesis including a comparison of uses of power by Aleuts during both periods.

This study focuses on the Aleuts' interactions with their colonizers until 1941, with the United States' entry into World War II. This work covers a large expanse of time without delving into the complications of the war. In June of 1942, Japan attacked the Island of Unalaska in an effort to distract the US military. The Japanese mission at Unalaska failed, but this action placed the Aleuts in the middle of the Pacific battlefield of World War II.

Aleuts had to relocate to towns and villages on the mainland. After the war, the situation in Alaska began to shift in a new direction. In the 1940s, congress passed Alaskan Civil Rights legislation. Lawsuits concerning land rights and self-government blossomed during this time.⁴ Starting in the 1940s, a new era of indigenous Alaskan history began that lies beyond the scope of this study.

Also, the chronological scope of this thesis needs to be addressed. When Russians began to explore the Aleutians, the United States of America did not exist. North America was still a combination of British, French, and Spanish colonies. The Aleuts were not a static community before the introduction of European and American rule and the Aleuts would not stay unchanged once Russians and Americans took over their territory. Parallels developed between the Russian and American periods, but they were not identical situations. By the time the United States bought Alaska in 1867, the Aleuts had lived under and adjusted to Russian rule for over one hundred years. Instead of dealing with a pre-contact society, Americans inherited an Alaska filled with natives accustomed to colonial rule. The situations under the colonial powers were different, but are still worth studying.

Historiography:

Today, both anthropologists and historians study the Aleuts, each with a slightly different outlook. Anthropologists have focused more on the traditional culture of a group. Ethnographies mention historical events and how these led to cultural changes, but these historical events are not analyzed in an in-depth manner. Anthropologists report historical events, but tend not to analyze which events or actions held more importance than others.

⁴ Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 257-266.

Even though some anthropologic works have shortcomings, the information given on indigenous cultures is indispensable. Historians have traditionally ignored indigenous history. Only in recent decades have subaltern studies become a major area of focus. Over the years, historians' and anthropologists' areas of study have overlapped. Some anthropologists write ethnohistories which combine standard ethnographies with historical analysis, while some historians now write cultural histories which combine history with an examination of a group's changing ways of life. This thesis aims to be a cultural history of the Aleuts, and it will add to the growing work of today's anthropologists and historians that aim to combine historical analysis with an anthropological insight.

Anthropology is the only academic field that has focused solely on the Aleuts. The most important work on the Aleuts is William Laughlin's *Aleuts: Survivors of the Bering Land Bridge*. Laughlin's work serves as one of the landmark books in the field of Aleut anthropology. It precisely describes Aleuts' ways of life and how Aleuts differ from other indigenous groups. More importantly, Laughlin's work combines a modern anthropological approach with research during the period studied in this thesis. Laughlin first visited the Aleutians in the 1930s and continued to return to the region for decades. This thesis utilizes information on Aleut traditional culture found in Laughlin's work.

The works of Lydia Black are some of the most respected on the topic of Alaskan natives. Although an anthropologist by training, Black wrote from both an anthropological and an historical perspective. Two of her most pertinent works are *The History and Ethnohistory of the Aleutians East Borough* and *Atka: an Ethnohistory of the Western Aleutians*. In the first work Black analyzes the history of each Aleut village during both the Russian and American periods. The work points to the variety of situations found on

different islands. Although not as neatly divided as in Black's work on the East Borough, she tackles events concerning the Western Aleutians in *Atka: an Ethnohistory of the Western Aleutians*. With these two works, Black gives a detailed account of Aleut history, something rarely found so completely in other works. However, Black recounts events without fully explaining why they occurred or detailing their historical significance. For example, in *The History and Ethnohistory of the Aleutians East Borough*, Black gives readers a detailed account of the history of the community at Sand Point. To conclude her chapter, Black states that although Sand Point was confronted by many economic hardships, Sand Point continues to exist when other communities have failed.⁵ Black states a valid point, but she does not fully historically explain why Sand Point continued to keep a population and function as a community when other communities had failed. Black lists the facts without finding an underlying meaning; her conclusions seem superficial and need further analysis. This thesis does not focus solely on the community of Sand Point, but it will attempt to address some unanswered questions left by Black. In Sand Point and other Aleut communities, the Russian Orthodox Church is always present. Black acknowledges the church's presence but never attempts to answer why the residents of the Aleutian Islands have such a strong connection to Orthodoxy. This thesis will attempt to answer that question.

However, Lydia Black's attempt at a history of Alaska is not as successful as her anthropologic works. In the introduction of *Russians in America: 1741-1867* Black states her goal of writing a general Alaskan history book that looks beyond the actions of Alaska's famous men and attempts to explain the complex situation with all its major players including the indigenous groups of Alaska. However, Black fails to deliver what her

⁵ Lydia A. Black, Richard Pierce, Katherine L. Arndt, and Sarah McGowan, *The History and Ethnohistory of the Aleutians East Borough*, Alaska History (Kingston, Ont.: Fairbanks, Alaska, 1999), 162.

introduction promised; *Russians in Alaska* added very little to the field. Black wrote a general history that did mention the Aleuts, but focused mainly on famous Russians that have already been discussed by dozens of other academics.

Priest Ioann Veniaminov was the first person to write a substantial amount on the Aleuts; Veniaminov spent a decade serving as the priest for the Aleutians. His journals, from 1823 to 1836, relate firsthand accounts of the situations at Unalaska and at other villages on the Aleutians. The church required all missionaries of the Russian Orthodox Church to keep a journal of activities. More importantly (and not required by the church) was Veniaminov's *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District*. This detailed work gives anthropological and geographical information on the Aleutians and its people during the Russian period.⁶ The priest's natural curiosity and yearning to understand the indigenous people of Alaska contributed to his later administration of the Orthodox Church and recent rise to sainthood. Most importantly, in *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District*, Veniaminov discussed the indigenous perspective. Most primary sources only discussed how Russians felt and lacked an indigenous point of view. Although Veniaminov served the Russian Orthodox Church, he described more than the Orthodox perspective with his accounts of indigenous attitudes. Many historians and anthropologists have used Veniaminov's works as windows to early nineteenth century Aleut society. However, only a few other academics have used Veniaminov's writing in works solely pertaining to the Aleuts.

Works pertaining to industry and trade are very important to this thesis. Stephen Haycox's *Alaska: An American Colony* is one of the most useful for this study. Haycox

⁶ Saint Metropolitan of Moscow Innokentii, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District Uniform Title: Zapiski Ob Ostrovakh Otdiela* (Ontario, Canada: Limestone Free Press, 1984).

argues that for much of Alaska's history, individuals moved to Alaska for the possibility of wealth. This fiscal motivation played a large role in the Aleutians. Russians expanded east for sea otter pelts. Americans and Scandinavians relocated to the Bering Sea for fishing. This thesis focuses on these immigrants because they dramatically changed Alaskan society. Also, even though Haycox's work is entitled *Alaska: American Colony*, a large portion of the work examines Russian America, Alaska under Russian rule. Haycox states that, in order to understand the American history of Alaska, one has to have an understanding of its Russian history. This thesis purposefully covers both periods of time because of this reason. Many complex situations developed due to this complicated history.

Works focusing on Russian trade and industry assisted this thesis's understanding of the complex relationship between Russian hunters and traders and indigenous Alaskans. James R. Gibson's works including "Russian Dependence on the Natives of Alaska" and *Imperial Russia in Frontier America* analyze the major role indigenous groups played in the existence of Russian America. Without indigenous labor, the colony would never have reached the level of a permanent establishment. The works of Andrei Grinev are also utilized in this thesis. Grinev points to the intricacies of native and Russians relations, especially with his articles on hostage taking and rogue Aleuts. However, both Gibson and Grinev left the social and cultural effects of Russian colonization to others to study. This thesis combines the theories of Gibson and Grinev with an analysis of changing Aleut culture.

Although Sergei Kan's *Memory Eternal* focuses on the Tlingits of Southeastern Alaska, Kan's examination of Tlingit reactions to Russian and American industries and trade parallel many of the Aleuts' responses to imperial conquest. In his introduction to *Memory Eternal*, Kan states his goal of explaining how the Russian Orthodox Church survived so

long after the sale of Alaska. He discovers that the legacy of the Orthodox Church related back to the Russian period. During the early nineteenth century, Tlingits converted to Russian Orthodoxy. While the church believed this conversion solely demonstrated a newly found belief in God, the Tlingits converted for a variety of reasons. Tlingits may have found a new understanding God, but through Orthodoxy they found a method of change that updated their religion, but did not eradicate all vestiges of Tlingit ways of life.⁷ *Memory Eternal* is important not only to Tlingit history, but also to broaden Aleut history. Kan recognized the voice that Alaskan natives held in society, a point this thesis will try to reinforce.

The indigenous Alaskans' switch from Shamanism to Orthodoxy is discussed by many academics. One of the most notable works by academics in this field is S. A. Mousalimas's *Transition from Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy*, where he argues that the Russian Orthodox Church was successful due to its use of syncretism, the purposeful blending of Orthodoxy with Shamanism. Others argue that the actions of the Russian Orthodox Church were as syncretistic as Mousalimas argued. In *Memory Eternal*, Kan states his belief that the Russian Orthodox Church did not believe in preaching syncretism, but rather permitted temporary allowances for traditional beliefs.⁸ Even though the actions of the church might have resembled syncretism, the church never meant to permanently include indigenous ways into church traditions. One of the newest theories on the longevity of the Russian Orthodox Church comes from the work of Erik Young. In his Master's thesis,

⁷ Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), Xix-xiv.

⁸ *Ibid*, 548-549.

Young argues that the history of the Russian Orthodox Church allowed for more flexibility in faith. The Russian Orthodox Church broke from the Catholic Church in the ninth century, which meant many of the ideological and philosophical developments of the Orthodox Church stopped with the break. Therefore, for the Orthodox Church, the language in which scripture was preached was irrelevant as long as the message was spread. Young also argues that this flexibility allowed Orthodox clergy to be more accepting of other cultures.⁹ In order to fully analyze the situation of the Aleuts, there needs to be understanding of the Russian Orthodox Church's methodologies. This thesis aims to analyze if the Russian Orthodox Church leaned towards a multicultural approach due to church ideologies or due to Aleut resistance.

⁹ Erik C. Young, "Missionary Schools and the Enlightenment of the Alaskan Natives: A Theological and Sociological Survey of Russian Orthodox and Protestant Missionary Efforts among the Natives of the Aleutian Islands and Southeastern Alaska" (Thesis/dissertation (deg); Manuscript (mss), George Fox University, 2007), 58-63.

Chapter Two: Russian Policies of Conquest Prior to Alaska

Beginning in the 1740s, Russia began to play a role in the New World by exploring Russian America, Alaska's name under Russian rule. However, Russian America did not serve as the foundations of Russian colonization. In Russian America, Russians utilized methods of trade relations and expansion first developed in Siberia. For many academics, including James Forsyth, Russian America served as an extension of Russian eastern expansion which began in the late fifteenth century when Muscovy, the Principality of Moscow encroached on surrounding lands.¹ Although Russian America differed from Siberia in many ways, Russian expanders of the empires utilized the similarities between the two regions in order to better understand their role in the expanding empire. Government officials, Russian clergy, and *promyshlenniki* (Russian hunters and traders) all interacted with Siberian indigenous communities prior to arriving in Russian America. These interactions with Siberian natives molded the attitudes and actions of Russians. When Aleuts interacted with Russians, whether clergy or *promyshlenniki*, prior relations in Siberia had already altered how Russians acted towards Aleuts. Prior to Russian America, Russians already formed ideologies and methods of expansion. This chapter examines how Siberian expansion shaped Russia's presence in the Aleutians.

Much of the discussion in this chapter focuses on Russian America's similarities to Siberia, but some obvious differences occurred. Many of the differences relate to the location of the two regions. Siberia sits on the same landmass as the rest of Russia whereas Russian America was located across the Pacific Ocean. Many Russians and Cossacks willingly moved to Siberia, but few volunteered to relocate to Russian America. Compared to

¹ James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990* (New York, 1992), Xvi-1.

portions of Siberia, the weather of the Aleutian Islands seemed extremely severe and the rough Bering Sea looked treacherous. Also, in sections of Siberia, farmers harvested crops on the fertile land, in contrast, Alaska suffered from a shorter growing season and less arable lands, especially on the Aleutians. These differences led to large changes in population. As stated by James R. Gibson, in 1719 Siberia, sixty percent of male residents worked as farmers. In 1833 Russian America, a comparable stage of development, ninety percent of Russian men were *promyshlenniki*. In Siberia, a large permanent Russian population affected the lives of indigenous groups. *Promyshlenniki* did not have to rely on Siberian natives to the extreme degree as in the Aleutians. Also, with a larger Russian population, the Russian Orthodox Church became a more permanent presence in Siberia without the conversion of the indigenous population.² The mix of individuals in Siberia differed from those of Russian America. Even though *promyshlenniki* and orthodox clergy had prior relations with Siberian natives, Russians had to adjust their methods in Russian America to work with a much smaller Russian society. One other major difference between Russian America and Siberia involved the military. In Siberia, Cossacks armies battled indigenous resistance. Due to distance, military forces never battled Alaskan natives.³ These differences made Russian American history unique when compared to Siberia. Also, even though Russians utilized some of their previous experiences in Siberia, some situations in Russian America called for new methods.

Just as the Aleuts responded to incoming Russian *promyshlenniki* and missionaries, the indigenous groups of Siberia also changed aspects of their lifestyle as a result of

² James R. Gibson, "Russian Expansion in Siberia and America," *Geographical Review* 70, no. 2 (1980), 128-136.

³ Forsyth, 32-34.

incoming Russian populations. As defined by the Soviet Union in the 1920s, twenty-six different native peoples lived in various regions of Siberia. Some indigenous groups, such as the Ket, lived in relative isolation, while other groups such as the Chukchi were in almost constant conflict with Russia.⁴ These different groups changed how they lived in response to the growing Russian influence in Siberia. Later, Russian settlers remembered these Siberian responses and used this experience to more effectively control Russian America. For example, when Russians faced resistance from Aleuts, they used past experiences and knowledge from Siberia to subdue Aleut resistance and extract labor and pelts. However, as previously discussed, differences in population eventually resulted in different relations between Russians and the indigenous groups of Siberia and Russian America. Unlike in Russian America, a large Russian population in the hundreds of thousands eventually moved to Siberia. In Russian America, the Russian population never maintained levels of more than a few hundred. However, during Siberia's and Russian America's initial periods of Russian expansion, both regions experienced similar encounters.

Governmental Policies of Expansion:

In a time when other European powers were conquering the Western Hemisphere, Russia conquered a large section of the Eastern Hemisphere. To be exact, Russia conquered Siberia, an area stretching over 2,800 miles, roughly the width of the United States.⁵ The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were eras of expansionism for the great European powers. In North America, the French and English began establishing settlements and made trade connections. In Central and South America, the Spanish and Portuguese expanded their

⁴ Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 3.

⁵ Forsyth, 7.

territory and exploited indigenous labor. The majority of European conquests in the New World focused on gaining profits. The Spanish and Portuguese benefited from gold and silver mines and the extremely profitable sugar plantation system. The British utilized the New World for new trading connections, and the French accrued wealth from the fur trade.⁶ Russia also wanted to participate in this age of imperial conquest. This desire to participate in Europe's imperial expansion played a role in Russia's decision for expansion, but other factors also contributed.

During this age of discovery, Russia focused on expanding eastward. Siberia lacked gold and silver or a climate suitable for sugar cane, but similar to French lands, fur bearing animals lived in Siberia. (Actually, Russians discovered gold in Siberia in 1868, but this was well after the start of Russian expansion into the region.⁷) The sable, a rather small animal, has a dark and luxurious pelt and was extremely valuable. The exact value of furs would fluctuate with the year, the quality of the pelt, and location of the trade. In 1595, the Russian state sent the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II, a gift of a variety of furs. Included in the gift were 40,360 sable pelts at a value of 28,907 rubles.⁸ British and French traders in North America served as Russia's only fur competitors, but Russians had the upper hand. Unlike the French, Russians did not have to cross an ocean to reach fur grounds. This overland hunting system led to better communication between *promyshlenniki* and the Russian government, which made the fur trade more efficient and profitable. As *promyshlenniki*

⁶ John E. Kicza, *Resilient Cultures: America's Native Peoples Confront European Colonization, 1500-1800* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003), 45-53, 110-115, 157-158.

⁷ Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990*, 216.

⁸ Raymond Henry Fisher, *The Russian Fur Trade, 1550-1700*, University of California Publications in History; (Berkeley: Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1943), 109-110.

traveled farther east, however, communications became increasingly difficult.⁹ Even though the Russian Empire only reached the New World in the eighteenth century, it had already explored and profited from Siberia.

The Russian empire expanded by slowly conquering areas previously held by the Mongols. Even though the Russian government endorsed the spread of Russian territory, the government had to collaborate with noble families in order to expand the empire. The Russian state did not have the finances or military to control the indigenous groups of Siberia. In order to manage this situation, the government would bequeath land to certain noble families, and then the noble families would have to undergo the process of subduing the indigenous people already residing on the land.¹⁰ For example, on April 4, 1558, Ivan the Terrible wrote the following letter to the Stroganovs:

I, the Tsar and Grand Prince Ivan Vasilevich of all of Russia, have been asked to grant to Grigorii Anikievich Stroganov that for which he petitioned, namely: the uninhabited lands, black forests, wild rivers and lakes and uninhabited islands and marshlands in our patrimony which extend some 88 versts, along the right bank of the Kama from the mouth of the Lyvaia, and along the left bank of the Kama to the Chusovaia River. These uninhabited lands extend for 146 versts. To the present time no one has worked this land nor established homesteads here. To date no tax revenue has been granted to

⁹ Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990*, 40-41.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 30.

anyone, nor has it been entered in the census books, nor in the books of purchase, nor in legal records.¹¹

Here, Ivan the Terrible portrayed the Kama Region as empty and waiting for Russian hands to plow these fertile lands when in reality many indigenous people lived under the control of Khan Kuchum. Russians believed that it their right to take the lands of Siberia. They also considered the indigenous populations of Siberia unworthy of effectively cultivating the land. This prejudice against indigenous groups would continue in Russian America.

In order to gain control of the Kama, the Stroganovs had to defeat Kuchum, the leader of the Kama. The Stroganovs did not have an army to fight Kuchum, but they hired one. In 1581, Yermak, a Cossack mercenary, organized a Cossack army consisting of over eight hundred fighters. By 1582, Yermak's army controlled the Kama region by defeating Kuchum. With this victory, the Russian empire expanded into the Kama region and other areas of Siberia by allotting land to noble families that would then become responsible for subduing the indigenous groups already living on the land.¹² The Russian government utilized this method of expansion and succeeded in enlarging Russia's area of influence. Although Cossack armies expanded Russia's territory in Siberia, this method of expansion was not utilized in Russian America, because the cost of bringing a military force there outweighed the profits made from forceful expansion. Russian hunters and traders could not rely on a military force to end indigenous resistance. Russian exploitation of the Aleuts could have started decades earlier if a military force took control of the Aleutians. Alas, no Russian

¹¹ Tsar Ivan Vasilevich to Grigorii Stroganov, April 4, 1558, in *Russia's conquest of Siberia: To Siberia and Russian America 1558-1700*, ed. Basil Dmytryshyn (Portland, Oregon: Western Imprints, 1985), 3.

¹² Forsyth, 32-34.

American military existed and fur traders had to deal with indigenous disobedience on their own.



Figure 1 The Initial Expansion of Muscovy¹³

Yermak's victory in the Kama region opened Siberia to Russian settlement and exploitation. Before soldiers battled for ownership of the land, *promyshlenniki*, Russian and Cossack hunters, had already established trading connections with indigenous Siberians. The *Promyshlenniki* were profit-seeking men who wanted to obtain as many pelts as possible. If one area became depleted of sables and other fur bearing animals, *promyshlenniki* would move to new hunting grounds. This exploration for the best hunting areas hastened Russia's

¹³ Image Taken from Wayne Dowler, "The Rise of Moscow," *Russian Heritage: Land, People, and Culture*, 1997, <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/citd/RussianHeritage/2.RM/RM.6.html> February 1, 2009, 1.

push into Siberia. By the early 1600s, Russian settlements began to form in Western Siberia. By 1700, a century later, traders had already settled in almost all portions of Siberia.¹⁴ With this addition of *promyshlenniki* and other settlers, Russian influences entered parts of Siberia before Russia established formal rule. This push by *promyshlenniki* eventually led to the Pacific and the Aleutian Islands.



Figure 2: Map on Russian Expansion: 1300-1795¹⁵

When an area was claimed for Russia, the natives living in that had region to pay the *iasak* to the Russian State. The *iasak* was a tribute that indigenous groups paid to the local

¹⁴ Slezkine, 29-31.

¹⁵ Image taken from Adam Harrison, Brad Dinan, and Alex Simon "Map Gallery of Russia," April 30 2008. <http://maps.unomaha.edu/peterson/funda/MapLinks/Russia.htm>. February 1 2009, 1.

Russian tax collector. In return for the *iasak*, the indigenous groups of Siberia would receive protection from other invaders. This *iasak* was paid in fur pelts, so that the value varied with the market price of the fur. For the Russian government, the *iasak* became a large source of revenue. In 1589, the state accumulated 15,000 rubles from furs. By 1680, Russia made 125,000 rubles annually from furs. For the empire, *iasak* financed much of the government's spending.¹⁶ For the Russian government, indigenous groups represented a source of income. Russians viewed Siberian natives as inferior but also as a source of valuable furs. Later, Russians expanded this view of natives as a source of income to the Aleuts.

Although the size of the land conquered by Russia was impressive, Russia's administration of Siberia was not. Until 1861, serfdom remained in effect in Russia, meaning that a large portion of the population was not free to move as desired. Actually, to promote population growth, the government sent exiles to Siberia. Russia's small presence in Siberia allowed for corruption by local officials and *promyshlenniki*. Russian policy dictated that *promyshlenniki* were only to hunt and trade for the Russian government. However, many *promyshlenniki* lived in relative isolation from any Russian government official and could do as they pleased. Also, Russian law required *iasak* collectors to turn over all tribute to the state, but many had little oversight. A tax collector could confiscate *iasak* for his own personal use. The government's lack of coordination increased opportunities for corruption. In 1721 the government executed Prince Gagarin, the governor of Siberia. In 1722, the government hanged the Voevoda of Irkutsk, followed by scores of minor officials.¹⁷ The Russian government could not effectively oversee hunting operations in Siberia. When the

¹⁶ Ibid, 20-24.

¹⁷ Ibid, 61.

promyshlenniki and tax collectors abused indigenous communities, the government had little power to stop it. Siberia's disorganized governmental leadership only added to the problem. In Russian America, government officials were not executed, but due to the distance from Russia and a lack of population, corruption continued. In Russian America and in Siberia, the government could not stop *promyshlenniki* or government officials from abusing the system.

