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THE DELICATE BALANCE

A CONSIDERATION OF SOME OF THE FORCES AND CIRCUMSTANCES
THAT SHOULD BE RECKONED
WITH TODAY IN A DISCUSSION OF "THE PLACE OF NATIVE PEOPLES
IN THE WESTERN WORLD"

GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is a heady experience for a historian who has been concerned with the struggle for justice waged by Bartolomé de Las Casas and other Spaniards in the sixteenth century on behalf of the American Indians to be invited to comment on the future of rights for Alaskan natives! I accepted this imaginative challenge from Judge Thomas R. Berger with considerable trepidation, and not a few self-doubts. For history does not repeat itself, nor —to quote a cynical maxim— do historians merely repeat each other. In my youth the writings of Carl Becker, one of our greatest historians, influenced me —particularly his view that a realistic study of history does not enable us necessarily to foretell the future, but should help us to meet it. It is in this sense that I have encouraged myself to participate in the Round Table on "The Place of Native Peoples in the Western World." Perhaps I should explain the perspective from which I view these matters: I am a retired professor of Latin American history, who lives in the town of Amherst, Massachusetts.

Let us begin by recognizing that because of the civil rights movement in the U. S. and the general decline of colonialism everywhere, the world probably is better prepared than ever before to understand

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the complicated and subtle problems of racial and cultural relations. But Bishop Antonio Augustin was well aware of the immensity of this problem when he declared in 1550 that the true nature of the Indians of the New World was "a question worthy of being considered in the theater of all mankind."¹ The bishop was speaking on the eve of the first and one of the most significant disputations ever held on the nature of man. The Dominican Las Casas was about to present to a royal council in Valladolid, Spain, his passionate and learned treatise entitled *Defense Against the Persecutors and Slanderers of the Peoples of the New World Discovered Across the Sea*. The treatise was designed to demolish the arguments of his fellow-Spaniard Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who maintained that the Indians were an inferior race that could be justly enslaved and forced to work for Spaniards. This is not the place to give a detailed analysis of that famous debate held over 400 years ago, a confrontation that still rouses passionate responses from scholars and others. Fortunately Judge Berger has provided a succinct summary of the 1550 debate in his article entitled "A Glance at History."²

As we look at the copious record of this mighty philosophical and political combat—whose substance seems so similar to the many other disputes that have arisen through the years when peoples of different ways of life have met—one naturally wonders whether the present discussions on the situation of Alaskan natives differ in any significant sense. Dorik V. Mechau has set forth the problem in these terms: "Do indigenous peoples have a special 'place' and deserve a special recognition within the nation-states whose ideologies all spring from modern Western European values... Can a compelling moral case be made now, in our time, under a democratic regime, for the singularity of aboriginal rights?"³

Additional questions arise as one reads the results of the recent discussions conducted by Judge Berger with natives in many Alaskan villages: Can they be guaranteed that their way of life will not essen-

¹ This quotation comes from my volume *All Mankind is One