Until the nineteenth century, Russian administration struggled due to constant conflict. In the seventeenth century, the Yakuts of central Siberia were very suspicious of Russian settlers hunting on their lands. In 1684, the Yakuts led a full revolt against the Russians, but were defeated due to Russia's superiority in weaponry. The Tungus, also of Central Siberia, opposed Russians not with violence, but by refusing to accept Russians into society; they strongly enforced bans on miscegenation. The indigenous groups of Northeastern Siberia were even more resistant. The Chukchis continually rebelled. By 1700, the region was proclaimed as part of Russia, but fighting ensued. In the 1740s, all three major tribes of the Northeast: the Chuckchi, Yakagir and Kolyma united against the Russians. In 1742, Empress Elizabeth ordered a war against the Chukchis which lasted until 1764.¹⁸ The Russian government struggled to extend its political control over Siberia. The government constantly called up Cossack armies to subdue indigenous resistance. This constant conflict affected policies in Russian America. First, the Russian government grew accustomed to indigenous resistance and became experienced at squashing rebellions. Secondly, the government recognized the financial price of fighting indigenous resistance. Armies were expensive to maintain, and in Siberia mercenary forces were in constant use. Russia could

¹⁸ Forsyth, 57-64, 141-150.

not afford to fight Aleuts for decades; it would bankrupt the empire. Russia needed to use a different method in Russian America, one that would not lead to constant resistance.

Promyshlenniki: Expanders of the Empire:

Before Cossack mercenary groups battled for control of Siberia, *promyshlenniki* already began to explore and profit from the resources found in the Siberian wilderness. This system of exploitation and trade began with Russian interactions with indigenous Siberians and would continue later with indigenous Alaskans. Although this system was not formalized, a consistent pattern evolved concerning how to extract pelts with the least effort and maximum profit. This pattern consisted of negotiation and domination of indigenous groups. Sometimes *promyshlenniki* would trade Russian finished goods for sable and fox furs. In other situations, *promyshlenniki* would practice *amanaty*, the practice where they would take hostages until natives produced the required number of pelts. Russians have a long history of using *amanaty*. The longevity of this method of domination is shown in the word's origin: *amanaty* is a Tatar term, but is Arabic in origin.¹⁹ *Amanaty* had been practiced for hundreds of years before *promyshlenniki* used it to dominate Siberian natives, and *promyshlenniki* continued this domination in the Aleutian Islands.

Throughout expansion, *promyshlenniki* developed relations with many different Siberian indigenous communities. As found later in Russian America, a variety of relationships developed with individual *promyshlenniki* and specific indigenous communities. In the following excerpt a Yukagir recounted what happened when a small Cossack hunting party came into contact with members of their village.

¹⁹ Ibid, 41.

Our friends started telling us something, but we did not understand anything and pointed to our ears.

They showed us something curved and shiny. We took it, looked at it, something was cut out of the middle. They put something in there, then brought some fire. Then they put that thing to our mouths. Then everyone took that thing and started sucking on it. We sat and talked by gestures. They told us:

“Next summer come back again. We will bring you various things.”

Then we got up and started to leave. Our friends gave us some axes and knives and, in addition to that, gave us all kinds of clothes.²⁰

In the previous excerpt, Russians and Yukagirs traded and interacted on friendly terms. The two groups willingly sat together and shared a tobacco pipe. They seemed to be on a level playing field. Neither the Cossacks nor Yukagirs had been forced into the situation. This excerpt resembles a middle ground like the one described by Richard White in the *pay d'en haut*. In a middle ground, neither the colonizers nor the natives held a dominant position over the other.²¹ In certain situations, as in the one described above, *promyshlenniki* and Siberian natives would willingly trade with the other in order to attain desired goods. As documented here in Siberia, middle grounds also developed in Russia America. In many instances, *promyshlenniki* were the only Russians living in an area and would have to rely on natives.

Even though certain exchanges in Siberia served as middle grounds, many instances in Siberia lacked true middle grounds because *promyshlenniki* often dominated relations.

²⁰ Slezkine, 15.

²¹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Cambridge Studies in North American Indian History; (New York, 1991), X.

Cossacks and Russians often controlled circumstances; they had superior technology and weapons. James Forsyth sums up the situation in following statement:

The Russian conquerors of all classes treated the native peoples of Siberia as enemies so inferior to themselves in way of life and military potential that they could be disposed of callously and unceremoniously, and exploited for the enrichment of the invaders. It was quite usual for armed bands of Russians to kill natives whom they encountered and divide the booty, and it has been said that in the first stages of conquest the natives were hunted like animals.²²

Although Forsyth's depiction of the situation seems a little harsh to believe, it emphasizes the racism and brutality of *promyshlenniki*. Russians felt superior to indigenous groups. When *promyshlenniki* did not have control of relations with natives, a friendly middle ground could develop. However, when *promyshlenniki* held a dominant position, they could more easily obtain furs through brutality. In Siberia, most interactions with indigenous groups resulted in the domination of natives. In Russian America, relations continued to be a mixture of Russian domination and middle grounds.

The Russian Orthodox Church:

During Russia's expansion from a small Principality of Muscovy in the fifteenth century to a grand empire in the nineteenth century, the Russian Orthodox Church fulfilled a variety of roles. During this time, the church sent an array of missions which held different ideologies. As discussed by Sergei Kan in his chapter in *Of Religion and Empire*, Russian Orthodox missions held a variety of ideologies with two ideological traditions serving as

²² Forsyth, 34.

poles when beliefs could easily fluctuate. The first tradition involved the forceful elimination of pagan religions in order to effectively spread their version of God's message without interference from previous beliefs. The second tradition involved the importance of a gradual and cautious missionary effort which was more tolerant of indigenous customs and languages.²³ These two different traditions developed due to the church's connection with the Russian government and the church's reactions to previous missionary attempts.

The history of the Russian Orthodox Church explains some of the complexity in missionary traditions. In 988, Vladimir, the Grand Duke of Kiev, converted to Orthodox Christianity, officially creating the Russian Orthodox Church, the state religion. The Russian Orthodox Church, as with many of the other Orthodox Churches, is autocephalous, meaning that it is self-governing but not independent. Therefore, the church could act on its own accord as long as these actions fit with the government's policies.²⁴ When the Russian government adopted policies that changed native customs, the Russian Orthodox Church was obligated to follow in similar practices. When governmental policies advocated a willingness to accept the customs of the "noble savage," the church's missions would follow similar ideologies. Even though the Russian Orthodox Church's policies were to align with the government's, church officials, not government administrators, ran church operations. Beginning in 1589, the Patriarch of Moscow served as the head of the Russian Orthodox Church.²⁵ When the Russian Orthodox Church decided to send missions to Siberia, the

²³ Robert P. Khodarkovsky Michael Geraci, *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 173-174.

²⁴ A. A. Preobrazhenskii, *The Russian Orthodox Church: 10th to 20th Centuries, Man through the Ages*; (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 4-12.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 57-64.

Patriarch of Moscow decided on methods used for conversion, as long as this methodology did not conflict with the government.

During Russia's expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, connections between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state were blurred to a further extent due to policies pertaining to citizenship. During this expansion, the government did not consider the indigenous groups living in Siberia citizens of Russia even though Russia claimed ownership of their lands. Only after conversion would the state recognize native citizens. As foreigners, natives did not receive the same rights as Russian citizens. Some natives who converted to Christianity reaped the benefits of citizenship.²⁶ The indigenous groups of Siberia, such as the Mansi and the Yakagir, could have converted to obtain the opportunities available to citizens. By including religious beliefs into Russian laws, indigenous groups had the opportunity to use Christianity as a tool to improve their position in society. In Russian America, Aleuts also used Orthodoxy as means of increasing their power in society.

The Russian Orthodox Church's missionary work concerning the conversion of the indigenous groups of Russia was rather limited for much of the time of expansion. The most famous first mission occurred in the 1380s, when St. Stefan traveled to the Perm region in hopes of converting natives. Legends tell how even though Stefan burnt pagan idols, the natives converted to Christianity due to Stefan's respect for their Shaman.²⁷ This mission pulls from both traditions discussed by Anthropologist Sergei Kan. Stefan offended natives by burning idols, which aligns with the first tradition that emphasized eradication of the indigenous culture, and simultaneously gained their respect by admiring the shaman, an act

²⁶Slezkine, 43.

²⁷ Geraci, 199-120.

in keeping with the second tradition. This respect of the shaman allowed for native conversion. Stefan's respect for native leadership would later be utilized in Russian America. Except for one other small mission in 1621, Russia was not interested in converting natives. Russia expanded into Siberia for riches; *promyshlenniki* focused on furs. If furs were not involved, Russians and Cossacks hunters and traders left native life unchanged.²⁸ Obviously, the fur trade altered native ways of life in both Siberia and Russian America, but the fur trade left indigenous religion relatively unaltered.

In the eighteenth century, Peter I changed the structure of the church and its missions. In 1721, Peter I removed the Patriarch of Moscow and created the Holy Governing Synod. This church council not only ruled the church, but it also served as a department of the imperial government. This action blurred the Russian Orthodox Church with the state even further than before. Peter also used the church as a means of expanding his reforms to better the Russian Empire. For Russia to become a modern and progressive empire, Peter believed it needed to be civilized in the manner of Western Europe. In order for Siberian natives to become civilized, they needed to convert Christianity. In 1706, Peter ordered Filofei Leshchinskii to travel down the Ob River to burn pagan idols and convert the natives to Christianity. However, this attempt failed when the Mansi, the indigenous group living by the Ob River, decided to move as far as possible from Russian settlements.²⁹ This method of missionary work resembles the first tradition mentioned by Kan, where indigenous customs were not acceptable to the church. The result of this mission demonstrated one outcome of an

²⁸ Slezkine, 41.

²⁹ Ibid, 48-50.

intolerant mission: the natives would simply move away. With the vastness of Siberia, this option was readily available in remote locations.

After the reign of Peter the Great, the success of missions were limited. Native conversion was no longer a priority of the government. However, the Russian Orthodox Church continued to organize missions in Siberia. In 1745, all of the different native peoples of Kamchatka were baptized and converted to Christianity. These conversions, like many others in Siberia, consisted of baptisms without explanations of what it meant to be Christian and the threat of violence if natives refused to convert. In other situations, natives were bribed with gifts in order to convert to Christianity. These types of conversion resulted in few true followers of Christianity. As a result, many natives called themselves Christians to appease the Russian government, while still practicing native religions at home.³⁰ These large-scale conversions, as in Kamchatka, did not create a true Christian population. Native Siberians utilized baptism as a means of appeasing the Russians, while also continuing traditional shamanistic beliefs.

In Siberia, Russian Orthodox clergy forced Christianity onto indigenous populations. However, these conversions did not turn natives into believers of Orthodox Christianity. In order to have faithful Orthodox Christians, clergy needed natives to convert voluntarily, not by force. This voluntary conversion occurred on a small scale throughout Siberian expansion. When *promyshlenniki* married native women, sometimes these wives would convert to Orthodoxy. During the 1820s, the idea of voluntary conversion became more popular. In 1819, Nicholas I appointed Mikhail Sperankii to a position advising Russia how to best organize and govern Siberia. Sperankii recommended to the government that the Russian

³⁰ Ibid, 50-53.

Orthodox Church convert by persuasion, not by force.³¹ These voluntary types of conversion align with the second tradition discussed by Kan: to be effective, conversion needed to be gradual and tolerant of some aspects of traditional life. The Russian Orthodox Church seemed to have learned from its mistakes prior to 1819 because the missionary tactics in Russian America were much more accommodating than in Siberian missions.

Conclusion:

The situation in Russian America was not identical to events in Siberia, but many similarities are visible. Both Siberia and Russian America became a part of Russia's imperial expansion. In both areas, the government struggled to effectively control trade. More importantly, Russia began a pattern of interactions with indigenous groups. Although Russia never brought a military or a large peasant population to Russian America, *promyshlenniki* and the Russian Orthodox Church crossed the ocean to the North America. *Promyshlenniki* brought knowledge attained in Siberia to Russian America. When Aleuts resisted *promyshlenniki*'s actions, this resistance resembled Siberian indigenous resistance. Although a slightly different situation occurred in Russian America, Siberian interactions had given *promyshlenniki* ideas on how to most effectively deal with Aleuts in order to obtain the most furs.

The Russian Orthodox Church seemed to have learned the most from experiences in Siberia. Forced conversions of entire tribes did not lead to faithful Christians. In the 1740s, Bering discovered the Aleutian Islands. While Russian vessels explored the Aleutian Islands, the Russian Orthodox Church attempted to convert Aleuts by persuasion, and not force. When conversions failed in Siberia, the church recognized its mistakes and tried to utilize a more effective method of conversion which made allowances for some native traditions. The

³¹ Ibid, 41, 81-87.

Russian Orthodox Church did not utilize more flexible mission ideologies in Siberia until the 1820s. However, the church's actions in Russian America beginning in the late 1700s demonstrated the Russian Orthodox Church's comprehension of previous failures and the necessity to alter methods of conversion.

Overall, by the time Russians entered the Aleutian Islands, government officials, clergy, and *promyshlenniki* all had previous experience working in the newly conquered land of Siberia. These experiences molded and shaped the colonization methods used in Russian America. These same methods would be used to alter Aleut society.

Chapter Three: Aleuts in Russian America 1742-1867

In the 1740s the Aleuts, the indigenous people of the Aleutian Islands, began to experience changes to their way of life due to Russian colonization. Beginning with Vitus Bering's second expedition in 1741 and continuing until the sale of Alaska in 1867, Russians imposed Russian society and industry onto the indigenous groups of Russian America, Alaska's name under Russian rule.¹ However, the natives of Russian America were not passive victims to the incoming European power. Aleuts utilized their power in society to control the amount of change affecting certain parts of Aleut culture and society. Although Russians held the majority of power in Russian America, Aleuts maintained varying amounts of control over different aspects of society. In trade Aleuts acted in a variety of ways depending on the situation at hand. During some occasions, the Aleuts violently resisted the initial Russian presence. In other instances Aleuts willingly traded for Russian goods. Through the Russian Orthodox Church, Aleuts used Christianity as a tool that enabled them to keep certain rituals and customs alive. During the Russian period, Aleuts did not possess all the power in society, but they utilized the power they had.

These changes to Aleut economy, society, and religion during Russian rule did not indicate the destruction of Aleut culture. As with all societies, Aleut culture changes over time. In "Transforming Memories and Histories: The Meaning of Ethnic Resurgence for Mayan Indians," Kay Warren argues that when indigenous groups vary their lifestyles, these changes are not certain death to the indigenous culture but rather the formation of new identities and the reshaping of existing identities. Indigenous groups have several identities including a continually forming traditional ethnic identity and a national identity. Native

¹ In this chapter, the area which is currently the state of Alaska will be referred to as Russian America, the official name under Russian colonization, or as *Alaska*.

rituals are continually renewed over generations. In the same light, European conquest did not occur overnight; a group's national identity evolved over decades.² In other words, citizens of the United States have a national identity while at the same time have an ethnic identity. The Aleuts had a changing ethnic identity prior to Russian arrival and continued to have an ethnic identity after. During Russian rule, Aleuts developed a national identity that evolved with the changing state of affairs in the colony. Beginning in the 1740s and continuing until the sale of Alaska, Aleuts participated in Russian colonial society. However, due to a lack of Aleut sources it is impossible to find exactly how Aleuts felt about their place in the Russian empire. Indigenous identity is complicated and continually evolving. As discussed later in this chapter, Russian culture had a large impact on Aleut indigenous identity.

Although this chapter attempts to answer many questions concerning the Aleuts' power and identity, answers to these questions are limited due to available sources. Although documents from the Russian government, Russian American Company, and the Russian Orthodox Church, are all utilized in this chapter, no Aleut sources were used. If Aleuts had written their own accounts of their time under Russian rule, none of these records survived. Many of the ideas discussing Aleuts' thoughts concerning their situation have been extrapolated from Russian sources. Therefore, this chapter answers some questions, but will not answer without a doubt how Aleuts felt about the different aspects of Russian society in Russian America. Unless new Aleut sources are uncovered, certain questions concerning the Aleuts will always remain unanswered.

² Kay B. Warren, "Transforming Memories and Histories: The Meaning of Ethnic Resurgence for Mayan Indians," in *Americas: New Interpretive Essays*, ed. Alfred C. Stepan (Oxford University Press, 1992), 194-205.

During the Russian administration of Alaska, a variety of relationships developed. In certain circumstances a middle ground developed. In *The Middle Ground*, Richard White argues that for a period of time during colonial rule in the *pay d'en haut*, the vast region surrounding the Great Lakes, neither settlers nor Native Americans held a dominant position and both sides had to cooperate with each other. In White's introduction, he explains what occurs in this phenomenon.

The middle ground is the place in between cultures, peoples, and in between empires and the nonstate world of villages. It is a place where many of the North American subjects and allies of empire lived. It is the area between the historical foreground of European invasion and occupation and the background of Indian defeat and retreat.³

Even though White wrote this description for the *pay d'en haut*, certain trading relationships in Alaska also served as middle grounds. Although situations changed with time, in some instances neither the Aleuts nor Russians could dominate relations and both sides traded amicably. Anthropologist Lydia Black emphasized this idea of a balanced trading relationship in Russian America. However, Black recognized that not all relationships in Russian America resulted in middle grounds. Middle grounds and other types of trading relationships will be examined in this chapter.

Trading and hunting relationships between Russians and Aleuts played a large role in the changing dynamics of the Aleut economy and society. James Gibson argues in both his book *Imperial Russia in Frontier America* and article "Russian Dependence on the Natives of Alaska" that indigenous groups played a major role in the longevity of Russian America.

³ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Cambridge Studies in North American Indian History; (New York, 1991), X.

Although Gibson does not emphasize many of the cultural and social changes in Aleut society, he demonstrates the importance of indigenous labor in keeping the colony functioning. Aleuts played a major role in the acquisition of sea otter pelts. This chapter utilizes Gibson's analysis on Aleut labor, but will also examine how the Aleuts' place in the Russian labor system led to changes in social structure and in daily activity.

The role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska is one of the most vigorously debated issues in Alaskan indigenous history. Academics, such as Sergei Kan and S. A. Mousalimas, questioned why the church took such an open armed approach to indigenous culture and why Aleuts converted to Orthodoxy. They wondered if these conversions were faithful or just a method to subdue Russian pressures. This thesis follows the theories of Sergei Kan. In *Memory Eternal*, Kan argues that the Russian Orthodox Church found that if clergy allowed a certain amount of indigenous customs to continue, then natives were much more open to receiving the word of God. These allowances by the church were to be temporary but have persisted as a portion of Alaska's Russian Orthodox Church until recent decades. Kan discovered that Tlingits converted and stayed with the Russian Orthodox Church because they recognized how to use the church as a tool in maintaining indigenous identity. Kan does not discount the fact that some natives converted to Christianity due to a new belief in God, but indigenous conversion was not a simple decision.⁴ Kan's analysis of indigenous reasoning is extremely important to this thesis. Although Tlingits resided hundreds of miles from Aleuts, the Russian Orthodox Church kept the same methods of conversion at both locations. Both Aleuts and Tlingits recognized the opportunities available in the church.

⁴ Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), Xix-xxi.

The Aleuts:

The Aleuts, the indigenous people of the Aleutians, were just one of the many groups living in Alaska during Russian rule. Figure One depicts the region inhabited by Aleuts in comparison to other indigenous Alaskans.

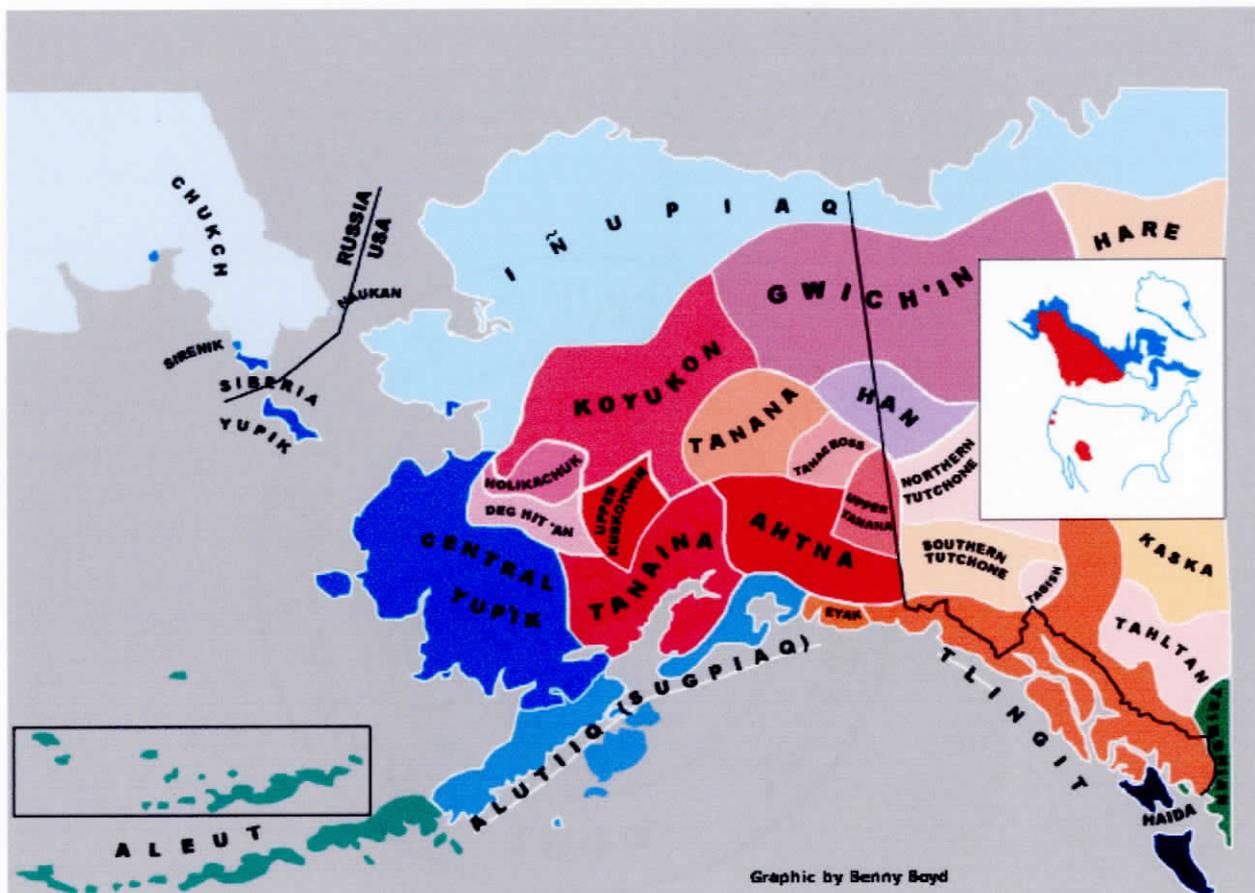


Figure 3: Map of all the Indigenous Groups of Alaska⁵

At one point, approximately ten thousand years ago, the Aleut, Alutiiq, and Eskimo all lived as one indigenous group, but over time the different cultures evolved based on their surroundings.⁶ Much of this difference related to the geographical area in which the Aleuts

⁵ Image taken from Carol Barnhardt, "A History of Schooling for Alaskan Native People," *Journal of American Indian Education* 40, no. 1 (2001), 2.

⁶ William S. Laughlin, *Aleuts: Survivors of the Bering Land Bridge*, Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology; (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1980), 10.

lived. The Aleutians are a chain of volcanic islands; trees are nonexistent. The islands contained very few nutritional plants or animals. The Aleuts had to rely on the sea for protein and tools.⁷ Due to this dependence on the sea, Aleuts became excellent hunters. Parents instructed their sons as young as six years old on how to build muscles that would allow them to accurately and easily throw a spear. Starting at the age of thirteen, an Aleut boy began to train in a kayak with his father and uncles. The village gave an Aleut his own kayak by the age of fifteen. The Aleut kayak, the *baidarka*, was considered the best of any kayak produced by an indigenous group in Alaska. On September 9, 1741, Aleksei Chirikov gave the following description of a group of men in *baidarkas*:

At 10:00 AM we sighted seven small boats, with one man in each, who appeared paddling towards us. These boats are about fifteen feet long and three feet in the middle. The bow is very pointed and the stern rounded, the crafts are completely covered with the hides of seals or sea lions.⁸

This excerpt taken from Chirikov's experiences during the first Russian exploration of the Aleutian Islands details the *baidarka* before any Russian influences altered the vessel. From his attention to detail, Chirikov seemed impressed by the Aleut kayak.

The Aleuts' expertise at seafaring led to many village interconnections. In the pre-contact era, Aleuts lived in villages with populations of two hundred or more individuals. Aleuts traveled island to island to trade with other villages or simply for social occasions. As recounted in William Coxe's 1780 edition of *The Russian Discoveries between Asia and*

⁷ Lydia T. Black, "Volcanism as a Factor in Human Ecology: The Aleutian Case," *Ethnohistory* 28, no. 4 (1981), 313-329.

⁸ Aleksei Chirikov, "Report of the Bering Expedition, "September 9, 1741, in Basil Dmytryshyn and E. A. P. Vaughan Thomas Crownhart-Vaughan, *Russian Penetration of the North Pacific Ocean, 1700-1799: A Documentary Record*, To Siberia and Russian America (Portland, Or.: Oregon Historical Society, 1986), 135.

America in 1764, Maxim Lasaroff commented that Aleuts traveled so much that it was impossible to obtain an accurate census of Aleuts.⁹ Visiting neighboring islands was a normal part of Aleut life. However, Aleuts did not act as one tribe and were not ruled as one cohesive community. In reality, in pre-contact times and during the Russian era, different Aleut villages battled one another for better islands and hunting grounds. Scientists and scholars clustered Aleuts together as a cohesive group due to similarities in culture, biology, and language. Although each community differed slightly from the next, most groups lived relatively the same lifestyle. Biologically, Aleuts are unique from other Native American groups. Aleuts share some biological variations with the Eskimos including a large mandible and a defect in the spinal column. The Aleuts are the only Native American indigenous group with three blood types: B, A, and O; all other indigenous North Americans only have blood types A and O. Also, Aleuts had a unique language different from any other indigenous group. Much of the pre-contact fighting occurred between Aleuts of different dialects.¹⁰ Although Aleuts differentiated themselves by dialects and from other indigenous groups, Aleuts did not have a national identity prior to Russian contact. Aleuts recognized themselves as a member of an individual Aleut village instead of a member of a cohesive Aleut community.

Before Russian contact, Aleuts had a vibrant culture. Aleuts followed Shamanism, a religion similar to the beliefs of Siberian natives and other Native American tribes. For Aleuts, the world had a creator and both good and bad spirits. In order to keep the spirits at peace, Aleuts needed to include spirits in all major activities and rituals. Not all Aleuts

⁹ William Coxe, *The Russian Discoveries between Asia and America*, March of America Facsimile Series; No. 40 (Ann Arbor [Mich.]: University Microfilms, 1966), 75.

¹⁰ Laughlin, 4-17, 50-54.

communicated with the spirit world, only a shaman could. Whenever a celebration or ceremony took place, a shaman served as an intermediary between the spirit world and the Aleut community.¹¹ Even though Aleuts converted to Russian Orthodoxy during colonial rule, the shaman and traditional spirituality continued to play a role in the lives of Aleuts. Although many parts of Aleut culture are unique, the similarities between Aleut and Siberian Shamanism allowed the Russian Orthodox Church to utilize previous knowledge on methods of conversion.

Industry and Trade:

Promyshlenniki, Russian hunters and traders, journeyed to the Aleutians and other areas of Alaska for one purpose: to profit from the fur trade. *Promyshlenniki* had already traveled to all regions of Siberia in search of the valuable sable. In the Bering Sea, *promyshlenniki* aimed to continue this line of wealth by hunting sea otters. The government advocated this expansion and allowed private companies to finance individual expeditions. As in Siberia, in the initial years of Russian America, indigenous groups paid tribute in the form of furs to the Russian government. Hunters sent ten percent of all furs collected in Alaska to the Russian government. Although not all companies gained riches, some were successful. From 1765 to 1778, five companies made eight voyages to the Aleutians and procured roughly 163,000 rubles worth of fur.¹² However, Russian expansion into the Aleutians and coastal Alaska did not run as smoothly as entrepreneurs and the government hoped.

¹¹ Dorothy Miriam Jones, *Aleuts in Transition: A Comparison of Two Villages* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 15-17.

¹² James R. Gibson, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America: The Changing Geography of Supply of Russian America, 1784-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 4.

In Siberia sable hunts occurred on land, but in the Aleutians, sea otter hunts occurred in the treacherous Bering Sea. A sea otter pelt was valuable because of a high luster, dark color, and large size; a pelt averaged approximately five feet long by twenty-four to thirty inches in width and half an inch to three quarters of an inch thick.¹³ In 1810, a prime female sea otter pelt sold for as much as 1,000 rubles but averaged 561 rubles, still a valuable profit. Due to overhunting, *promyshlenniki* faced the ever increasing problem of finding sea otter hunting grounds. Sea otter populations easily became depleted due to overhunting and a low fertility rate. Female sea otters only produce one pup per year per dam. However, the most important issue in sea otter hunting became how to effectively catch a sea otter, which took years of practice. In Siberia, *promyshlenniki* hunted approximately at the same rate as indigenous hunters. In the Aleutians, *promyshlenniki* were unprepared to hunt for sea otters themselves; it was extremely difficult and dangerous.¹⁴ Ferdinand von Wrangell, Governor of Russian America in the 1830s, commented that, "Of all hunts, the sea otter hunt requires the most experience, skill, and patience. Fur seals, sea lions, and walruses, despite their strength and size, are caught more easily and quickly."¹⁵ From the perspective of *promyshlenniki*, sea otters brought in large profits, but the challenges of the hunt were too great. *Promyshlenniki* would rather trade for pelts than hunt for sea otters themselves.

Difficulties in hunting just served as one of the problems in Russian America.

Colonial officials faced a lack of willing and able Russian immigrants. Until 1861, just six

¹³Ibid, 34.

¹⁴ James R. Gibson, "Russian Dependence on the Native of Alaska," in *An Alaska Anthology: Interpreting the Past*, ed. Stephen W. Mangusso Mary Childers Haycox (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 22.

¹⁵G. H. von Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World During the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806 and 1807* (Carlisle [Pa.]: Printed by George Philips, Place: United States; Pennsylvania; Carlisle, 1817), 241.

years prior to the sale of Alaska, a large majority of Russia's population felt the constraints of serfdom. Of those free from serfdom, few desired to travel to Russian America.¹⁶ In 1839, the Russian population of Russian America, including settlement in California, climaxed at 823 individuals; however, the population remained around a few hundred for the majority of Russian rule. In 1799, at the start of the Russian American Company only 253 Cossacks and Russians lived in all of Russian America.¹⁷ This small population meant that the Russian government and entrepreneurs had to utilize methods that supported the colony on such a limited Russian population.

Russians first entered the Aleutians after the 1740s fur rush. In 1741 Vitus Bering and Alexi Chirikov commanded the two vessels of the Second Kamchatka Expedition, an expedition ordered by the government in order to find North America. Although Bering died in a ship wreck on the return voyage, the surviving members of the expedition returned in 1743 with a large quantity of furs procured on the Aleutian Islands. This load of valuable sea otter pelts started the fur rush that would eventually lead to the Russian colonization of Alaska. Although *promyshlenniki* did not press forward beyond the Near Islands until 1756, by 1780 Russians had advanced across the Aleutians to the coast of mainland Alaska.¹⁸ For *promyshlenniki*, riches served as the main purpose for expansion into new hunting grounds. As in Siberia, *promyshlenniki* used relationships with indigenous groups to obtain the most pelts with the least amount of effort. However, as in Siberia and the American frontier, riches were not as readily available as hunters and traders had dreamed. In reality ten percent of

¹⁶ Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 56.

¹⁷ S. G. Fedorova, *The Population of Russian America (1799-1867): The Russian Population of Alaska and California* (Fairbanks: Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, University of Alaska, 1973), 2-6

¹⁸ Raymond H. Fisher, "Finding America," in *An Alaska Anthology: Interpreting the Past*, ed. Mangusso Mary Childers Stephen W. Haycox (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 6-18.

profits went to the Russian government while investors received approximately half of the remaining profits.¹⁹ For Russian *promyshlenniki*, the more riches extracted from natives the better. Even though *promyshlenniki* received less than half of the profits procured from sea otter hunting, the more furs *promyshlenniki* obtained, the larger the piece of their profits became.

When Russians first arrived in the Aleutian Islands, the Aleuts had already established trading and hunting relations with Aleut villages and other indigenous communities. During the pre-contact era, Aleuts traded with the Koniag and other indigenous groups in order to obtain desired goods not available on the Aleutians islands. For example, in the late 1700s Russians noticed that Aleuts wore rain coats made from bear innards. The rain coat came from mainland Alaska where bears lived. The Aleuts must have procured the rain coats through trade with other indigenous groups.²⁰ Also by the time of Russian contact, Aleuts had already allocated specific hunting grounds for particular Aleut communities. Individual Aleut communities had already established exactly who hunted where. Russians were invaders to a preexisting system. Aleuts were hostile to unwanted invaders. When Russians brought gifts to Aleuts, this would help relations, but for the most part, Russians were trespassers in Aleuts' lands and seas.²¹ Prior to Russian contact, Aleuts had trade relations and also knew the importance of property ownership. Aleuts did not intend to simply hand over hard fought Aleut territory to undeserving Russians.

¹⁹ Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 55.

²⁰ Lydia Black, *Russians in Alaska: 1732-1867* (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2004), 11.

²¹ R. G. Liapunova, "Relations with the Natives of Russian America," in *Russia's American Colony*, ed. S. Frederick Starr, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 108-109.

During the first few decades of contact with Russian traders, a variety of Aleut-Russian interactions occurred, including several violent confrontations. According to government records and analysis by Mari Sardy between 1741 and 1749 five Russian vessels reported eleven instances of contact with natives. Of those eleven incidents, on three occasions Aleuts instigated violence towards Russians and on one occasion Russians initiated hostilities towards Aleuts. Between 1750 and 1759, seventeen ships reported twenty-three separate instances of contact including nine violent encounters. Aleuts initiated violence five times while Russians instigated violence on four occasions.²² Although some Russian vessels probably left out instances of contact from official reports, patterns of relationships are evident. In some instances Aleuts forced Russians to flee, while in other situations, Russians forced Aleuts to give hostages for pelts or would threaten Aleuts with guns. Although Russians controlled the majority of the trading relationship, contact depended on the specific community. In the early decades of contact, the power in trading relations seesawed between Aleuts and Russians.

When Aleuts controlled the situation, they tried to forcibly remove *promyshlenniki* from Aleut indigenous lands and seas. Captain Petr Kuzmich Krenitsyn and Captain Lieutenant Levashev found that Aleuts took advantage of any situation that gave them the upper hand. Aleuts “subscribe to one thing: if their side is stronger, they will kill everyone without exception, not realizing that the following year many [more] will come. They think that the ones they kill are the only ones, and no more will come.”²³ Aleuts might have thought that if they killed all the Russians in the region at a certain time, this would have

²²Mari Sardy, "Early Contact between Aleuts and Russians, 1741-1780," *Alaska History* 1, no. 2 (1985), 45.

²³ Captain Pter Kuzmich Krenitsyn and Captain Lieutenant Mikhail Dmitrievich Levashev. 1771, in Dmytryshyn and Crownhart-Vaughan, *Russian Penetration of the North Pacific Ocean, 1700-1799: A Documentary Record*, 250.

ended Russian expansion. Clearly, Aleut attacks did not result in the end of Russian penetration into North America. It did succeed in placing fear in some *promyshlenniki* from visiting certain villages. When Aleuts attacked Russian trading parties they attempted to massacre the entire group. As described by Orthodox clergymen Ioann Veniaminov, Aleuts would rehearse attacks on Russian trading crews. At the trade two Aleuts would stand beside each Russian. When the Russians opened the fur bundles, Aleuts would stab the *promyshlenniki* to death.²⁴ In resistant communities, Aleuts used their power to the fullest ability to rid the Aleutians of Russians.

In many circumstances, *promyshlenniki* forced Aleuts to give into Russian demands. *Promyshlenniki* either used straightforward force or *amanaty*, the practice of hostage taking for furs. *Promyshlenniki* needed Aleuts to use their skills in hunting sea otter pelts. Unlike Aleuts, *promyshlenniki* could threaten Aleuts with firearms. Often *promyshlenniki* used the *amanaty*. Although originally used as means of peaceful relations, with *amanaty*, hostages were given to the *promyshlenniki* until the indigenous community delivered the required number of pelts. However, in the Aleutians, *promyshlenniki* forced groups to send hostages and even greater problems developed when villages refused to send hostages.²⁵ In 1790 *promyshlennik* Ismailov killed one hundred and fifty to two hundred natives when a village on Kodiak Island refused to send hostages. Even when *amanaty* was not used, *promyshlenniki* abused Aleuts in other ways. On June 7, 1789, tribal Aleut leader Algamaling claimed to the government inspector that *promyshlennik* Psenichney treated Aleuts

²⁴ Saint Metropolitan of Moscow Innokentii, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District Uniform Title: Zapiski Ob Ostrovakh Otdiela. V. 2. English. Selections* (New Haven, Conn.: Human Relations Area Files, 1970), 65-66.

²⁵ Andrei V. Grinev and Richard L. Bland, "Native 'Amanaty' in Russian America," *European Review of Native American Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003), 7-10.

tyrannically. He forced them to hunt in the worst winter storm, causing the death of three Aleuts. On other occasions Psnenichney whipped six Aleuts to death. In another instance, more than three hundred Aleuts starved to death when *promyshlenniki* deprived them of food.²⁶ When Russians held a dominant position, as they did in most situations especially after the 1760s, *promyshlenniki* used their power to obtain as many furs as possible. Some *promyshlenniki* such as Psnenichney tyrannically controlled relations. However, not all *promyshlenniki* dominated and abused natives to such a horrible level. Aleuts were the labor source; their death led to labor shortages in sea otter hunting.

As previously discussed, some contact resulted in Aleut dominance while other resulted in Russian control. However, sometimes a middle ground developed. As argued by Lydia Black, certain trading relationships especially those in the western Aleutians during initial contact, resembled a middle ground where neither Aleuts nor Russian *promyshlenniki* held a dominant position. In the 1740s and 1750s, Russians lacked knowledge of local conditions and relied on Aleuts for information concerning the region. Black argued that Russians lacked the financial support for large amounts of gun powder. Without ammunition, Russians did not dominate all relations. Therefore a middle ground developed.²⁷ As recounted by William Coxe, *promyshlenniki* Durneff and Sheffyrin spent much of 1757 living amicably with the natives of an Aleutian Island.²⁸ Durneff and Sheffyrin needed Aleuts for furs and Aleuts received Russian goods from the *promyshlenniki*. Both groups needed something from the other and had to compromise to get what each side needed.

²⁶ "Report of Complaints by Natives in Unalaska to Government inspectors 1789-1790," July, 1790, *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska*, Yudin Collection ([College: s.n.], 1938), 237.

²⁷ Lydia Pierce and Richard A. Black, *Atka, an Ethnohistory of the Western Aleutians*, Alaska History (Kingston, Ont., Canada: Limestone Press, 1984), 78-82.

²⁸ Coxe, 45.

During the decades of various relations with Russian traders, Aleuts utilized Russian technologies to improve their goods. Within a decade of contact, Aleuts modified *baidaras*, Aleut large boats, using Russian methods so they would run smoother.²⁹ Even Veniaminov noted that Aleuts incorporated Russian items such as axes, knives, guns, and needles.³⁰ In 1762, Stephan Cherepanov noticed how even when metal tools were not traded or given to them, Aleuts crafted small knives from nails that washed up onshore from shipwrecks.³¹ Aleuts utilized Russian goods and technologies to improve daily activities. Aleuts decided which Russian goods to incorporate into their lives. Aleuts, not Russians, chose which tools to add to their homes.

In certain instances, Aleuts did not follow the same path as other members of their community and became a part of the “Fifth Column.” Andrei Grinev argues that a “Fifth Column” of natives developed in Russian America. These indigenous “traitors” sided with Russians for personal gains. In 1760, an Aleut woman saved the crew of the *Sv. Vladimir* by warning them of a planned native attack. In many circumstances indigenous informants told of impending attacks on Russian traders in order to receive gifts of European finished goods. On other occasions, natives taken as hostages by Russians developed long lasting relations with *promyshlenniki* and serve as informants for years. However, hostages could reverse the situation and spy on the Russians. In other instances, Aleuts would inform *promyshlenniki* of acts of intertribal warfare. In 1763, the Fox Aleuts alerted traders of an upcoming attack by

²⁹ Lydia Pierce, Richard A. Black, Katherine L Arndt and McGowan Sarah, *The History and Ethnohistory of the Aleutians East Borough*, Alaska History (Kingston, Ont.: Fairbanks, Alaska, 1999), 10.

³⁰ Innokentii, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District*, 283.

³¹ Stepan Cherepanov, “Accounts of Cherepanov’s Stay in the Aleutian Islands, 1759-1762,” August 3, 1762, in Dmytryshyn and Crownhart-Vaughan, *Russian Penetration of the North Pacific Ocean, 1700-1799: A Documentary Record*, 209

the Andreanof Aleuts purely because the Fox Aleuts hated the Andreanof Aleuts.³² Although these individuals of the “Fifth Column” never held a majority in indigenous society, these individuals had a distinct indigenous view.

During the first fifty years of trade relations, a variety of interactions occurred. When Aleuts held the power in relations, Aleuts could violently dominate the situation. However, after the 1760s, Russians permanently held the dominant position in relations. In the long run, Aleuts never stood a chance at controlling relations. Russia’s superior firearms and other advanced technologies eventually led to the domination of Aleuts. Aleut communities that resisted were controlled into submission by deadly Russian revenge for disobedience.³³ The previously discussed atrocities by *promyshlennik* Psnenichney may not have been as tyrannically insane as first thought. The Aleut village he abused could have refused to cooperate with Russians and Psnenichney used deadly force to halt further disobedience. Even though Aleuts lost much of their power in trading and hunting relations, early resistance demonstrated how Aleuts felt towards incoming *promyshlenniki*.

The Russian American Company and Aleuts:

Starting in 1799, the Russian government authorized the Russian American Company to hold a monopoly over hunting and trading in Russian America. The Russian American Company played a major role in the lives of all Aleut communities. The Russian government created the company as an institution to check the power of abusive *promyshlenniki*.

However, abuse and domination continued during the company’s administration. The Russian American Company was a joint stock company, like the British East India Company.

³² Andrei V. Grinev and Richard L. Bland, "A Fifth Column in Alaska: Native Collaborators in Russian America," *Alaska History* 22, no. 1 (2007), 1-18.

³³ Gibson, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America: The Changing Geography of Supply of Russian America, 1784-1867*, 3-4.

However due to initial financial woes and administrative mismanagement, by 1818 the Russian government played a major role in the administration of the company. Instead of acting as an independent capitalistic company, the Russian American Company became a means of governmental influence in Russian America without direct government involvement³⁴ The Russian government could use the Russian American Company as an instrument to implement Russian ideologies, but not an institution causing foreign conflict.³⁵ This increase in government control is visible in the second and third charters, which emphasized native and Creole rights.

However, distance stopped the government from maintaining effective control over actions by Russian American Company employees. Both the Russian government and the headquarters of the Russian American Company were located in St. Petersburg. Letters sent from St. Petersburg to New Archangelsk, Russian America's capital traveled 12,000 miles before reaching their destination. On average, mail delivery from the colonial capital to St. Petersburg took two years to arrive.³⁶ With a lack of communication, Russians in the colony whether government officials or *promyshlenniki*, had more freedom to do as they pleased. This allowed room for corruption and abuse towards indigenous groups.

Much of the Russian American Company's actions during the initial charter occurred under the administration of Aleksandr Baranov, who viewed Aleuts and other indigenous groups as a labor source. He felt that Aleuts needed to have an allegiance solely to the Russian American Company and felt that the Russian Orthodox Church would only distract

³⁴ Anatole G. Mazour, "The Russian-American Company: Private or Government Enterprise?," *The Pacific Historical Review* 13, no. 2 (1944), 169-173.

³⁵ Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 88-89.

³⁶ Gibson, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America: The Changing Geography of Supply of Russian America, 1784-1867*, 45-46.

Aleut workers from their hunting duties. However, during these initial decades, Baranov pronounced the Russian American Company's goal of protecting the Aleuts.³⁷ Baranov needed the Aleuts as a labor force, but did not deliver the protection promised. Logistically, it was impossible to stop all abuses from *promyshlenniki*. Russian America was too vast a land to effectively govern on such a small population. Also, Baranov needed Aleuts to supply food. The transportation costs of foods and other supplies from Russia were extremely high. Baranov needed Aleuts and other natives to grow crops for Russian American Company employees. However, Aleuts never practiced agriculture before Russian arrival, and the Aleutians only had a 170 day growing seasons. Both of these factors led to failures.³⁸ During the first twenty years of the Russian American Company, Baranov used indigenous labor and attempted to protect Aleuts, but failed to stop abuses. Instead of viewing Aleuts as a people, he viewed them as a labor source.

Under the second and third charters of the Russian American Company, the rights and duties of natives were more clearly defined. Sections Forty-Two through Fifty in the 1821 Charter stated the Russian American Company's duty to protect the Aleutian Islands' indigenous population and recognized these natives as Russian subjects. Sections 143 and 271 in the 1844 Charter stated that Russians had a duty to protect natives and improve their way of life.³⁹ These protective principles seemed good in theory, but in reality the distance to mainland Russia led to disobedient *promyshlenniki* and other Russian American Company employees. Also, even though Aleuts in the eyes of the law were treated as equal, Russians

³⁷ Liapunova, 125.

³⁸ Gibson, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America: The Changing Geography of Supply of Russian America, 1784-1867*, 60, 96-103.

³⁹ Vladimir Gsovski, *Russian Administration of Alaska and the Status of the Alaskan Natives*, Senate Document (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1950),44-45.

did not view them as such. For example in his last report on Russian America, Captain P. N. Golovin demonstrated his discrimination towards the Aleuts by blaming them for their poor living conditions, not the Russian American Company.⁴⁰ In the eyes of Russians, the Aleuts caused their own problems. They blamed the victims, not the instigator of the problem: Russian American Company policies and workers. Overall, Russian American Company charters attempted to create policies of equalities, but in reality the guidelines were unenforceable and with small wages and poor working conditions the status of natives fell.

The rights of Aleuts and other Alaskan natives were also demonstrated through the Russian American Company's policies towards trade relations. As argued by Sergei Kan, Russians did not want traditional ways of life to be lost to European fashions. The Russian American Company attempted to block the sale of alcohol in Russian America. Company officials also wanted to preserve traditional hunting methods.⁴¹ Both prohibition and the promotion of traditional hunting methods were profitable for the company. Aleut sea otter hunts were already the most effective creating the most profits, and alcohol use could have led to drops in hunting rates. Even though these policies helped the Russian American Company, they also allowed certain aspects of Aleut culture to continue.

Although certain portions of the 1821 and 1844 charters attempted to protect the position of natives, other sections demonstrated the company's control over Aleuts. Section Fifty-One of the 1821 Charter, as in other charters, stated that fifty percent of males eighteen to fifty in the indigenous population of the islands were to hunt for the Russian American Company. Section Fifty-Six of the same charter also declared that those natives not

⁴⁰ Pavel Nikolaevich Golovin, *The End of Russian America: Captain P. N. Golovin's Last Report, 1862*, North Pacific Studies (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1979), 23.

⁴¹ Kan, 118-119.

employed by the Russian American Company were allowed to fish on their home shores, but are not allowed to travel to other shores.⁴² These conditions created a quasi-feudal system where the native islanders became serfs for the Russian American Company. Aleuts received such a meager wage that even the Board of Directors of the Russian American Company suggested giving the Aleuts a small raise.⁴³ Although this same council realized the importance of keeping the Aleuts in submission, they considered the current policy “the least offensive to the Aleuts and not discreditable to the Company.”⁴⁴ The Russian American Company might have attempted to protect natives, but as in all companies, profits not the wellbeing of indigenous workers were the main goal. Aleuts recognized the serf-like positions the company attempted to place them in. At the same time, Aleuts recognized their status as the most skilled sea otter hunters.

In fact, Aleuts recognized their constrained position and attempted to notify Russian American Company officials of abuses by *promyshlenniki* and how company policies negatively affected Aleuts. As sea otter hunting grounds became depleted, company officials mandated Aleuts to relocate to new hunting regions. Some Aleuts moved with *promyshlenniki* to southeastern Russian America. Once there, Aleuts became entangled in the midst of the Russian and Tlingit battle. Tlingits argued that Aleuts helped Russians and deserved to be punished just as much the Russians. In 1802, Tlingits killed hundreds of

⁴² Gsovski, *Russian Administration of Alaska and the Status of the Alaskan Natives*, 45.

⁴³ Board of Directors to Administrator-General Muraviev, March 4, 1820, *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska*, Russian American Company Archives ([College: s.n.], 1938), 223.

⁴⁴ Board of Directors to Administrator-General Muraviev, 4 March 1821. *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska*, Russian American Company Archives ([College: s.n.], 1938), 224.

Aleuts solely due to their status as Russian American Company workers.⁴⁵ In this instance and in other act of violence in Southeast Russian America, Aleuts suffered due to their perceived alliance with the Russian American Company. From the Tlingit perspective, it seemed as if Aleuts jumped at the opportunity to work for the Russian American Company. For the Aleuts, working for the Russian American Company was an obligation placed on them, and not something they necessarily wanted.

Although many Aleuts were forced to relocate easterly, others were moved to the Pribilof Islands, the islands of St. Paul and St. George. The Pribilofs are located north of the Aleutian chain in between mainland Alaska and Asia. At the time of Russian expansion, the islands were uninhabited. *Promyshlenniki* learned from Aleuts that fur seals used these islands as breeding grounds. In 1790, Russians relocated fifty Aleut men and thirty Aleut women from Unalaska to the Pribilof Islands.⁴⁶ This first group of Aleuts became the first of hundreds forcefully relocated to the Pribilofs. From 1786 to 1832, Aleut and Russian hunters killed 3,178,562 fur seals at the Pribilof Islands.⁴⁷ For their hard work, Aleuts received insufficient wages, not even large enough to live on. In an 1864 Russian Orthodox Church report, Bishop Peter explained the unescapable position. Aleuts received between 40 and 75 kopecks (1/100th of a ruble) for each of the 50,000 fur seal skins, but by the time Aleuts used this money to pay for the European goods necessary to live on the Pribilofs, Aleuts were indebted to the Russian American Company and had to hunt for longer just to pay off their

⁴⁵ Basil Dmytryshyn and E. A. P. Vaughan Thomas Crownhart-Vaughan, *The Russian American Colonies, 1798-1867: A Documentary Record, To Siberia and Russian America* ([Portland, Or.]: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1989), Xlvii.

⁴⁶ Black, *Russians in Alaska: 1732-1867*, 133.

⁴⁷ Dmytryshyn and Crownhart-Vaughan, *The Russian American Colonies, 1798-1867: A Documentary Record*, Lviii.

debt.⁴⁸ As in other locations, Russians placed Aleuts in perpetual debt peonage to the company. However, the plight of relocated Aleuts was worse than Aleuts hunting for the company in home waters. As recounted in an 1821 Russian American Company dispatch, in the preceding year Aleuts relocated to the Pribilofs urgently requested to be transferred back home.⁴⁹ Aleuts on the Pribilofs recognized the hardships of living on the Pribilofs and tried to improve their living condition by returning home. They had to petition to the Russian American Company in order to receive permission to move. This pleading to the company demonstrates how Aleuts worked within the Russian system in order to try to improve their position.

As with natives, Creoles formed a labor group for the Russian American Company. *Promyshlenniki* were known to take native women and make them their wives. These unions resulted in mixed children. These Creoles, half native and half Russian, became very important to colonial society. Creoles were a connection between the two cultures. The indigenous groups of the area were matrilineal, therefore some Creole children kept strong connections back to their native roots. However, the indigenous community decided whether to accept the Creole into the community.⁵⁰ Russian polices viewed Creoles as equal to Russian subjects. The 1821 Charter Section Forty-One stated “Creoles are Russian subjects with the right to have lawful protection equal to Russian commoners.”⁵¹ In actuality, as with

⁴⁸ Bishop Peter, “Report of Conditions of Alaskan Diocese in 1864,” *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska*, Alaska Church Collection, ([College: s.n.], 1938), 147.

⁴⁹ Russian American Company Main Administration to Matvei I. Muravev, “Dispatch Regarding Aleuts who wished to be Returned to Their Own Islands,” January 6, 1821, in Dmytryshyn and Crownhart-Vaughan, *The Russian American Colonies, 1798-1867: A Documentary Record*, 337-338.

⁵⁰ Kan, 177-182

⁵¹ Gsovski, 43.

natives, Creoles were not equal to Russians. To Russians, Creoles ranked below Russian subjects, but above natives. Indigenous communities could accept a Creole into Aleut society, but often rejected them, and Creoles became outcasts.

In the eyes of the Russian American Company officials, Creoles represented a labor force. People already in Alaska were seen as a great asset. The Russians viewed the Creoles as the next generation in Russian America. Beyond the 1821 Charter statement of rights, the charter also stated that Creole employees of the Russian American Company were to be treated the same as Russian employees. The Russian American Company wanted to mold the Creoles into skilled workers. The Company would pay for the higher education of Creoles so that they could become doctors or military officers or other high ranking officials in the colony. The Company's charter stipulated that each Creole after training must work in the colony for the next ten years.⁵² For the Russian American Company, Creoles represented an important commodity. Company charters demonstrated the respect given to Creoles. However, the Russian American Company needed Creoles to work as laborers in the colony.

During the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century and through the actions of the Russian American Company, the Russian government attempted to have more amicable relations by rewarding honorable indigenous chiefs with medallions. As argued by Jonathan R. Dean, the Russian American Company awarded medallions to indigenous chiefs as a sign of goodwill between the company and natives. Dean argues that, by giving out medallions, the Russian American Company followed in the same line as the British. In *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: the British in India*, Bernard Cohn theorized that, in colonial India, the British utilized indigenous symbols of status such as cloth to denote British acknowledgment of the Raj, the ruling kings of certain Indian provinces. Dean argues

⁵² Ibid, 43.

that the Russians, like the British, used local symbols to denote recognition of honorable natives. Instead of cloth, Russians gave medallions to Tlingits.⁵³ Russians used medallions as signs of acknowledgement for more groups than just the Tlingits, but also with the Aleuts as evident in Figure Four. The Russians crown minted this medallion in 1785 so that it could be given to honorable Aleuts by members of the Billings Expedition. The Russian government, either through the Russian American Company or through other expeditions wanted to express their value for indigenous groups. Although Russians viewed Aleuts and other natives inferior to Russians, they recognized that the colony needed working relations with indigenous communities. By distributing medallions, Russians were attempting to show their recognition towards Aleuts that worked with the Russian system of labor. These tokens only played a small role in the indigenous relations. However, the medallions must have created better relations if they were given out to Tlingits decades after Aleuts.



Figure 4: Medallion Given to Aleuts⁵⁴

⁵³ Jonathan R. Dean, "Uses of the Past" On the Northwest Coast: The Russian American Company and Tlingit Nobility, 1825-1867," *Ethnohistory* 42, no. 2 (1995), 266-285.

⁵⁴ Black, *Atka, an Ethnohistory of the Western Aleutians*, Viii.

By accepting the medallions, Aleuts could have added to their Russian national identity. The above medallion depicts Catherine II, Empress of Russia. In a certain light, Aleut acceptance of the medallion could be seen as acceptance of the Russian government. However, no evidence exists relating how Aleuts felt about the medallion. Was the medallion just seen as a gift or was it a sign of Aleut acceptance of colonial rule? No surviving records specify if Aleuts even knew who Catherine II was. Nevertheless, Aleuts accepted the medallions regardless of their reasons.

During the Russian American Company's administration of Russian America, Aleuts suffered from low pay and poor working conditions. The Aleuts had little power to change their position. However, certain members in the indigenous community attempted to improve circumstances by reporting conditions to company officials. Pribilof workers used Russian channels to ask for a relocation. By using Russian methods to try to modify their position, Aleuts were molding their national identity. The Russian American Company was a Russian institution in which Aleuts played a role. Under the Russian American Company charters, Aleuts were obligated to work for the company. Ironically, these same charters tried to protect Aleuts from abuses.

Religion:

Out of all parts of Russian society brought to Russian America, the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church had the longest and arguably the largest impact on Aleut society. Ironically, early nineteenth century missionary attempts on the Aleutians had longer lasting affects that indigenous conversion in mainland Russia. Due a variety of reasons, including language and education, Aleuts created a strong connection to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Although a limited number of clergy resided in Russian America, the Russian Orthodox Church was able to spread God's word. Prior to the 1820s, when the church sent its first permanent priest to the Aleutians, Aleuts were already familiar with Russian Orthodoxy because of prior sermons by traveling clergy. Often in the late 1700s and early 1800s, Aleut villages did not have a church or chapel to hold ceremonies, so visiting clergy preached under a tent put up in the same place on each Christian ceremony.⁵⁵ Prior to permanent clergy, several priests stopped at Unalaska and baptized many Aleuts. In 1790, Father Vasili Sivtsov, chaplain for the Billings Expedition, performed baptisms and marriages for local Aleuts. Beginning in the summer of 1795, Hieromonk Makarii stayed on Unalaska approximately for a year. In 1807, Hieromonk Gideon, on his way to Kodiak Island, stopped at Unalaska and baptized and married Unalaskan Aleuts. Although none of these Orthodox clergy stayed permanently in the Aleutians, the Aleuts seemed to have received some sort of understanding of Orthodoxy through these visiting clergymen. On August 3rd, 1824, Ioann Veniaminov, the first permanent clergy at Unalaska, blessed the marriage of two Aleuts.⁵⁶ This event occurred just three days after his arrival, a short amount of time to preach Orthodoxy. Therefore, the Aleuts must have had some understanding of Christianity prior to Veniaminov's arrival.

Aleuts accepted Russian Orthodox clergy in their society for a variety of reasons; the church's ability to mix with and assist Aleut leadership became one of the biggest factors. Makarii, the monk that lived with Aleuts in the 1790s, carried a petition from Aleuts

⁵⁵ Bishop Innokentii, "Regulations," June 1, 1843, *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska*, Alaska Church Collection, vol. 1 ([College: s.n.], 1938), 140.

⁵⁶ Saint Metropolitan of Moscow Innokentii, *Journals of the Priest Ioann Veniaminov in Alaska, 1823 to 1836*, The Rasmuson Library Historical Translation Series (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1993), 18.

protesting actions by *promyshlenniki*.⁵⁷ The Russian Orthodox Church could be used as a tool in assisting the Aleuts' fight in obtaining better treatment. The clergy as well as the Aleuts viewed the abuses perpetrated by *promyshlenniki* during the Baranov era. During Baranov's administration of the Russian American Company, he discouraged Russian Orthodox missions for indigenous populations. As recounted by Heiromonk Afanasii, Baranov banned all interactions with natives unless approved by Baranov first, and clergy were supposed to avoid indigenous populations as much as possible.⁵⁸ Clergy viewed Baranov's decisions as restrictive and oppressive. As previously discussed, Baranov felt indigenous workers should only pledge allegiance to the Russian American Company, not Russian Orthodoxy. In the early 1800s, Aleuts were frustrated at the lack company protection by the company, and Orthodox clergymen became aggravated with the lack of assistance the company gave to the church. This communal frustration concerning the administration of the Russian American Company joined the two groups closer together. This connection, combined with other church actions with Aleut leadership, led to Aleut acceptance of Russian Orthodoxy. In the initial years, Aleuts accepted the church because aligning with the clergy strengthened the Aleuts' position. This alliance with the church shaped the Aleuts' indigenous identity a few different ways. First, Russian Orthodox clergy now had to be placed in the Aleut hierarchy. Also, by accepting Orthodox clergy, aspects of Russian Orthodoxy began to enter Aleut religious beliefs.

During his time on the Aleutians, Ioann Veniaminov became closer to the Aleuts than almost any other clergyman in the Aleutians. His views on Aleuts affected both his

⁵⁷Ibid, Xxv.

⁵⁸ Hieromonk Afanasii, "Report Detailing Complaints Against Aleksnadr Baranov," August 1, 1804, in Dmytryshyn and Crownhart-Vaughan, *The Russian American Colonies, 1798-1867: A Documentary Record*, 62-64.

leadership as a priest in the Aleutians (in the 1820s and 1830s) and later as Bishop of the Alaskan Diocese. In his *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District*, Veniaminov commented on the qualities of the Aleuts. He found Aleuts “tireless in work and walking. Aleuts especially astonish with their tirelessness in baidarka travel.” Veniaminov continued by commenting that “They have fine memories and lively imaginations.”⁵⁹ Through these excerpts, Veniaminov’s respect for the Aleuts is evident, and the Aleuts respected Veniaminov in return. Throughout his journals written during his time in the Aleutians, Aleut respect for Veniaminov is repeatedly demonstrated. For example, on May 5, 1827, Veniaminov “was met with obvious joy by each and every person there.”⁶⁰ Aleuts seemed to have accepted Veniaminov for the recognition he showed towards their people.

However, even Veniaminov held negative feelings towards some aspects of Aleut culture. In his *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District*, he describes the work ethic of Aleuts.

The Aleuts are lazy. This must be stated directly without any evasions. Very often one can observe an Aleut who sits doing nothing at all, while he ought to take advantage of the circumstances or the weather. Only in summer, he is somewhat more active but even then no great zeal is seen.⁶¹

Veniaminov also commented on Aleut living conditions.

The Aleuts are rather slovenly. All refuse is thrown out at the entry of the yurta. They prepare food very carelessly. Household utensils are almost never

⁵⁹ Innokentii, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District*, 163-165.

⁶⁰ Innokentii, *Journals of the Priest Ioann Veniaminov in Alaska, 1823 to 1836*, 49.

⁶¹ Innokentii, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District*, 179.

washed. Even in places from where they fetch water for drink and food is frequently disgusting foulness. Children are almost always dirty, soiled, and their hair tangled.⁶²

Like other Russians, Veniaminov commented on what he viewed as the negative aspects of Aleut culture. In Veniaminov's point of view, the Aleuts had an interesting way of life, but at the same time Aleuts needed the Russian Orthodox Church to help fix Aleut ways not up to Russian standards. For Veniaminov, the Aleuts needed the church's help to become a better society. Aleuts probably also held a complex view of Russian society. Some clergy like Veniaminov were very helpful, while other Russians like certain *promyshlenniki* were abusive. Other Russians, like *promyshlenniki*, focused on Aleut barbarity to stress Russian superiority and the necessity of Russian leadership. For some *promyshlenniki*, Aleuts were too primitive to effectively manage their own hunting operations. The attitudes of different groups were very complex and depended on the individual communities.

Veniaminov also played a major role in the Aleut language. However, the Russian Orthodox Church as a whole always endorsed the use of indigenous languages in Russian America. In a *ukase* (imperial proclamation) from the emperor and the Holy Governing Synod (head of the Russian Orthodox Church) on January 10, 1841, the Holy Governing Synod clearly stated regulations concerning language. Clergy needed to learn the native language, translate Holy Scripture into this native language and then teach this translation to at least fifty natives.⁶³ The Russian Orthodox Church recognized that natives understood

⁶² Ibid, 180.

⁶³ Holy Governing Synod to Innokentii, "Ukase of the Emperor," January 10, 1841. *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska. Alaska Church Collection*. Vol. 1 ([College: s.n.], 1938), 134-135.

God's message more clearly if clergy gave sermons and other religious lessons in the native tongue. Until clergy became fluent in the native language, the church would procure an interpreter to travel with the preacher and translate God's message to the church's followers. Before Veniaminov gained a comprehensive knowledge of the Aleut language, he used an interpreter who translated his sermons and lessons to the Aleuts of Unalaska.⁶⁴ The church's utilization of interpreters and emphasis on using native languages not only resulted in a clearer message by natives, but also added to Aleuts' connection to the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Russian Orthodox Church's ideologies on the use of native languages correlated to the foundations of the church. In "Missionary Schools and the Enlightenment of the Alaskan Natives," Erik Young argues that the Russian Orthodox Church was more open to the use of native language due to state connections in the church. The Russian Orthodox Church, as in all the different orthodox churches, uses the state language during religious services, in particular Slavonic. By communicating in the language of the state, followers readily understood the morals and lessons of Orthodox Christianity. In the same light, the Russian Orthodox Church aimed to preach in indigenous languages so that native followers could also receive a clear understanding of Orthodoxy.⁶⁵ This flexibility in language strengthened connections with the indigenous community.

Veniaminov strengthened connections between Aleuts and the Russian Orthodox Church even more by creating the written form the Aleut language. As Veniaminov put it,

⁶⁴ Innokentii, *Journals of the Priest Ioann Veniaminov in Alaska, 1823 to 1836*, 18.

⁶⁵ Erik C. Young, "Missionary Schools and the Enlightenment of the Alaskan Natives: A Theological and Sociological Survey of Russian Orthodox and Protestant Missionary Efforts among the Natives of the Aleutian Islands and Southeastern Alaska" (Thesis/dissertation (deg); Manuscript (mss), 2007), 36.

“Until 1828, the Aleuts possessed neither books, literature, nor a written character.”⁶⁶ During his stay in Unalaska, Veniaminov worked with local leader Ivan Pan’kov to create an Aleut written language that utilized the Cyrillic alphabet as a basis. The process took years to complete. First Veniaminov and Pan’kov had to develop an alphabet then they created a dictionary of Aleut words. In the final step, Veniaminov used the Aleut dictionary to translate scripture into the Aleut language which Pan’kov revised.⁶⁷ Anthropologist Lydia Black argues that the success of the Aleut written form derived from Pan’kov’s contribution to the collaboration. Aleuts respected Pan’kov; therefore, they respected the work he completed.⁶⁸ To create the written form of the Aleut language, Veniaminov relied on native leadership, just as clergy had relied on Aleut leadership previously in becoming a portion of Aleut society.

By creating the written form of the Aleut language, Veniaminov created a permanent link between the Russian Orthodox Church and Aleut identity. As argued by Lydia Black, with the Aleut written form, the church became a vehicle for identity solidarity and maintenance. During the Russian period, Aleuts wanted to keep parts of their traditional culture alive, especially language. The written Aleut language strengthened Aleut indigenous identity.⁶⁹ Even though Veniaminov created Aleut literacy due to his obligation to translate Russian Orthodox scripture into the indigenous language, it meant much more than that to the Aleuts. It added to the uniqueness of the Aleut identity. Aleut writings became another

⁶⁶ Richard Henry Martin Geoghegan, Innokentii Saint, Metropolitan of Moscow, *The Aleut Language: The Elements of Aleut Grammar with a Dictionary in Two Parts Containing Basic Vocabularies of Aleut and English*, ed. Fredericka I. (Washington: Dept. of the Interior, 1944), 18.

⁶⁷ Innokentii, *Journals of the Priest Ioann Veniaminov in Alaska, 1823 to 1836*, 42-44.

⁶⁸ Lydia Black, "Ivan Pan'kov: Architect of Aleut Literacy.," in *An Alaska Anthology: Interpreting the Past* ed. Stephen W. Mangusso Mary Childers Haycox (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 45-46.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 44-45.

example of how Aleuts differed from other communities. The Aleut alphabet became something that Aleuts could pass down through the generations. Even though the Russian Orthodox Church played a significant role in the development of the written language, Aleut literacy added to the Aleuts' indigenous identity, not its national identity.

Russian Orthodoxy added to Aleut identity in many ways beyond language. In *The Transition from Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska*, S. A. Mousalimas argued that the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska purposely utilized syncretism, the mixing of Orthodox and indigenous religions, in order to increase indigenous converts. This thesis does not advocate the idea of a purposeful Russian Orthodox Church syncretism. The Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska incorporated certain aspects of Shamanism, but these changes were to be temporary and were not supposed to result in altered church beliefs. Even though these changes were supposed to be temporary, they lasted for decades, but the intent behind these actions was not syncretism. However, many of the items touched on by Mousalimas are still relevant to this thesis. Even though the ideologies of Aleut Shamanism and Russian Orthodoxy differ drastically, certain rituals and traditions were very similar. In both cultures, icons played a major role in spirituality. In Orthodoxy, icons represent the physical union between the divine and the fallen. Therefore, every Russian Orthodox Church or chapel was required to display a certain number of icons. In Aleut rituals, shamans wore tribal masks that assisted in communications with the spirit world. The position of the shaman and the priests also paralleled. Both assisted their communities to reach the spiritual/holy world.⁷⁰ These parallels between Russian Orthodoxy and Shamanism helped Aleuts to understand

⁷⁰ S. A. Mousalimas, *The Transition from Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995), 31-159.

what it meant to be Orthodox. Nevertheless, these specific similarities existed without clergy modifying church traditions or rituals.

However, clergy did modify some portions of Orthodox beliefs in order to obtain a stronger connection with indigenous converts. As evident in later Tlingit translations of scripture, Veniaminov used words familiar in Shamanism to explain Christian concepts. For example, in Veniaminov's Tlingit translation of scripture, he used *shagoon* to represent god. *Shagoon* originated from *haa shagoon* which represented the ancient spirits and destiny spirits which Tlingits would call upon in times of great need. The concept of a soul translated into *daseikw*, meaning breath or life. Veniaminov used two words to explain sin: *ligaas l'ushke* which in Tlingit meant taboo and evil.⁷¹ Although this relates the Veniaminov's Tlingit translations, and not Aleut translations, it is probable that Veniaminov's Aleut translations also utilized indigenous words to explain Orthodox ideas. Veniaminov used the indigenous words so that natives could obtain a better picture of Christianity; however, the translations resulted in more connections with Shamanistic beliefs. Veniaminov aimed to spread Orthodoxy, but his translations spread a hybrid of Orthodoxy and Shamanism.

Veniaminov's contribution to the conversion of Aleuts extended beyond translations. During his time as Bishop of the Alaskan Diocese, he encouraged other clergy to practice his openness to the traditional culture. Veniaminov believed that all cultures had some good natural laws in place in the society. The indigenous groups should be encouraged to follow these natural laws. He also encouraged missionaries not to be extremely vocal against the polygamy in native society.⁷² Although not all clergy accepted aspects of Aleut culture as

⁷¹ Kan, 134-135.

⁷² Ibid, 104-135.

readily as Veniaminov, this approach resulted in the greatest connection between the Russian Orthodox Church and indigenous Alaskans. In *Memory Eternal*, Kan argues that Tlingits recognized that they could use the Orthodox Church as means of maintaining portions of Tlingit culture. The same line of thought might have occurred to the Aleuts. Aleuts could have recognized that their world was changing, but, by joining the Russian Orthodox Church, certain Aleut customs and traditions could continue. Although no written sources verify if Aleuts recognized this opportunity, aspects of Aleut culture continued with Aleuts' conversion to Orthodoxy.

This connection becomes more visible in light of the situation on the Aleutians under Russian rule. During the first fifty years of Russian contact, the Aleut population decreased by approximately two thirds from pre-contact levels.⁷³ Academics such as Vyacheslav Ivanov argue that syncretism did not occur with the Aleuts because Aleuts of the nineteenth century had changed since Russian contact.⁷⁴ Yes, those of the nineteenth century were different from pre-contact Aleuts, but Ivanov did not factor in Aleut identity. Aleut ethnicity evolved during the Russian colonization of Alaska. By the mid-nineteenth century, Aleut indigenous identity had changed to include Russian Orthodoxy. The Aleut community did not have to include Russian Orthodoxy into its identity, but Aleuts recognized what they could gain in incorporating Orthodoxy.

However, the addition of Orthodoxy to Aleut ethnic identity did not mean the complete removal of Shamanistic beliefs. In 1862, just five years prior to the sale of Alaska, Priest Salamatov commented that many of the Aleuts that drowned in sea otter hunts died

⁷³ Gibson, "Russian Dependence on the Native of Alaska," 25.

⁷⁴ Viacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov, *The Russian Orthodox Church of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands and Its Relation to Native American Traditions: An Attempt at a Multicultural Society, 1794-1912* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1997), 26.

because of their continued faith in the spirits of their mummified ancestors. Aleuts on Atka and Unalaska both still paid homage to their ancestors.⁷⁵ Salamatov's disgust at the continuation of Aleut traditions displays two key elements of Russian Orthodoxy in Russian America. First, Aleuts kept connections to their indigenous spirituality. By paying homage to the mummies, Aleuts attempted to keep the spirits at peace. With this peace, Aleuts felt safer when hunting in treacherous waters. Secondly, the Russian Orthodox Church did not advocate the continuation of these shamanistic beliefs. The Russian Orthodox Church supported the continued leadership of Aleut clergy, but not the continued belief in Shamanism. Aleuts used their power to keep certain Shamanistic beliefs even if the Russian Orthodox Church wanted them to become purely Orthodox.

This evidence of Russian Orthodox clergy frustrations at the continued Shamanistic beliefs of Aleuts strengthens this thesis's position that the Russian Orthodox Church did not purposefully advocate syncretism. The church wanted Aleuts to eventually leave Shamanism totally behind. This argument contradicts the argument in *Orthodox Alaska* where Michael Oleska states that the beliefs of Aleut Shamanism and Russian Orthodoxy were so similar that the two easily mixed together. Oleska found Aleuts spirituality focused on a creator, similar to God and that for Aleuts valued finding the origins of the world.⁷⁶ If the two had mixed so seamlessly together, then Salamatov would not have gotten so frustrated at continued Aleut beliefs.

⁷⁵ Priest Lavranty Salamatov, "Journal for July, 1862 to September 1863," August 26, 1862, *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska, Alaska Church Collection*, Vol. 2 ([College: s.n.], 1938), 17.

⁷⁶ Michael J. Oleska, *Orthodox Alaska: A Theology of Mission* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 1-18.

Education:

During the nineteenth century Aleuts received a free education from Russian Orthodox schools. Beginning in the 1790s and continuing into the early twentieth century, the Russian Orthodox Church established dozens of schools that aimed were to deliver a primary education to Russian American Company offspring and to the indigenous children of Russian America. Although the schools' curriculum emphasized Russian history and culture, Aleut indigenous identity was strengthened their through the multicultural aspects of the classroom.

Aleut education by Russian Orthodox clergy began shortly after permanent clergy arrived in an area. In 1794, a Russian Orthodox school opened on Kodiak Island, just east of the Aleutians.⁷⁷ This school became the first of dozens established by the Russian Orthodox Church in order to educate the children of Russian America. On March 12, 1825, under the leadership of Veniaminov, a school opened in Unalaska to serve all the children of the island.⁷⁸ It seemed to Russian Orthodox clergy that natives better understood Christianity after receiving an education.

With education, the Russian Orthodox Church also tackled language. Even though the teaching of the Holy Scripture served as the main objective, language played a large role in the classroom. Clergy found that a bilingual environment most effectively facilitated learning. Native children were taught Russian, and Russian children learned some of the native languages. The higher the education level a student achieved, the more native

⁷⁷ Ivanov, 26.

⁷⁸ Innokentii, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District*, 23.

languages a student would be taught.⁷⁹ By teaching Russian, teachers pressured students to join the Russian community, but at the same time, Aleut children gained knowledge of the written form of their own language. While education transformed Aleuts' national identity, it strengthened their indigenous identity. By learning the Russian language Aleuts became more of a part of Russian society. Through learning how to write, Aleut children strengthened their connection to their traditional community.

Aleuts also attended because all Russian Orthodox schools were free. The Russian American Company contributed the funds for the construction of school buildings while the church financed school supplies. The Russian American Company's funding for the church was stipulated in its charter. Many of the children educated at these establishments were employees' children.⁸⁰ Free education enticed Aleuts to attend, but it also added parts of Russian society into Aleut communities.

The schools not only taught Russian and native languages, but in many instances schools taught different racial groups in the same classroom setting. Church records indicate year by year how many students attended each school and gender and race of the attendees. The school in Atka educated Russians, Creoles, and Aleuts. In 1843 eleven Creoles and fourteen Aleuts attended the school. In 1850 nine boys and six girls attended.⁸¹ This school strived to teach all races and genders. Creoles attended the same schools as Aleuts and other indigenous groups. Schools in Russian America had integration. Indigenous children were instructed alongside Russian children. This multicultural environment theoretically treated

⁷⁹ Holy Governing Synod to Bishop Innokentii, 26 April 1844, *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska, Alaska Church Collection*. Vol. 2 ([College: s.n.], 1938), 356.

⁸⁰ "Regulations Regarding the Primary Education of Settlers, Approved by the Emperor," Sept 3, 1836, *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska, Alaska Church Collection*. Vol. 2 ([College: s.n.], 1938), 374-348.

⁸¹ Salamatov to Bishop Innokentii, "Report on Atka School Enrollment," May 18, 1851, *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska, Alaska Church Collection*. Vol. 2 ([College: s.n.], 1938), 349.

Aleut children as equal to Creole and Russian children, something never accomplished by the Russian American Company. Also, the continued Aleut attendance seems to show that Aleut parents approved of the school. With an education at a Russian Orthodox school, a student could obtain a skilled job for the Russian American Company or Russian Orthodox Church. Parents continued to send their children for the opportunities at the school. However, the earlier violent actions of other Russians were still in the minds of Aleuts. By attending Russian schools, Aleuts were participating in Russian colonial society; behavior that would not lead Russian violence.

The education of indigenous children and Russian American Company employee children moved well beyond simple Russian and Holy Scripture. These two subjects were extremely important, but clergy also taught other subjects in these schools. The Holy Governing Synod sent the official school curriculum to Russian America in 1844. Russian education had four classes. The first class included reading Russian and Slavic primers, penmanship, singing by notes and Arithmetic part I. The second class taught Russian and Slavic grammar, general and Russian geography, Sacred History, the complete Catechism, more singing by notes and Arithmetic part II. The third and fourth classes advanced beyond primary education. In the third class students studied Rhetoric, Russian Civic History, Elementary Physics, Bible History, Holy Scripture and native languages. The fourth class aimed to train students how to enter the clergy. Dogmatic, Moral and Ministerial theology were studied. The History of the Russian Church and medicine were also discussed.⁸² In missionary school out in the Aleutians, the curriculum did not extend to the advanced level, but children still received education. In Unalaska, Veniaminov tested students on Russian

⁸² Holy Governing Synod to Bishop Innokentii, April 26, 1844, *Documents*, 356-357.

grammar and reading, mathematics up to decimals and fractions, and Divine Law.⁸³ This education added more elements of Russian society in Russian America. It also strengthened the connection between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Aleuts. By attending Orthodox schools, Aleuts could find better career opportunities.

Conclusions:

During the Russian colonization of Alaska, Aleuts had a variety of roles depending on the amount of control they maintained. During the initial decades of Russian contact Aleuts held the majority of power in the trading relationships in some locations. At times Aleuts violently resisted incoming *promyshlenniki*. In other instances, Aleuts willingly traded for Russian goods. However, by the nineteenth century, Aleuts had lost the majority of power to the Russian American Company. By the 1860s, Aleuts had become accustomed to living under Russian rule. They attempted to work within the Russian system, as seen with official complaints, in order to improve their position.

In religion, Aleuts had more control over changes to their lifestyle. Aleuts converted to Russian Orthodoxy because of its similarities in rituals and icons. Although no Aleut sources explain from an Aleut point of view why they converted, it seems presumable that they viewed the Russian Orthodox Church as tool in maintaining and evolving their ethnic identity. By aligning with the Russian Orthodox Church, Aleuts strengthened their position in society. When Aleuts complained of abuse their word was reinforced by Orthodox clergy. Aleuts gained the written form of Aleut language from the church. They also found Orthodox clergy to some extent open to Aleut traditional leadership and customs. Although the Russian Orthodox Church did not intend to create a long lasting Alaskan Orthodoxy that mixed with

⁸³ Innokentii, *Journals of the Priest Ioann Veniaminov in Alaska, 1823 to 1836, 104-135.*

Shamanism, Aleuts, as seen with ancestral mummies, kept both aspects of Orthodoxy and Shamanism.

During this period, Aleuts created a national identity and altered their ethnic identity. Although with the lack of sources, it is difficult to exactly state how Aleuts felt about being a portion of the Russian state. By the 1860s, Aleuts had come to terms with living under Russian colonial rule. Aleuts probably considered themselves to be more Aleut than Russian, but still recognized their position in Russian American society. The Russian period had a larger effect on Aleut ethnic identity. Beginning in the 1820s, Aleuts had a unique written language. Aleuts converted to Russian Orthodoxy, but still kept some Shamanistic beliefs. By 1867, Aleuts had a weak Russian national identity and an altered ethnic identity.

Chapter Four: American Policies of Conquest prior to Alaska

Alaska is often called America's last frontier. With the United States' purchase of Alaska in 1867, Alaska became the final area of land in North America to become a part of the United States. At the time of purchase, the United States had only declared its independence less than a century prior. From 1776 until 1867, the American government and society evolved from a loose confederation of Atlantic coast states to a nation spanning the width of the North American continent. During this period Americans from all parts of society experienced encounters with indigenous societies. In particular, government officials moved from using British policies to creating uniquely American indigenous policies. American settlers constantly pushed west and continually encroached on indigenous lands and traders established connections with indigenous groups. Members of clergy established missions in order to convert Native Americans to Christianity. All of these types of individuals learned from their experiences with indigenous groups. These interactions shaped the attitudes and actions of Americans. When they entered the Aleutians, prior relations and experiences in the American West altered how Americans acted towards Aleuts. This chapter examines how America's push across the frontier shaped its presence in the Aleutians.

Even though many similarities occurred between early American development in Alaska and the American frontier, several differences made the situation in Alaska unique. First, prior to the purchase of Alaska, virtually no Americans lived in the region. In all other regions acquired by the United States, American settlers and traders entered the area prior to official rule. The encroachment by American settlers in the contiguous United States never happened in Alaska. One of the greatest differences in government relations with Alaskan Natives and other Native Americans had to do with treaties. By the time the United States

began relations with Alaskan indigenous groups, the government banned the making of any more treaties with native tribes, a major tool used in negotiations with dozens of other Native American groups. Much of the policies of the United States government during the decades prior the purchase of Alaska changed due to new liberal ideas on Indian policy. Also, when missionaries and other Americans entered the Aleutians, they encountered an Aleut population accustomed to colonial rule.¹ Even though many Native Americans had previous contact with Spanish, French or British colonizers, Aleuts experienced Russian pressures for over one hundred years, including Russian Orthodoxy. These differences created a unique situation in Alaska.

By the time Americans reached Alaska, government officials, clergy, and settlers all had experienced contact with Native Americans. Although interactions with indigenous Alaskans were different than experiences between other Native Americans and American society, the pattern of experiences by government officials, settlers, and church missionaries all affected the treatment of Alaskan Natives. The United States government utilized treaties to define land boundaries. At the same time, American settlers constantly encroached on native lands, while traders and hunters learned how to effectively trade and interact with natives. The Methodist Church and other denominations had established missions with many different Native American tribes before reaching Alaskan Natives. When Americans began to move into Alaska, individuals from various parts of society all utilized previous knowledge of indigenous responses obtained during Western expansion.

Governmental Policies and Actions:

When the United States government began to implement policies concerning Alaskan Natives, previous events and negotiations affected the government's decision making

¹ Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 159-165.

process. The United States held a variety of opinions concerning different North American tribes, but often the United States tried to protect indigenous lands. Through decades of expansion, the United States government learned that it could set policies pertaining to the protection of Native American lands, but enforcement continually failed due to a persistent disregard by American settlers and traders. Throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the United States government would hold one opinion on indigenous lands, and settlers would hold another. Often, the United States government aimed to protect Native Americans. However, American settlers would ignore governmental policies and laws and take lands regardless of the government's wishes.² For example, beginning during British colonial rule and continuing into American rule, Shawnee continually had to give tribal lands to incoming American Settlers. In 1775, a Shawnee chief stated, "We are often inclined to believe there is no resting place for us and that your intentions were to deprive us entirely of our whole Country."³ For Native Americans, the government might have said they were protecting indigenous people and lands; actual events told a different story.

When the United States government began setting policies concerning Native Americans, many of these early policies and ideologies continued stances held during English colonization. Although the American Revolution resulted in a certain amount of change, many government policies stayed the same. During British rule, the British envisioned colonization as a process of replacing Native American landowners with white

² Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1780-1834* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 4.

³ Donna L. Akers, "Removing the Heart of the Choctaw People: Indian Removal from a Native Perspective " in *The American Indian: Past and Present*, ed. Roger L. Nichols (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 125-136.

settlers.⁴ Americans continued this ideology; they considered themselves superior to indigenous populations. Although some settlers took native wives, the majority of indigenous people and culture were considered too inferior to mix with. This idea of racial and cultural superiority would continue throughout the Western expansion of the United States.

During the initial years of British colonization, Britain had difficulties in administering an effective Indian policy. As Americans would later discover, trade with indigenous groups and settlement of indigenous lands were difficult to regulate. For several decades, the British government attempted to improve policies that would curb abuses to natives and make trade more efficient. Traders notoriously used alcohol to get natives intoxicated, so that natives would make better offers to the trader. The government banned the trade of alcohol; however, the alcohol trade persisted and traders continued to dominate relations. Beginning in 1707, the British government required fur traders to obtain trading licenses. However it took another fifty years before the British government recognized the major inhibiting factor to trade abuses: each colony held its own policies pertaining to Native American relations. In 1755, the British government appointed a superintendent of Indian Affairs, an office with power over all colonies.⁵ The British government struggled with Native American policies for the majority of its rule of the thirteen colonies. Native American groups suffered from exploitation and encroachment while Britain attempted to find effective policies. Native Americans would again suffer while the United States dealt with creating and implementing Native American policies.

⁴ Prucha, 5.

⁵ Ibid, 9-13.

George III formalized Native American policies with the Proclamation of 1763. The British government realized that many indigenous conflicts occurred due to colonial encroachment. With the proclamation, the government established a distinct boundary between colonized and indigenous lands. Before 1763, no clear boundary differentiated between Indian and white lands. The proclamation encouraged settlement on newly acquired lands, but prohibited any colonial action past the boundary. It also empowered law enforcement to seize settlers in Indian country. Although the proclamation failed to stop all encroachment on indigenous lands, it attempted to create a more orderly process of Western expansion.⁶ The Proclamation Line, although not a permanent boundary, set important precedents in governmental policies. For the first time, the government recognized indigenous rights; Native Americans controlled Indian Territories. Also, the British government aimed to protect indigenous groups from encroaching settlers. Even though American settlers resisted the proclamation, Native Americans recognized the British government's attempt to protect them. With America's independence, British protection and respect for indigenous groups no longer mattered. The Proclamation Line and other British policies disappeared with independence, opening the West to expansion.

When the United States declared independence from Britain, America's founding fathers attempted to continue aspects of Britain's Indian policy, but Americans were ill-equipped to do so. The United States government aimed to become the new protectors of Native Americans, filling the void left by the British. By protecting indigenous lands, the United States could ensure friendlier relations with indigenous groups. However, the United

⁶ Ibid, 13-15.

States was powerless to stop encroachment.⁷ In the last decades of the eighteenth century, the United States government struggled just to act as a nation; it did not have a strong presence to stop settlers from moving west. For indigenous groups, especially those on the east coast, American independence was a disaster. Americans could not halt the ever increasing number of settlers invading indigenous lands. The American government's continued promises of protection and continued failures affected relations with Native Americans. Indigenous groups became wary of American promises.

However, the United States government did not try to protect all indigenous communities. The Shawnees, the indigenous people living in portions of the Ohio valley and the Carolinas, did not want to be included in any sort of British or American system. They wanted to live as an independent nation. During the American Revolution, Shawnees remained neutral. Once Americans won independence Shawnees continued to violently fight for their tribal homelands. Although portions of the Shawnee, especially in the South, gave into American rule, the Ohio Shawnee continued to fight until the 1790s. Thomas Jefferson became so frustrated with the Ohioan Shawnee that he thought Shawnee needed to be either exterminated or forcibly removed from their lands.⁸ Even though the United States government attempted to create a protecting image, the government did not consider all Native American tribes worthy of American protection. The United States had ulterior motives in indigenous relations.

Besides the idea of a protector, the American government utilized other policies developed during British colonial rule. By giving Congress the power to create laws to

⁷ Ibid, 27-35.

⁸ Colin G. Calloway, "'We Have Always Been the Frontier:' The American Revolution in Shawnee Country," in *The American Indian: Past and Present*, ed. Roger L. Nichols (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 188-120.

regulate trade, the United States government attempted to avoid abuses by white traders. With land policy, the government sought to limit expansion into Indian territories; only the federal government could purchase Native American lands. Beginning in the 1790s, the government appointed a Superintendent of Indian Matters. Among other duties, the superintendent was responsible for handing out or revoking licenses to trade. However, by 1818, only twenty five agents worked primarily on Native American relations. This number of agents was inadequate for the size of indigenous populations at the time. In 1803, these overworked agents had more to do over the Louisiana Purchase.⁹ The Louisiana Purchase added thousands of acres of land, but more importantly, it led to interactions with many more indigenous groups. The United States correctly focused power in policies concerning Indians at the federal level. Also, the government recognized the previous failures of the British government and attempted to implement British policies that seemed to have worked. The government's trade regulations were well intentioned, but again unenforceable. With the vastness of Alaska, government agents would again have problems regulating trade and land use.

Since the beginning of the United States, the government believed that Native Americans needed to be civilized; however, government aid to bring civilization to indigenous groups only began in the 1820s. In the nineteenth century, Americans, along with European powers, believed that white society was blessed with civilization and had a responsibility to spread civilization to the savage indigenous groups of the New World. This idea that Americans needed to civilize the Native Americans began at the Continental Congress in 1776 when America's founding fathers wrote of this civilizing responsibility in a

⁹ Prucha, 45-53.

formal doctrine. However, the government provided little financial help for this cause until 1819 when Congress began appropriating \$10,000 annually for indigenous education through missionary work.¹⁰ Beginning in the 1820s, dozens of indigenous groups succumbed to the pressure to civilize by choosing to leave indigenous culture behind and to accept American culture. This civilizing process would be felt by the Aleuts beginning in the 1890s when the Jesse Lee Home began operations at Unalaska.

For nineteenth century Americans, indigenous education did not civilize Native Americans quickly and effectively enough, and only removal ensured indigenous acceptance of American civilization. If a Native American lived in his tribal homeland, it was more difficult to fully accept American ways. In order to better accept civilization, Native Americans needed to move away from tribal homelands. This positive view of indigenous removal aligned with Western expansion. Lands once belonging to indigenous tribes were opened to American settlement. Although presidential administrations since Thomas Jefferson advocated removal, the Jackson administration facilitated the removal of Native Americans. Beginning in 1827, Jackson proposed a Congressional bill authorizing the forced removal of indigenous groups. Although initially rejected by members of Congress, the Indian Removal Act became law in 1830.¹¹ Although officials could argue that removal helped Native Americans accept civilization, this seemed to be an excuse for western settlement. With formerly Native American lands empty, the government welcomed American settlers. Even though policies with Alaskan natives differed from negotiations with other groups, the government would gradually confiscate indigenous lands in Alaska.

¹⁰ Ibid, 214-221.

¹¹ Ibid, 223-232.

The forceful removal of Native Americans found a strong ally with the Jackson administration, but timing also played a role when removal occurred. Prior to 1800, many indigenous groups including the Choctaw maintained considerable control over their lands. With an increase in American settlement and a decrease in indigenous population due to disease, Americans eventually gained control over indigenous populations and lands. For example, in the early nineteenth century, the Choctaw attempted to appease Americans by ceding certain lands to settlers and allying with the United States military in the War of 1812. However, the government had enough power in the 1830s to forcibly move the Choctaw west.¹² The Jackson administration has become synonymous with removal, when in reality, the early 1800s was a time when American power grew while Native American power weakened.

Although ideas concerning America's Manifest Destiny began before Indian Removal, the government's participation in the movement grew substantially in the decades following removal. In 1832, over 20,000 land patents were approved by President Andrew Jackson. However, even this large number did not sufficiently document American western migration. During this time, the government realized that policies and laws needed to comply with the unstoppable push of Western expansion. Attempts at protecting indigenous land continually failed, and the government needed a more effective system. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act which aimed to reward yeoman farmers with western homesteads with a minimum of 160 acres.¹³ In the decades prior to the United States' purchase of Alaska, the American government recognized that they could not stop

¹² Akers, 127-138.

¹³ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1987), 59-63.

American expansion and implemented policies that complemented western development. The American government no longer served as a protector of indigenous lands and rights, but rather as an advocating force for American expansion.

American Settlers and Traders:

American settlers and traders always held their own opinions on Western expansion. As described by Patricia Limerick in *The Legacy of Conquest*, settlers and entrepreneurs thought of themselves as innocent Americans who lived how they were meant to: "Even when they were trespassers, westering Americans were hardly, in their own eyes, criminals: rather they were pioneers."¹⁴ For Anglo-American settlers and traders, it was Manifest Destiny; it was their god-given right to take western lands and profit from them. This ideology plagued relations with Native American. With the Homestead Act and other pro-settlement policies, American settlers become more confident in their position.

Before pioneers established homesteads in Indian territories, traders had established relationships with indigenous groups. As in Siberia, traders entered the region before settlers arrived in hopes of making profits. For Americans traders and entrepreneurs, western lands represented furs, farmlands, timber and minerals. The American West was a land filled with profits and Natives Americans were the "pests" that traders had to work with in order to achieve wealth.¹⁵ To obtain valuable furs and other good, indigenous groups were the means the traders had to use to get wealth. Some traders would follow the policies of the set by the government, but due to the vastness of the frontier, traders could usually do as they pleased. Traders continually sold alcohol to indigenous groups even though both the British and

¹⁴ Ibid, 36.

¹⁵ Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 96-98.

American governments had banned the sale of alcohol. Also, unlicensed traders plagued indigenous relations. The majority of indigenous complaints concerning trade involved unlicensed traders.¹⁶ To American traders, indigenous groups functioned as a means to an end. Traders needed to work with indigenous groups to obtain furs and other items; when domination brought better profits, traders would use force, creating an animosity between the two groups.

Trade with Americans resulted in changes to indigenous ways of life. Prior to European and American contact, Native Americans traded with other indigenous groups. However, with the introduction of American and European goods, Native Americans altered their material culture. Through decades of trade with Europeans and Americans, indigenous groups became dependent on European and American finished goods. Trade also led to alterations in indigenous social stratifications. As demonstrated with the Pawnee, tribal chiefs grew in importance. Chiefs became the only individuals in a tribe that could trade with American traders. This monopoly on trade elevated the status of chiefs from a valued member of the clan to a person above the rest of the group.¹⁷ Many individuals participated in trade with other native groups. With American trade relations only chiefs traded with Americans, thus elevating their status. Even though American traders demonstrated obvious racism towards indigenous groups, Native Americans were obliged to continue the relationships. Indigenous groups became too dependent on American goods to live without them. Also, chiefs that had gained social status through trade relationships did not want to relinquish it. In trading relations, Americans held a dominant position over indigenous groups. Dominance by American traders would continue in Alaska.

¹⁶ Prucha, 70-75.

¹⁷ White, *The Roots of Dependency*, 42-44.

Religious Missions:

Religious freedom is one of the basic rights for every American citizen. Ironically, during American expansion, only Christianity, not indigenous religions, allowed Native Americans to become civilized, or so the government and missionaries preached. To Americans, Native Americans were not civilized until they left traditional customs for American ways. In the United States, many different religious denominations established missions in Indian territories. The government and American society in general advocated the conversion of Native Americans as long as it was a denomination of Christianity. Although many different Christian denominations organized missions for Native Americans all around the United States, only the Methodist Church reached the Aleutian Islands. Only in the past fifty years have religious denominations other than Russian Orthodoxy and Methodism established churches in the region. Therefore, the formation of the Methodist ideologies towards indigenous conversion is extremely important to this thesis. The Methodist Church's missionary activities working with Native Americans all across the United States molded the ideologies and missionary tactics used in the Aleutians. To understand the formation of these ideologies, the following examines the foundations of Methodist activities prior to the it's Alaskan mission.

Unlike the Russian Orthodox Church, which had formed hundreds of years prior to Russia's colonization of Alaska, the Methodist Church only became an independent denomination in 1784, a mere century before Methodist missionaries entered the Aleutians. The Methodist Church sprung from John Wesley's rejuvenation of the Church of England in 1738. Wesley believed that the Church of England lacked enthusiasm; Christianity was a

social religion that should not focus solely on the individual. Most importantly, Wesley preached that Jesus died for everyone's sins, even for the sick and poor. He also believed that all people, no matter their social standing, needed education to better understand Christianity.¹⁸ Wesley's ideas concerning education for all clashed with society at the time, where only the rich received an education. Overall, Methodism aimed for its congregation to look beyond class issues and accept everyone into the church. By believing all human are worthy of saving, Native American had just as much of a right to convert to Christianity as any other individual. Although Methodist missionaries would convey prejudices against indigenous culture, indigenous people were welcome to join the Methodist faith.

During the early years, missionary work and Methodism were inseparable. Wesley and his followers traveled all over Great Britain encouraging followers of the Church of England to join societies that energized their Christian beliefs. Until 1784, Methodism was not a new faith, but rather a part of the Church of England. Methodist leaders traveled to different parts of Great Britain spreading the idea that by joining a Methodist society, a person could better understand Christianity. When British populations began to immigrate to the New World, Wesley sent missionaries there beginning in 1769. These missionaries served as organizers of Methodist society. By 1773, the Methodist movement had ten missionaries in the New World.¹⁹ Methodism kept the same beliefs, even the same scripture, as the Church of the England. Prior to 1784, Methodism served more as a social organization than a denomination. In colonial times, Methodists were missionaries for the Church of England, not clergy for a separate denomination. However, these missionary beginnings

¹⁸ Wade Crawford Coplestone J. Tremayne Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions*, 4 vols., vol. I (New York: Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1949), Xxiii-xxi.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 72-96.

created a consistent pattern of mission activities within the Methodist Church. Although the Russian Orthodox Church had existed as a separate institution for much longer, missionary activities did not serve as a core of church activities as it have in the Methodist community. Even though Methodism had a stronger connection to missionary activities, Russian Orthodoxy continued to be the main religious institution for the Aleuts.

Even though Methodist ideologies accepted all types of individuals, Native American missions did not become a portion of Methodist work until the government announced funding for missionary schools for Native Americans. Prior to the 1820s, Native Americans joined the Church in small numbers. Although Native Americans could join the Methodist church, the church did not attempt to send missionaries into indigenous territories until the government offered assistance. In 1820, the Methodist Church organized its first Native American mission, directed at Wyandot in present day Michigan. Over time the Methodist Church would organize missions for dozens of indigenous tribes. Initially, missions were located on the east coast, but by the 1840s Methodist missions spanned the width of the United States. Through this experience, the Methodist Church learned what to expect from indigenous groups and how to adapt missions from Anglo-American converts to Native American. Because they interacted with the same indigenous communities prior to and after removal, Methodist missionaries understood resentment felt by indigenous groups. Also, the Methodist Church suffered from a lack of willing missionaries to fill positions in western missions such as at the Kansas mission.²⁰ This difficulty in finding clergy would also occur in Alaska. In general, the further removed from mainstream America, the less willing clergy became.

²⁰ Crawford, *History of Methodist Missions*, 4 vols., vol. II (New York: Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1949), 133-124, 173.

More importantly, Methodists perfected educational techniques. Methodist missions advocated for boarding schools instead of day schools because at boarding school missionaries could regulate attendance.²¹ In day schools, parents could more readily pull children from the mission schools if they disagreed with the civilizing methods used. In boarding schools, parents had less access. Although, the Methodist Church's mission of civilizing indigenous groups stayed the same from the early missions to Alaskan schools, church ideologies and methods changed due to previous experiences in the western United States.

Conclusions:

To conclude, the experiences of Americans in the western frontier, although not exactly the same as in Alaska, shaped the ideologies and actions of American government officials, settlers, and clergy. The unstoppable western movement of the American settler had the largest impact. Ideas of Manifest Destiny continued in Alaska, American settlers in Alaska still felt it was their God-given right to take indigenous lands. The actions of the government demonstrate this unstoppable force. The government tried to appear as the protector of indigenous lands and rights, but after years of ineffective policies, the government changed its stance. With Indian removal and the Homestead Act, the government attempted to provide policies that encouraged the unstoppable spread of Western expansion. American traders used their dominant position to obtain sizable profits from indigenous groups of the American West and continued this domination in Alaska.

Also during this formative time, the Methodist Church developed as a separate denomination that accepted all people no matter their race or class. Beginning in the 1820s, the church established several missions with different indigenous groups from many areas of

²¹ *Ibid*, 272-273.

the United States. The Methodist Church learned from these previous missions and utilized this knowledge, such as the preference of boarding schools, in its missions in the Aleutians.

By the time the United States bought Alaska, the United States and its people had developed a system of relations with indigenous groups. Unlike Russia, which had developed relations with indigenous groups over hundreds of years, the United States and its people experienced something new with Western expansion.

Chapter Five: Aleuts in American Society: 1867-1941

The Aleuts have experienced significant changes to their culture. The Aleuts first came in contact with European society in the 1740s with the introduction of Russian culture. In 1867, the United States purchased Alaska. Even before the European and American conquest, the Aleut culture evolved over time. Aleuts adapted their way of life to the situation at the time. During both Russian and American rule, Aleuts altered their culture to deal with the situation at hand. This chapter will focus on Aleut cultural changes under American rule from its purchase in 1867 to the United States' entrance in World War II. During this time, the amount of power the Aleuts held over these changes depended on which aspect of culture was altered. In trade and industry, the Aleuts took part in the growing American economy. This participation dramatically altered Aleut material culture and the type of employment available to Aleuts. These changes occurred because of the Aleuts' power to contribute to the American economy. In religion and education, Aleuts maintained more traditional aspects of their culture. This study examines the complex influences resulting in changes to different aspects of Aleut culture during the initial American period. In order to profit from the American economy, Aleuts accepted certain changes to their daily lives. Through the Russian Orthodox Church, Aleuts sustained control over the amount of alteration that occurred to their religious beliefs.

This thesis utilizes and adds to the arguments of several academics. This study will expand on issues of race examined by Dorothy Jones in *Aleuts in Transition*. In *Alaska: An American Colony* Stephen Haycox argued that American migration occurred due to the prospect of economic opportunities. This migration will be demonstrated in my paper with the growth of the cannery industry in the Aleutians. In *Memory Eternal*, Sergei Kan argued

that the Tlingit, the indigenous group residing in the southeastern panhandle of Alaska, and the Russian Orthodox Church had two very different reasons for conversion. The Orthodox Church aimed to have Tlingits convert and join Russian culture while the Tlingits used the Orthodox faith as a means of connecting and keeping portions of their traditional culture, land, and resources.¹ My argument is similar to Kan's, but I will study the conversion of the Aleuts, not the Tlingits. Also, the Aleuts reside over a thousand miles away from the area inhabited by the Tlingits. This distance and cultural differences meant that the situation pertaining to conversion of natives in the Aleutians was similar, but not identical.

This Aleuts became a portion of the United States with its 1867 purchase of Alaska. However, the initial governing of Alaska placed the United States government in a unique situation. Unlike in other territories such as Texas and Oregon, no American settlers resided in Alaska before its purchase. The American government normally determined what a territory needed by examining the American population. In 1867 Alaska, the population consisted of indigenous groups, Russians, and Creoles (the ethnic mixture of Russians and natives). At this point in time, interior sections of Alaska were unmapped; Alaska seemed more like the land explored by Lewis and Clark than a settled territory. Also, 1867 was just a few years after the United States' Civil War, so the United States was financially broke. When the Board of Indian Commissioners asked the Bureau of Indian Affairs to include Alaskan natives into its government programs, the Bureau rejected the offer citing financial issues.²

¹ Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), Xix-xiv.

² Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 175-179.

In 1871, the difficulties when dealing with Alaskan natives were expanded by Congress's decision to ban further treaties with any indigenous groups in the United States. This ban, based on liberal ideologies, strained relations with all indigenous groups, but especially hindered relations with Alaskan natives. Although treaties were not always kept, a treaty served as a legal method of negotiation between indigenous groups and the government. Before 1871, indigenous groups in Alaska did not agree to any treaties with the United States government.³ Neither the United States government nor Alaskan natives could use treaties to negotiate land issues. Relations between indigenous Alaskans and the United States government were unknown territory for either side. The United States could not rely on previous treaties as none existed.

For Alaskan indigenous groups, dealing with a settler-style empire like the United States was a new experience. During the Russian period, the Russian population of the colony had always stayed relatively low. The population reached over seven hundred for only two years, with most years averaging two or three hundred Russian colonizers.⁴ The migration of thousands of Americans to Alaska must have caused indigenous groups to rethink their place in society. US Census records demonstrate that, in 1880, 32,996 Native Americans and only 424 non-natives resided in Alaska. By 1910, the number of Native Americans in Alaska had dropped to 25,331, while the number of non-natives had increased to 39,025.⁵ Census data is not always accurate, but an increase by the thousands of settlers in thirty years must have significantly altered traditional indigenous ways of life. These

³ Ibid, 178.

⁴ S. G. Fedorova, *The Population of Russian America (1799-1867): The Russian Population of Alaska and California* (Fairbanks, University of Alaska, 1973), 2-6.

⁵ William Chamberlin Hunt et al., *Indian Population in the United States and Alaska. 1910* (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1915), 1.

numbers demonstrate the growth of the Alaskan population as whole. This rapid increase in Alaska's population, as argued by Haycox in *Alaska: An American Colony* occurred because of several reasons. For thousands of gold prospectors, Alaska was a stop on the path to the Yukon. Others came to Alaska for forestry, coal and copper mining.⁶ In *Aleuts in Transition*, Dorothy Martin found evidence that in the Aleutians, salmon canneries, fishing, and hunting drew people from all over the world. Along with Americans, Scandinavians, Japanese, and Chinese workers all immigrated during the beginning of the twentieth century to the Aleutians for fishing and other related employment.⁷ With the introduction of the frontier-based settler society in Alaska, the Aleuts, as with other Alaska indigenous groups had to adjust to this growing outsider population, which in turn led to a reshaping of indigenous identity.

Alterations due to Industry and Trade:

One major adjustment made by Aleuts and other indigenous groups in Alaska concerned trade. During the Russian period, the Russian government had restricted the type of items traded to indigenous groups in hopes of limiting the amount of European customs they adopted.⁸ In contrast, the American government took a *laissez faire* approach to trade. American stores could trade all types of goods to the indigenous people of Alaska. Aleuts began to shift to residing in frame houses instead of traditional *barabaras* (sod houses). Inside their frame houses, Aleuts would keep other Americans items bought at American trading stores including clothes, toys, guns and ammunition, steel fishing equipment, and

⁶ Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 166.

⁷ Dorothy Miriam Jones, *Aleuts in Transition: A Comparison of Two Villages* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 24-25.

⁸ Kan, 113-120.

other modern goods.⁹ This open trade policy led to massive changes in Aleut material culture. However, even though differences in governmental regulations allowed this insertion of American goods into Aleut homes, the Aleuts made the decision to buy these items. The United States government did not force Aleuts to buy all of the newly available goods; the individual Aleut bought the items. Aleuts were shaping their national identity by including these items into their daily lives. With these purchases, Aleuts become just like every other American citizens that purchased American finished goods to improve their daily life. As argued by Warren, indigenous groups had two identities: an ethnic identity and a national identity. This transition to American goods may have altered the Aleuts' indigenous identity, but it helped to create their national identity.

The United States government attempted to limit the trade of only one item: alcohol. In previously settled Native American territories, the government found that, without prohibition, areas with indigenous populations suffered from alcohol abuse and an overall immoral behavior. With the Customs Act of 1868 and the designation of Alaska as an "Indian Country" in 1873, the United States government banned the importation and sale of alcohol in Alaska. However, attempts to ban alcohol in the territory failed due to moonshining and smuggling.¹⁰ The American government was not alone in its struggle to rein in alcohol use. During Russian colonization, the Russian government also had problems controlling alcohol. American and British traders would illegally trade alcohol to indigenous groups, especially with the Tlingit.¹¹ However, alcohol abuse seems to have peaked during

⁹ Jones, 22.

¹⁰ Haycox, 180.

¹¹ A. V. Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America, 1741-1867 / Uniform Title: Indeitsy Tlinkity V Period Russkoi Ameriki, 1741-1867 Gg. English* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 94-100.

the American period. Public drunkenness became a common occurrence. Priest Tikhon Shalamov gave the following description in his 1895 journal:

The chief vice and misfortune of the Aleuts, here as in other villages, is drunkenness with the inseparable companion –lechery. The Karluk Aleuts do not brew such beer and brandy. They buy from the Chinese so called ‘shamsha,’ which they import from San Francisco with government permission. Women drink just as much as men and thus prepare grounds for fornication.¹²

Shalamov’s account documents how even isolated regions of the Aleutians succumbed to alcohol abuse. Also, if Chinese immigrants attained permission to bring certain alcohol into the Aleutians, the government probably also gave others permission to bring in alcohol. When studying Shalamov’s comments, we need to understand his feeling towards Aleuts. Earlier in this journal entry, Shalamov described Aleuts as dirty for living in mud huts.¹³ Overall, Shalamov’s comments help to give insight into alcohol use during the period. The United States government was ineffective in controlling the spread of alcohol. However, material items and alcohol only represented a portion of changes to Aleut culture.

With a new government and new technologies, new industries entered into the Aleutians, particularly salmon canneries and fisheries. During the Russian period, limitations of technology and the isolation of the Aleutians led to limited salmon fishing in the Aleutians. However, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the process of preserving salmon through canning was perfected. At the same time, the transportation infrastructure in Alaska improved. Once salmon from the Aleutians arrived on the mainland, it could be

¹² Tikhon Shalamov, “Travel Journal of Priest Tikhon Shalamov of Kodiak,” June 26, 1895. *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska. Alaska Church Collection*. Vol. 2 ([College: s.n.], 1938), 84.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 84.

shipped by rail line.¹⁴ In 1878, the first salmon cannery in Alaska opened a few miles outside of Sitka. In 1889, the Karluk cannery canned over three million fish in a single year.¹⁵ Karluk is a community on Kodiak Island, just east of the Aleutians. The indigenous group at Karluk is the Koniaq, but the same economic transition at Karluk was also felt by residents all over Alaska. This economic shift altered Aleut fishing from a community activity to an individually-centered wage labor system. The Aleut community had exchanged pelts or other goods for money, but this American fishery and cannery industry exacerbated Aleut dependence on a wage labor system.

Also, before the explosion of salmon fisheries and canneries in Alaska, salmon had been considered a sacred animal. The spiritual connection between the salmon and the Aleut ended when salmon became financially profitable.¹⁶ For the Russian Orthodox Priest Shalamov, "The cannery, depriving the Aleuts of everything, of their souls and bodies, does not give anything in return except whiskey, lewdness, and syphilis."¹⁷ The introduction of canneries to Alaska brought changes to Aleut ways of life. Shalamov's description of the canneries was extremely negative. To some degree, the cannery probably brought some sinful habits to the Aleuts. What is more important, Aleuts altered their traditional beliefs concerning certain animals.

During the American period until 1911, the Pribilof Islands (the islands of St. George and St. Paul) were the only islands to have significant governmental regulations on hunting

¹⁴ Lydia A. Black, Pierce Richard, Katherine L. Arndt, and Sarah McGowan, *The History and Ethnohistory of the Aleutians East Borough*, Alaska History (Kingston, Ont.: Fairbanks, Alaska, 1999), 214-215.

¹⁵ Ted C. Hinckley, *The Americanization of Alaska, 1867-1897* (Palo Alto: Calif., Pacific Books, 1972), 123-128.

¹⁶ Haycox, 166.

¹⁷ Tikhon Shalamov, "Travel Journal of Priest Tikhon Shalamov," July 30, 1898, *Documents*, 87.

allotments and the treatment and pay of indigenous workers. The Pribilof Islands are not a portion of the Aleutians; they are located farther north. During the Russian period, the Russian American Company relocated Aleuts to St. George and St. Paul for hunting purposes. When the United States bought Alaska, the relocated Aleuts continued to reside on the Pribilof Islands. Like the Russians, the American government recognized that in order to have successful hunting businesses, the Aleut population was necessary. In order to effectively administer these islands, the United States government would rent each island either to the American Commercial Company or the North American Commercial Company. Along with paying rent, the company had to pay Aleut workers a wage and provide provisions such as food and coal. In 1894, the North American Commercial Company rented the Pribilof Islands for \$60,000 and provided indigenous workers with eighty tons of coal, along with supplies of salmon and salt.¹⁸ The United States government attempted to regulate the Pribilof Islands so that both the American industries and indigenous workers could profit, but the system did not work as neatly as the United States had intended.

Fur seal hunting was extremely profitable. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, annual revenues from the Pribilof Islands were six times greater than the cost of running all governmental services in Alaska. However statistics given in George Roger's "An Economic Analysis of the Pribilof Islands, 1870-1946," reveal that indigenous labor only received 3.3% of the profits. While Aleuts used their indigenous techniques to hunt fur seals, Americans and people of other nationalities played other roles in the process. The

¹⁸ *North American Commercial Co. v. United States*, 171 U.S. 110, 18 S. Ct. 817, 43 L. Ed. 98, 1898 U.S. LEXIS 1592 (1898) 1-2.

Aleuts, even with their small wages, were proud to use their skills.¹⁹ Alaskan Commercial Agents stated that Pribilof Aleuts recognized their monopoly on fur seal hunting.²⁰ Companies would underpay Aleuts, but in a certain respect they held power. Aleuts were the only individuals that could successfully hunt fur seals.

Pribilof Aleuts recognized this power and did not quietly accept their low paying position. In 1916, and again in 1919, Aleuts and American industry agents petitioned the government for better pay. One agent described the situation in the following terms:

The fact cannot be denied that the people of St Paul (and St. George as well) [Sic.] are living in actual slavery and that this condition exists and is maintained under the immediate control of the U. S. Government... Their children, in particular, are insufficiently clothed and nourished and practically all the people are inadequately housed.²¹

Instead of the businesses paying workers entirely with money, a portion of Aleut income was given in provisions. As discussed earlier, the amounts of provisions were detailed in company contracts. These allotments of provisions took away the rights of the Aleuts. Instead of using their pay to decide which item they needed, Aleuts had to use the items given to them. In contrast, companies paid Caucasian coworkers in money alone.²² The earlier description of the situation as “slavery” might be a little strong, but the method in

¹⁹ George William Rogers, *An Economic Analysis of the Pribilof Islands, 1870-1946* (Fairbanks, Alaska: Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, University of Alaska, 1976), 1-32.

²⁰ US Treasury Department, Special Agents Division, *Seal and Salmon Fisheries and General Resources of Alaska*, Vol. 1 (Washington DC: General Printing Office, 1880), 126.

²¹ “H.C. Fassett to Commissioner of Fisheries,” October 20, 1916, *Bureau Records 1913-1946*, (St. Paul) (E-68)

²² Rogers, 154-157.

which the Aleuts were paid was discriminatory and the Aleuts realized it. Although an agent, not an Aleut, wrote the above excerpt, the agent seemed to have held many of the same frustrations as the Aleuts. They realized that without their hunting skills, American operations would flounder. Aleuts, through this agent, used their power to protest their poor treatment.

At the Pribilof Islands, the United States government recognized the importance of maintaining the fur seal population and placed limitations on hunting. On July 1, 1870, the government passed an act forbidding fur seal hunting except for the months of June, July, August, September, and October. Also, the United States government placed limits on how many fur seals each company could kill annually. The number of seals harvested would always stay right at the limit, which was 100,000. In the 1880s, 1883 is the only year this limit was not reached; every other year had 100,000 or 99,995 pelts harvested. This cap on the number of fur seals gathered at the Pribilof Islands may have impeded the speed in the depletion of fur seals, but 100,000 hunted every year is a large quantity. Also, the Pribilof Islands served as the breeding grounds for fur seals.²³ By hunting at the Pribilof Islands, the Americans and earlier the Russians were altering the traditional habitat of the fur seal.

In 1911, the United States government signed a treaty banning the hunting of fur seals and sea otters with Great Britain, Russia, and Japan for the preservation and protection of fur seals. This treaty stopped all commercial hunting within cosigning nations. Natives were exempted from this treaty and could continue pelagic sealing (hunting in the open sea).²⁴ The need for this treaty occurred because of the United States' *laissez faire* approach. Except for

²³ Ibid, 20-24.

²⁴ William Sulzer, "The Fur Seals Convention ... Report. <to Accompany H.R. 16571.>," in *62d Cong., 2d sess. House. Rept.; 295; Variation: 62d Cong., 2d sess.; House. Rept.; 295.* ([Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1912), 1-2.

the Pribilof Islands, the United States government imposed few regulations on hunting. Animals had to be at least three years old and, to legally hunt, individuals were required to be native or married to a native. However, except for the Pribilof Islands, there were no regulations on the number killed.²⁵ Massive amounts of fur seals could be harvested in a small amount of time. On Pribilof Islands in 1872, seventy-one men killed 71,000 fur seals in fifty days.²⁶ Gigantic harvests destroyed sea otter and seal populations. The ban on hunting stopped the extinction of the fur seal in the Bering Sea.

Americans moved onto the Pribilof Islands and all along the Aleutians in hopes of making a decent living in the fishing and canning industries. These new residents brought along language with them. In order to better interact with American businessmen and fishermen, Aleuts needed to learn English. Until World War II, Russian still survived in the region, but English became the language of capitalism.²⁷ English grew to be the most important language as it replaced Russian and Aleut. The transition from Russian to English seems obvious with the transition of power, but the discontinuation of the Aleut language in industry marks a change to the culture of the Aleut. The Aleut language no longer held a respected position in the economy. This transition from Aleut to English affected the Aleuts' identity. The Aleut language had always been a major part of the Aleuts' indigenous identity. By replacing Aleut with English the Aleuts were changing to American ways. Individual Aleuts decided to speak English instead of Aleut in order to obtain better jobs.

Race and Racism during American Rule:

²⁵Waldemar Jochelson, *History, Ethnology, and Anthropology of the Aleut*, (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1933), 41-44.

²⁶ Rogers, 17.

²⁷ Raymond L. Hudson, *Family after All: Alaska's Jesse Lee Home. Volume 1, Unalaska, 1889-1925* (Walnut Creek Calif.: Hardscratch Press, 2007), 15.

After the purchase of Alaska, language was not the only item to change; ideas of race and racism fundamentally differed from racism under Russian rule. During the Russian period, an individual was either Russian, native or a mix of the two. With the United States' purchase of Alaska, Anglo-Americans, Scandinavians, and Asian immigrant workers entered society. Ideas of class shifted. Americans now discriminated against Russians, who were once the top of colonial society. With the addition of Chinese and Japanese migrant workers, the social standing of Aleuts was blurred. There is not a clear picture of where these groups fell in the lower end of the class system. Both Asian migrant workers and Aleuts were respected for their strengths.²⁸ Also, the United States attempted to limit hunting by allowing only natives and men married to natives to hunt. Still, it did not stop hunting. Instead, it caused a huge number of Scandinavian men to enter into Aleut society.²⁹ During the Russian period, racial issues were rather clear. Under the American period, however, racial issues became more complex.

These racial beliefs are demonstrated in the types of job held by the different races. Americans and Scandinavians owned and supervised the fishing and cannery businesses. Aleuts were employed as fishermen and hunters, while Chinese and Japanese workers were preferred by employers to work in the canneries. Many cannery owners complained that, once Aleuts earned enough money for a comfortable living, they would quit; they were seen as unreliable.³⁰ In the cannery industry, Aleuts were placed at the bottom of the racial scale. This situation was further complicated by the specific location of the industry. In her work

²⁸ Black, *The History and Ethnohistory of the Aleutians East Borough*, 18.

²⁹ Bureau of Education, "Chignik, Historical Record.," in *Historical albums of Alaska Native schools, 1924-1931* (Date: [1924-1931]1927), 2.

³⁰ Black, *The History and Ethnohistory of the Aleutians East Borough*, 230-231.

Aleuts in Transition, Dorothy Jones argues that racial issues depended on the degree of outside influences, particularly during the time of World War II. This paper examines issues prior to World War II, but different amounts of western influences directed the racial situation on the Aleutians both after and prior to World War II. At New Harbor, a remote fishing village on the Alaska Peninsula, the Aleuts continued to own and operate the fishing companies. While at Iliaka, only Scandinavians and Anglo-Americans owned companies. Jones recounts how Iliaka began as a Russian fishing settlement in the 1760s, while New Harbor began as American cannery town in 1911.³¹ At Iliaka, American companies seemed to continue Russian dominating practices. At New Harbor, Aleuts were able to better establish their power in the new community. These are only two communities of the many on the Aleutians. Jones's analysis provided evidence that a variety of racial ideologies existed during the initial American period. Depending on the location, Aleuts held different amounts of power in society. Some were able to run their own businesses while others struggled to rise from their subordinate position.

Racism toward Aleuts was also visible in government policies. For some government officials, the race of the Aleuts required more debate than the government's treatment of them. The biological differences between the Aleuts and other Native American groups led to discrimination in government actions and in titles of works. Along with the Aleuts, the Eskimos have many of the same biological variations that separate them from other Alaskan groups. When the Bureau of Indian Affairs was asked to include Alaskan natives into their programs, the Bureau claimed that they were not funded to provide services to non-Indians

³¹ Jones, 26-27.

such as the Aleuts and Eskimos.³² The issue of race became the subject of congressional discussion. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts made the following statement, "If we look at [the natives] ethnographically we shall find two principal groups or races, the first scientifically known as Esquimaux, and the second as Indians."³³ The questioning by the government of the ethnicity of the different groups demonstrates the racial biases in the United States at the time. The United States government held a clear picture of how to treat Native Americans. However, the government's debates on how to treat the Aleut exemplified the racial undertones in American government during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Instead of evaluating circumstances on the environment and culture of the Aleuts, Congress focused on evaluating Aleut biology. The ethnicity of the Aleut should not have affected the government's role in providing government programs and services to the indigenous groups of Alaska. The Aleut had a unique culture, but the Koniag had a very similar sea-based lifestyle. However, the race of the Koniag was not questioned. The government debated how to treat the Aleuts based on race, not on lifestyle.

Aleuts and Religion:

During the American period, most Aleuts continued to attend the Russian Orthodox Church. This continued faith occurred as much of the Russian populations returned to Russia because of the "cost of living and homesickness."³⁴ Even with this loss of Russian society in Alaska, Aleuts continued to worship with the Orthodox Church during this period. While in other regions in Alaska the Russian Orthodox Church had to discontinue certain missions;

³² Haycox, 179.

³³ United States Senate, "Russian America," 40th Cong., 2d Sess., 1868, H.E.D. 177, Pt. 1, p. 156 (Serial 1339).

³⁴ Bishop Paul to Metropolitan Innokenty, "Report about the Management of Non-Arkhangelsk for 1869," *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska*, ([College: s.n.], 1938), 152.

the clergy at Unalaska were ordered to stay.³⁵ In 1892, twenty- five years after the sale of Alaska, the Holy Governing Synod, the leader of the church, “authorized Bishop Nicholas to build a church at Illiuluk on Unalaska Island to replace the old one.”³⁶ With a new church building and an order for clergy to stay in Unalaska, the Russian Orthodox Church not only survived the transition from Russian to American rule, but seemed to sustain its membership.

The Aleut and Russian Orthodox Church connection is also demonstrated in the movement of the Aleuts. At Sanak, the Russian Orthodox Church built a chapel in 1882. However, due to economic issues, the population of Sanak moved to Sand Point. When this move occurred, the Russian Orthodox Church moved its congregation to the new chapel built at Sand Point.³⁷ At King’s Cove, a settlement founded during the American period, the indigenous people also had a strong connection to Russian Orthodox Church.³⁸ In the Aleutians, the Russian Orthodox Church relocated with Aleut communities when economic activities were discovered elsewhere. Even in communities established after 1867, the Russian Orthodox Church served as the religious center for Aleuts. This continued faith in the Russian Orthodox Church reveals the power Aleuts had in deciding what faith to follow. Without a congregation, the Russian Orthodox Church could not have survived, let alone expanded. The Aleuts wanted the Russian Orthodox Church in their community.

Once the United States purchased Alaska, the Russian Orthodox Church recognized the importance of adjusting to American society. In 1871, Bishop Paul of Novo Arkhangelsk

³⁵ “Minutes of the Consistory,” July 16, 1868. *Documents*, 183.

³⁶ Holy Governing Synod to Bishop Nicholas, December 5, 1892, “Abstracts of Ukases, 1890-1894,” *Documents Relative to the History of Alaska. Alaska Church Collection*. Vol. 1 ([College: s.n.], 1938), 169

³⁷ Black, *The History and Ethnohistory of the Aleutians East Borough*.60-63, 150.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 104.

ordered that all church transactions were to be in dollars, and not rubles.³⁹ Linguistically, English became the primary language used in scripture. For example, on December 7, 1872, the Holy Governing Synod, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, approved the English translation of the rituals for converts to orthodoxy from other denominations.⁴⁰ This translation shows the attempts made by the Russian Orthodox Church to participate in the transition to American society. Just as Aleuts altered their national identity, here, the church altered its identity in order to fit into American society. Also, by approving an English translation of rituals for conversion from a different denomination, the Russian Orthodox Church aimed to both keep converts during the Russian period, but also to welcome any new residents of Alaska who wished to convert to Orthodoxy from a protestant faith or any other denomination. The church recognized the importance of the residents of Alaska. Without the Aleuts and other Aleutian residents, the church could not have survived in the region.

Aleut Education:

During the American period, the Russian Orthodox Church had to manage the running of its missions and schools on a much smaller budget. During the Russian colonial period, the Russian American Company would pay for the construction of schools. Russian Orthodox parishes were only responsible for buying supplies for the schools. If the school was located in an impoverished area, the government would pay for the supplies.⁴¹ With the sale of Alaska, the Russian government no longer appropriated any funds and the Russian American Company ceased to exist. All of the funding for Russian Orthodox Church

³⁹ Bishop Paul to the Alaska Ecclesiastical Consistory, "Excerpt from Orders," *Documents*, 156.

⁴⁰ Holy Governing Synod. "Ukase of the Holy Governing Synod," December 7, 1872, *Documents*, 154.

⁴¹ "Regulations Regarding the primary Education of Settlers, Approved by the Emperor," *Documents*, 347-248.

operations in Alaska became the sole responsibility of the church. In 1894, Pobiedonostsev, an administrator for the church made the following statement:

In general the conditions of the orthodox church in America need improvement. To our regret, the clerical staff in the distant parish of the Territory of Alaska is very unsatisfactory. It was difficult to secure worthy clergymen from Russia for those places.⁴²

In the above quotation, Pobiedonostsev described what occurred due to this funding decrease. The Russian Orthodox Church could not afford to fund a well organized clerical staff that could effectively manage the situation in Alaska. The structure of the Russian Orthodox Church administration was fractured. With less funding in Alaska, the church had a reduced amount of finances available to pay clergy. In order to work in Alaska, a priest had leave Russian society and could receive less pay. No wonder it could be difficult to find worthy clergy.

When Russia sold Alaska in 1867, the Orthodox Church ended its relationship with the Russian American Company but began a new relationship with the Alaskan Commercial Company. In November of 1880, the Russian Orthodox Church contracted the Alaskan Commercial Company to buy the supplies and complete the repairs on existing buildings and all new construction for the Orthodox Church in Alaska. In 1882, the American Commercial Company billed the Russian Orthodox Church \$13,570.55 for all work completed on church buildings.⁴³ This association parallels the situation with the Russian American Company. Unlike that relationship, the Russian Orthodox Church had to finance construction completed

⁴² Pobiedonostsev, "Report of Pobiedonostsev, the Procurator-General of the Holy Governing Synod, about the conditions in America during 1890-1891," January 11, 1894, *Documents*, 190.

⁴³ "Minutes of the Consistory," December 7, 1882, *Documents*, 188.

by the American Commercial Company. This evidence confirmed how the Russian Orthodox Church would use previously successful tactics in one relationship to assist in a new situation.

For the United States government, the process of converting indigenous groups to Christianity became a group effort with different denominations responsible for different regions of Alaska. The government assigned portions of Alaska to the Baptists, Moravians, Presbyterians, and Methodists to spread their message to Alaskan natives. If a denomination already had missions in a certain region of Alaska, that denomination would be assigned that region. Sheldon Jackson, the head of the Presbyterian Church in Alaska and later the Commissioner of Education for the territory, assigned the Methodist Church to the Aleutian Islands. Prior to this assignment the Methodist mission had established itself in regions all over the world, but nowhere in Alaska. Jackson assigned the Methodist Church to fill a void in Alaska and to help expand the Methodist mission. The Methodist Church's Women Home Missionary Society began the church's efforts by establishing the Jesse Lee Home in Unalaska.⁴⁴ Jackson chose Protestant faiths, not the Russian Orthodox Church due to Protestantism's civilizing notion. In one government report and the indigenous groups of Alaska are referred to as "half-civilized people."⁴⁵ Protestant Churches followed the American ideology, that for Native Americans to become civilized, they needed to completely leave behind their traditional culture and acculturate to American ways.⁴⁶ This meant that, in Alaska, the Methodist clergy only spoke in English and wanted indigenous

⁴⁴ John W. Hamilton, "Official Record of the Alaska Methodist Episcopal Mission" (paper presented at the First Session of Alaska Methodist Episcopal Mission, Juneau, Alaska, 1904), 18.

⁴⁵ Sheldon Jackson, *Report on Education in Alaska* (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1886), 33.

⁴⁶ Haycox, 186.

followers to do the same. In Unalaska, at the Jesse Lee Home, the agenda of mission was “the conversion of children to Protestantism and the eradication of most vestiges of Aleut and Russian culture.”⁴⁷ Protestant faiths, including the Methodist Church, aimed to “civilize” the Aleuts.

Other than the Jesse Lee Home, the United Methodist Church at Unalaska served as the only Protestant church in the Aleutians during this initial American era. The church officially organized in 1915, with one hundred members attending Sunday school. However, the rocky history of the church demonstrates its unsteady connection with the people of Unalaska. Starting in the 1940s, the church no longer sent a pastor to serve at Unalaska. For thirty-three years, starting in 1957, the church ceased to exist.⁴⁸ If the Methodist mission had successfully converted the Aleuts at Unalaska, then the Methodist Church at Unalaska would not have disbanded. With the Russian Orthodox Church, sometimes the church no longer would serve an area because the congregation had moved to a new community. Here, the town of Unalaska did not die, only the Methodist Church did. This discontinuation of the church demonstrates the power of the Aleut people to choose which religion they wanted to pray with.

This lack of a connection between the Methodist Church and the Aleut community is more visible in education. In 1867, the United States government did not have any public educational institutions in place in the Aleutians, not to mention all of Alaska. By 1884, seventeen years after the purchase of Alaska, the United States government finally began to organize an educational system in Alaska. Until then, missionary schools served as the only

⁴⁷ Hudson, 95.

⁴⁸ "Our History," Unalaska United Methodist Church, <http://www.gbgm-umc.org/UnalaskaUMC/Our%20Mission%20and%20Ministry/thehistory.html>, 1.

educational outlets. On the Aleutians, this meant that the Russian Orthodox Church continued its educational missions. The Methodist school in Unalaska did not begin until 1889. In 1879, church records show that the Russian Orthodox School at Unalaska taught forty-five boys and twenty-two girls. At St. Paul, the Russian Orthodox clergy instructed forty-eight boys and girls.⁴⁹ This documentation of dozens of Aleut children being educated at two of the Russian Orthodox schools in the region reveals the continued effort of the Orthodox Church in the Aleutians and on the Pribilof Islands during the first few decades under American rule. This also demonstrates the Aleuts' acceptance of the Russian Orthodox educational system.

Even though Russian Orthodox schools operated after the sale of Alaska, some Aleuts felt abandoned by the Russian Orthodox Church and left the school. Due to the financial problems, Russian Orthodox schools could no longer be free. In a report to the head of the church, Bishop John wrote of an encounter with a frustrated Tlingit woman. She did not understand why her children could attend the Orthodox school for free before the sale of Alaska, but after, the school expected her to pay for her children's education.⁵⁰ This Alaskan native recognized the difference in the Russian Orthodox community since the sale of Alaska and used her voice to protest these changes. The Tlingits and other indigenous groups understood the situation. If parents felt inclined, they had the power to not pay the Russian Orthodox Church and remove their children from the school. However, as previously discussed, some Aleuts decided to continue to send their children to Orthodox schools. Aleuts stayed with Orthodox schools because the strong connection between Orthodoxy and

⁴⁹ Bishop Nestor, "The Report of Bishop Nestor for the year 1879," 1879, *Documents*, 167.

⁵⁰ Bishop John to the Holy Governing Synod. "Report on Conditions in the Alaska Diocese for the First Half of 1876. July 27, 1876, *Documents*, 162.

Aleut ethnic identity formed during Russian rule. Through the Russian Orthodox Church Aleuts simultaneously maintained aspects of their traditional life and adapted to the changing world.

In 1884, Sheldon Jackson was appointed the Commissioner of Education for Alaska and began to organize an educational system for the territory. Due to previously discussed issues, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had refused to include Alaska in its programs; the United States Department of Education stepped in and selected Jackson to oversee the operation. Sheldon Jackson was chosen because his views of acculturation had matched those of the Bureau of Education. Both the government and Jackson believed that Native Americans needed to be civilized by leaving behind all forms of traditional culture. From 1877 until his appointment as Commissioner of Education in 1884, Jackson organized the Presbyterian effort in Alaska and had successfully established a school and a church in Wrangell, Alaska.⁵¹ Jackson understood the distance the Alaskan school system would cover. For Jackson, working with church missions became one of the most effective methods of spreading education. By the end of 1885, Jackson had fused the Alaskan public school program with the mission system; this was a system financed by both public funds and private church funds.⁵² This goodwill towards church missions included the Russian Orthodox Church, as demonstrated in letters between Orthodox clergy and Sheldon Jackson. On December 1, 1899, Sheldon Jackson wrote the following in a letter to Reverend Tikhon:

I have no doubt that you and I can work harmoniously together. My interests in Alaska as Commissioner of Education are identical with those of yourself as well as the Priests and Ministers of other Churches in their unified effort to educate and build

⁵¹ Haycox, 183-186.

⁵² Hinckley, 110-118.

up the native population, and I take this occasion to assure you that I am ready heartily to cooperate with you in any suitable way for the furtherance of your schools just as I would help the schools of the Protestant Churches.⁵³

Even though Sheldon Jackson believed in an acculturation method of education, he still wanted to work with the Russian Orthodox Church to help educate the indigenous children of Alaska. Russian Orthodox clergy did not attempt to remove all parts indigenous society from Aleut children, but they taught their students English which aligned with Jackson's goals.

The public school system eventually established public schools in many of the communities on the Aleutians. However, most of these schools were not opened until the early twentieth century. The one exception was the school established at Unalaska in 1885 under the direction of instructor Salomon Ripinsky. Sheldon Jackson assigned Mr. Ripinsky to the post because of his fluency in both English and Russian. In an 1886 report, Jackson explained that the 1,278 mile voyage from Sitka to Unalaska made intercommunication impossible and it also made it harder to find individuals willing to travel so far.⁵⁴ Eventually, the Bureau of Education found faculty to educate students at other locations in Alaska. The school at Atka had a long-established history. In 1914, seventeen students attended daily.⁵⁵ This attendance stayed rather steady with an average attendance of twenty-one in 1930.⁵⁶ In 1921, the public school at Akutan opened. In 1930, the school averaged eighteen in daily

⁵³ Sheldon Jackson to Reverend Tikhon, December 1, 1899, *Documents*, 81.

⁵⁴ Jackson, *Report on Education in Alaska*, 27-28.

⁵⁵ *Report on the Work of the Bureau of Education for the Natives of Alaska, 1914-15*, Bulletin / United States Bureau of Education (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1917), 11.

⁵⁶ Bureau of Education, "Atka, Historical Record," in *Historical Album, 1925, 1929-1931* (1930), 2.

attendance. Others schools were also opened at Kings Cove and Chignik.⁵⁷ The public school system eventually reached the residents of the Aleutians, and the religious missions continued to operate. With both public and religious schools, Aleuts had the option to choose which school to send their children to. Certain communities were too isolated to have more than one school at any time, but more populated area such as Unalaska had a variety of educational institutions.

On January 27, 1905, the United States Congress gathered to enact a policy to establish funding for the education system in Alaska. However, the Nelson Act became the Plessy v. Ferguson decision for Alaskan education. Section Seven of the act states, "That the schools specified and provided for in this Act shall be devoted to the education of white children and children of mixed blood who lead a civilized life."⁵⁸ This created a "separate, but equal" system of education. This act directly affected the Russian Orthodox Church school system. Traditionally, indigenous children and European or American children had been taught in the same classroom. This act ended that system of education.⁵⁹ The Russian Orthodox Church had to adjust how it taught the children of Alaska. More importantly, it changed Aleut education. In a multiethnic classroom, the Aleut held the same position as Anglo-American students. By forcing Aleuts to attend a separate school, it degraded their position. These different approaches developed due to the different beliefs of Russian and American administrations. The Russian Orthodox Church believed that everyone, no matter their ethnicity needed an education. Although racism existed in Russian American society, the church attempted to teach all students equally. Conversely, Americans felt that Native

⁵⁷ Bureau of Education, "Akutan, Historical Record," in Historical Album, 1925, 1929-1931, (1930) 1-2.

⁵⁸ Ronald Lautaret, "The Nelson Act," *Alaskan Historical Documents since 1867* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1989), 50-55.

⁵⁹ Black, *The History and Ethnohistory of the Aleutians East Borough*, 21.

Americans were too inferior to receive an education in the same school as Caucasian children.

Just a decade before the Nelson Act, the Methodist Church began its efforts in the Aleutians. In September 1889, John and Mary Tuck arrived in Unalaska. The Tucks were hired to run the Jesse Lee Memorial Home and School. The school had yet to be built, but this did not deter John Tuck. In 1889 he rented a house and began educating thirty students. On September 16, 1890, John Tuck received legal custody of the thirty girls attending the school because they were all supposedly orphans. The home became the first Methodist mission to serve the Aleutians. The students would stay at the school until eighteen years of age. Besides English, the students would learn traditional American roles such as housekeeping.⁶⁰ The Methodist Church established the Jesse Lee Home as a school for orphans. Its most famous resident was Benny Benson, the designer of the Alaskan state flag.⁶¹

The Jesse Lee Home resembled boarding schools in other regions of the United States. The Carlisle Indian Industrial School of Carlisle, Pennsylvania opened in November of 1879 with 147 students enrolled. Richard Pratt, the founder of the school stated in his memoirs, "This is to be an industrial school to teach young Indians how to earn a living among civilized people by practicing mechanical and agricultural pursuits and the usual of civilized life."⁶² Pratt had his students wear American clothing, cut their hair, and adopt a new American name. Students learned carpentry and blacksmithing. However, Pratt's

⁶⁰ Hudson, 13-26.

⁶¹ India Spartz, *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag* (Juneau, Alaska: Alaska State Museums, Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums, Alaska Dept. of Education and Early Development, 2001), 8-9.

⁶² Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904*, ed. Robert Utley (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press: 1964), 335.

attempts to “civilize” his native students failed. They would resist by disrupting class or refuse to complete any work.⁶³ Even though Pratt was able to alter the students’ appearance, the indigenous students demonstrated their power by resisting the school’s civilizing mission. Unlike at Carlisle, Russian Orthodox schools never reported discipline problems before or after the sale of Alaska. Although the perceived threat of violence may have stopped resistance prior to American rule, Russians would have been powerless to stop Aleut resistance during the American period. This lack of resistance reinforces Aleut acceptance of Russian Orthodox schools. At the Jesse Lee Home a different situation developed.

During the initial years of schooling, the Methodist Jesse Lee Home and the Russian Orthodox Mission worked together with displays of goodwill between the two faiths. In Unalaska, the Russian Orthodox Church had a home for boys, so the Methodist Church established one for girls. The Methodist Church even tried to adopt some Orthodox customs. At Easter, the Methodist Home adopted the making of *kulich*, the traditional Russian bread. In 1911, Noah Davenport commented on the attempts by Russian Orthodox priest to better the intercommunication between the churches. “Rev. and Mrs. Pontalaief are striving hard to learn English,” Davenport continues by saying, “While we couldn’t by the wildest stretch of the imagination believe in his church yet we find them personally congenial and interesting people.”⁶⁴ The clergy of both missions may have held different beliefs, but they attempted to work together to better the education of the indigenous community of the Aleutians.

However this initial goodwill did not last due to the fact that many of the first residents of the Jesse Lee Home were Aleut girls who had parents. In 1897, the parents of

⁶³ Sally Jenkins, *The Real All Americans* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 75-83.

⁶⁴ Noah Cleveland Davenport Clara Ellen Tarte Davenport, C. Papers of Noah, and E. Davenport Clara, "Papers of Noah C. And Clara E. Davenport, 1910-1912," October 27, 1911.

the children at the Jesse Lee Home wrote a petition to the head of Russian Orthodox Church at Unalaska, the judge and the US Marshall for the district. Among other things parents were attempting to gain back legal custody of their children in the petition. Aleut parents argued that they did not know the legal significance of the papers they signed that gave the Jesse Lee Home custody of its students. In the petition parents wrote, "We demand that the paper we signed should be annulled."⁶⁵ When parents first enrolled their students, parents claim they had never heard of the word 'Methodist' before the establishment of the Methodist Jesse Lee Home. Parents felt misguided in having believed that the Jesse Lee Home was a government public school instead of a Protestant school, a school where "several little girls had been enticed from the Orthodox faith by the efforts of the public school teacher."⁶⁶ The parents of the Aleut students felt betrayed. In the initial few years of existence, the Jesse Lee Home allowed students to practice any religion, but soon after 1896 the home changed to the "civilizing" mission. Parents noticed. These Aleut parents were attempting to give their children the best opportunity available, but instead their children were taught to leave behind their traditional ways. The parents were attempting to repair the situation by bringing the issue to anyone in power. They legally petitioned the situation and made appointments to speak with governmental representatives. However, legal attempts failed when the judicial system sided with the Methodist school.⁶⁷ This petition demonstrates the resistance Aleuts held to the civilizing process of the Methodist Church. In this situation, the power of the Aleuts was overcome by the American judicial system, but it shows the voice Aleuts held in society. Parents wanted their children to have a connection to the past. They did not want

⁶⁵ Vassili I. Shaynanikof et. al, "A Humble Petition," October 6-18, 1897, *Documents*, 226.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 225.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 224-230.

their traditional culture to be completely lost. Here, these parents used the American legal method to attempt to stop the civilizing process.

When legal resistance was ineffective, parents took a more proactive approach and removed their children from the Jesse Lee Home. If the government was not going to stop the “civilizing process,” the Aleut parents were. During the time of the petition, only nine students attended the Jesse Lee Home. By 1902, Eskimo children were relocated from mainland Alaska to Unalaska, to fill the void left by the Aleuts. By the turn of the century, no Aleut children attended the Jesse Lee Home.⁶⁸ The Jesse Lee Home had been established to serve the Aleuts of Unalaska, but the Aleuts did not want their “help.” This active resistance to the American acculturation process attempted by the Methodists demonstrates the power Aleut held in keeping portions of their culture alive. Also, in *Family After All*, Raymond Hudson describes the excitement the Jesse Lee Home felt at the anticipation of the Eskimos’ arrival to the school.⁶⁹ This description includes some racial overtones. The Jesse Lee Home was established to educate the Aleuts. Aleut parents would not allow their children to attend, so the Methodist church found natives that would attend the school. The Methodist apparently thought more highly of Eskimos than the Aleuts.

This distrust of the Jesse Lee Home also spread to the Orthodox clergy. The initial goodwill between the two denominations did not continue once the Methodist Home placed more of an emphasis on acculturation. In particular, the church was dismayed at the lack of recognition the Methodist Church gave to the Orthodox Faith. In October of 1897, Mary Peterson, a six year old female student of the Jesse Lee Home School, died. The Russian

⁶⁸Hudson, 100-154.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 154.

Orthodox Church was outraged when they were not allowed to give Mary, a member of the Orthodox Church, Orthodox last rites or preside over her funeral. To make matters worse, the Methodist Home buried Mary Peterson in the Russian Orthodox cemetery without asking permission or even informing the Russian Orthodox Church beforehand.⁷⁰ Father Kedrofsky described his outrage at the Methodist Church in following excerpt:

This institution wore a mask up to this time: it did not betray its real object and aims, but concealed them under its ostensible quality of Governor's school, so orthodox parents sent their children there to be taught and educated, without a suspicion that they might be lured away from the Orthodox faith in a heretical heterodox confession.⁷¹

This letter showed the obvious anger at the Methodist Church, but it points to the noticeable disregard the Methodist church felt towards the Russian Orthodox Church. If the Jesse Lee Home had believed that Mary Peterson had converted to Methodism, she should not have been buried in the Orthodox cemetery. By burying her there, the Methodist home must have realized she was still Orthodox. The relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Methodist Jesse Lee Home deteriorated due to a lack of respect between the two denominations. This also injured relations between the Jesse Lee Home and the Aleut community. Mary Paterson was an Aleut and should have received a proper burial of her faith.

Along with Methodism, the Russian Orthodox Church became suspicious of other Protestant faiths and the American community as a whole. These feelings of distrust

⁷⁰ Father Alexander Kedrofsky to Holy Governing Synod, October 16, 1897 "Letter to Holy Governing Synod," *Documents*, 221-223.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 221.

originated from both ideological differences and racism. Ideologically, the Russian Orthodox Church served as the only major church operation that did not follow the acculturation method emphasized by both the United States government and Protestant denominations. Russian Orthodox Church found Americans in general prejudiced against them. The church thought some of this prejudice derived from ignorance. Also, Russian clergy found the expansion of other denomination as detrimental to the Russian Orthodox Church and considered these other denominations to be enemies. In an 1894 report, Pobiedonostsev said the following:

The desire to join the orthodox church and be baptized is still being manifested by the Indians and Koloshes (Tlingits) but the enemies of orthodoxy, particularly Presbyterians and Jews, are beginning to spread their activities to the detriments of ours. The Presbyterians spread their propaganda by means of schools, asylums, and in other institutions; they are amply supplied with money, whereas the means of our missions are extremely limited.⁷²

Part of the anger displayed in this report might be simply the jealousy of the well-funded denominations, but to some extent the Presbyterians became the enemy of the Russian Orthodox Church. They were taking indigenous followers away from the church. In different situations, the Russian Orthodox Church felt that the American government discriminated against them and Russian society in Alaska. Russian clergy attempted to document instances of racist overtones in reports by the American government. The Russian Orthodox Church claimed that the US census of 1890 purposefully undercounted the number of natives and

⁷² Pobiedonostsev, 190.

creoles residing in Alaska. They also found that the United States government did not bother to consult church records when attempting to figure how many followers the Russian Orthodox Church had.⁷³ The Russian Orthodox Church felt that they were being discriminated against because of their ethnicity and beliefs.

The US Government and the Aleuts:

During this same period, the United States government discriminated against Alaskan natives by enacting liberal policies. In 1906, Congress passed the Native Allotment Act which authorized the distribution of 160-acre land plots for the head of indigenous households. This act opened up lands not claimed by indigenous households to white settlers. However, to claim a plot, the land had to be surveyed. This left many indigenous Alaskans, including Aleuts, without a claim to their land. Congress based the Native Allotment Act on the Dawes Act which had attempted to remove any provisions (such as tribal designations) that specified Native Americans as a special group. The Native Allotment Act differed from the Dawes Act because, at the time, the indigenous groups in Alaska did not have any legal designations as a tribe.⁷⁴ While Aleuts and other Alaskan indigenous groups strove to find their identity in American society, the government limited their power before Aleuts and other groups had time to organize.

In the 1930s, the United States government attempted to rectify the limited power of indigenous groups by passing the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. This reversed policies in the Dawes Act by encouraging tribes to use reservations as areas in which they could govern themselves. Although limited, this gave Native Americans political power. Even though indigenous groups had exerted power in other ways, this act was monumental because

⁷³ "Defects of American Statistics," *Documents*, 260-265.

⁷⁴ Haycox, 218-219.

for the first time since indigenous groups became a part of the United States, natives were given political power over their reservations. However, like the Dawes Act, the Indian Reorganization Act did not affect Alaska. In 1936 Congress passed the Alaskan Reorganization Act which implemented policies of the Indian Reorganization Act in Alaska. This Act so was prominent that it became known as the Indian New Deal. It not only implemented policies of self-government, but also included programs for financial assistance for indigenous businesses. However, the programs in the Indian New Deal were poorly funded and administered. The Aleuts and other indigenous groups did not receive many of the benefits of the Alaskan Reorganization Act until after World War II.⁷⁵

These government policies and failures parallel the charters of the Russian American Company. Even though both institutions aimed to protect and assist Alaskan natives and consider them as equal to other citizens, both failed to deliver what they promised. During both periods, the vast size of Alaska and a small number of officials made this impossible. Beginning in the mid 1700s and continuing until World War II, Aleuts could not rely on the government to stop all abuses by hunters and traders.

Conclusion:

To conclude, during this initial period of American governance in Alaska, different aspects of Aleut culture changed to certain degrees depending on what aspects of life were affected. In trade, the Aleuts decided to purchase the vast array of newly available American goods. In industry, Aleuts participated in the expanding salmon industry which moved salmon from a worshiped species to a valuable commodity. As an ethnic group, Aleuts adapted to their changing position in American class stratification. In economics, the Aleuts

⁷⁵ Ibid, 251-253.

altered their indigenous identity in order to create a national identity to correspond with the growing American landscape on the Aleutians.

Through education and religion, Aleuts maintained aspects of their culture by continuing to align with the Russian Orthodox Church and attending Russian Orthodox schools. Under the Russians, Aleuts converted from Shamanism to Orthodoxy because Aleuts recognized that the practices of the Russian Orthodox Church allowed the Aleut language and other traditional aspects of Aleut culture to remain. During the American period, Aleuts continued to attend the Russian Orthodox Church and resisted the civilizing process of the Methodist Church. In education, parents refused to have their children educated in an environment that tried to remove all aspect of traditional culture. Parents took legal action, when this failed they removed their children from the Jesse Lee Home. Aleuts had the power to decide which faith to follow and which school to attend. Aleuts were not passive victims of American acculturation.

The government also had a role in the Aleut situation. The Bureau of Education appointed Sheldon Jackson because his views on native acculturation aligned with their position. The Nelson Act created an educational system for natives, separate from white education. Politically, the Land Allotment Act took away Aleut power to govern themselves. The Alaskan Reorganization Act attempted to return this power, but failed due to poor management. During this initial American period, Aleut power was limited due to government involvement. However, the Aleuts were able to use the power they had to control what changes occurred in certain aspects of Aleut culture.

Overall, the Aleuts' decisions on how to change aspects of their culture related to their identity. During this period, Aleuts created an American national identity and altered

their ethnic identity. Beginning in the 1860s, Aleuts began to recognize their position in the American Aleutians. By the 1940s, Aleuts seemed to consider themselves to be both American and Aleut. In the parental petition, Aleuts stressed their belief that they had the same right as any other American to parent their children as they saw fit. Through religion, Aleuts continued to follow Russian Orthodoxy due to its connections to Aleut ethnic identity. In contrast, American missions attempted to rid Aleuts of their ethnic identity, so Aleuts used their power to stop these changes.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

From the mid-eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, Aleuts used a variety of methods that enabled aspects of their culture to continue during a changing Alaskan world. Even though Aleuts held differing amounts of power in society during Russian and American rule, Aleuts used their power in different institutions of Alaskan daily life in similar ways. During both periods, Aleuts used their power in society to decide whether to trade for European goods. In certain situations in the late 1700s, Aleuts held the dominant positions in trading relations and decided to trade for Russian finished goods or do without the goods and attack Russians. Starting at beginning of the nineteenth century, Aleuts adjusted to life under the restrictive Russian American Company and later private American enterprises. Throughout Russian and American rule, Aleut power is most effectively demonstrated through religion. For the duration of Russian colonial rule, Aleuts used the Russian Orthodox Church as a means of strengthening their position in Russian society and as a tool to continue indigenous traditions. Aleuts' complaints and opinions held more power within colonial Russian America when backed by Orthodox clergy. However, Aleuts used their power to include aspects of Shamanism even when clergy wanted Aleuts to become purely Orthodox converts. During the American period, Aleuts continued to use their power in religion by removing their students from Methodists schools and continuing to congregate with the Orthodox Church.

These parallels in Aleut activities and power are even more interesting in light of the different situations during Russian and American rule. In Russian America, the Russian American Company, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian government all existed to assist the Russian State. The Russian American Company served as an indirect vessel for

government rules in North America. The Russian Orthodox Church served as the state religion and continued ideologies advocated by the government. The majority of Russian influences in the colony were connected to the state. In contrast, American Alaska had many different independent institutions affect society. Individual enterprises ran industrial operations. Although religious institutions including the Methodist mission had connections to the Bureau of Education, Methodism was not the state religion. Churches in Alaska acted independently. Russian influences were all related whereas a variety of institutions affected Alaskan indigenous culture. Therefore, Aleuts maintained varying amounts of control in the same areas even though various people worked in the different institutions in the two eras.

Even though different forms of industry, religion and government entered the Aleutians, similar types of individuals arrived in the area. Instead of *promyshlenniki*, American pioneers moved to Alaska in hopes of riches. In religion, instead of Russian Orthodox missionaries, Methodist missionaries arrived to preach the greatness of Christianity. During the period of Russian America, Russian government officials governed the colony. After the sale American government officials set policies. Despite the fact that Russia and the United States held differing visions of effective governing, both ruling periods brought similar types of individuals to the region. These individuals also had similar experiences with indigenous groups prior to Russian and American colonization of Alaska. Siberian and American frontier histories are different in several ways, but many comparisons are evident. In both regions hunters and traders learned from experiences with indigenous groups. At different periods of time, each government advocated missions for the conversion of indigenous groups. Russian and American government and society differed in form and shape, but each nation's frontier propelled the migration of hunters, traders, missionaries, and

a small number of government officials to Alaska. With this migration of similar populations under both Russian and American rule, Aleuts could continue adapting different aspects of Aleut culture that began during Russian colonization and carried on into the American period.

From the 1740s and continuing for the next two hundred years, Aleuts decided which European or American goods they added to their homes. While trading with Russian *promyshlenniki* or later American merchants, Aleuts made the decision whether or not a certain item would be useful in their lives. Although both Russians and Americans could strongly encourage Aleuts to buy European and American goods, neither could force Aleuts to use these items. In some cases, Aleuts bought or traded for more technologically advanced goods, such as metal tools. Sometimes, they bought items because of a desire, not a need. With alcohol, the United States attempted to instate prohibition in the territory, but Aleuts used their powers to bypass American laws. Although disobedience of alcohol laws was not a positive use of Aleut influence, it still demonstrated Aleuts' power in deciding what items to obtain from the current imposing society. Incoming Russians and Americans could offer goods, but the Aleuts had the power to decide if they should use them.

For the majority of colonial and territorial rule, Aleuts lacked much of the power to control industry but used the situation to mold their national identity. Even though certain Aleuts violently resisted initial Russian presence, most Aleuts were obligated to work for the Russian American Company or later American fishing, hunting, or canning operations. Aleuts became accustomed to working for a wage and for a company, and not for the Aleut community. These changes added to the two different national identities of the Aleuts under Russian and American rule. While Aleuts never seemed patriotic about their position in

colonial Russian American society, they seemed to recognize their position in society. With Aleut complaints to company officials, Aleuts seemed to realize that they needed to work within the Russian system if they were going to improve their position. During the American period, Aleuts again worked within the system to attempt to improve their position.

With religion, Aleuts reinvented their traditional ethnic identity by converting to Russian Orthodoxy. During Russian colonization, Aleuts recognized they could strengthen their position in society by converting to Orthodoxy. Clergy added to the weight of Aleut complaints against the Russian American Company. Also, Russian Orthodoxy corresponded and added to indigenous spirituality in several ways. For example, both the church and Aleut Shamanism used icons in religious ceremonies. By creating the written form of Aleut, the Russian Orthodox Church forever strengthened both Aleut indigenous identity and the church's ties to the Aleut community. This connection became even stronger when Russian Orthodox clergy respected some of the traditional customs and leadership of the Aleut community. Aleuts converted to Russian Orthodoxy because of the church's ability to reinforce the Aleut position and its connections to indigenous spirituality. Russian Orthodoxy was different from Shamanism, but Aleuts felt a strong enough connection in Orthodox rituals and respect for indigenous customs that Aleuts converted to the Russian Orthodox Church. As demonstrated in the Aleuts' continued belief in the power of the ancestral mummies, Aleuts continued aspects of the Shamanist beliefs even when clergy advised against it. Aleuts continued to mix Aleut Shamanism and Orthodoxy even when clergy discouraged it. Aleuts had the power to decide what to believe in.

Although at first Aleut actions towards religion and education during American rule might seem opposite, Aleuts utilized the same power in society during both periods. Under

Russian rule, Aleuts decided to convert to Orthodoxy due to its positive connections to the Aleut community. In the late 1800s, Aleuts used this same power to remove their children from the Methodist school. Aleuts recognized the attempts by Methodists missionaries to remove indigenous culture from Aleut children. Aspects of Aleut indigenous culture such as language that had been maintained with the Russian Orthodox Church were going to be lost in Methodism. Aleuts used their power to decide what religion to follow; they stopped attending Methodist schools and continue to congregate with the Orthodox faith.

Although some Alaskan histories portrayed Aleuts as passive victims to incoming European and American powers, Aleuts held power in different aspects of society. Initially, Aleuts used their dominant power to violently resist incoming Russian hunters. In religion, Aleuts decided which faith to follow. They held similar amounts of power in varying institutions during both Russian and American rule. These similarities occurred because even though Russia and the United States differed, both powers brought the same type of individuals and institutions to Alaska. Both Russia and the United States brought hunters, traders, and clergy to the Aleutians. Aleuts used these similarities to modify their position; they recognized that the Aleutians were changing. During Russian rule, Aleuts seem to have discovered what uses of their power were most effective. When American missionaries, hunters, and traders entered the Aleutians, Aleuts were able to use their power in areas as under Russian rule. These similarities facilitated Aleut power in both eras. Even though the power structure during Russian and American rule gave Europeans and Americans power, Aleuts held some of the power in trade and religion. Overall, Aleut power in society resulted in complicated relations in both Russian America and Alaska.

The identities of Aleuts changed over time. During the Russian period, Aleuts developed a weak national identity and altered their ethnic identity in order to both strengthen their position in society and to adapt to the changing world. Although it is impossible to say without a doubt how exactly Aleuts felt, it seems that Aleuts had come to terms with their place in Russian colonial society by the 1860s. Aleuts used Russian channels to petition for better treatment. By the sale of Alaska, Aleuts probably considered themselves to be more Aleut than Russian. In contrast, Aleuts developed a strong American national identity. As shown through the parent's petition concerning the Jesse Lee Home, Aleuts felt they deserved the same rights as every other American citizen because they were Americans too. During American rule, Aleuts used connections to the Russian Orthodox Church to keep their ethnic identity even though the American government and Methodist Church wanted Aleuts to completely lose their ethnicity.

The power of Aleuts, as argued in this thesis, has implications beyond Aleut history; other indigenous groups of North and South America also have more complex histories than historians and anthropologists have argued. Indigenous Studies has only become a major field in the academic world in the last few decades. Native American historians have enlightened academics on the viewpoints of many indigenous groups, but not all indigenous groups have been examined to the same extent. For example, in Alaskan indigenous history dozens of academics focused on the Tlingits, but only a few examined the Aleuts. The Tlingits have been stereotyped as the powerful indigenous people that at one point burnt down the Russian fort at Novo Arkhangelsk. In contrast, Aleuts were stereotyped as the indigenous group that after initial violence in the 1700s became powerless victims to Russian and American powers. This thesis demonstrated that Aleuts did have power in society; they

did not have not all the power, but some. Some indigenous groups of North and South America that have been cast as powerless victims, as seen here with the Aleuts, could have a more complex history than historians have argued.

To conclude, Aleuts were not helpless victims to European and American expansion. During both Russian and American rule, Aleuts used their power to control the amount of change that occurred to their culture.

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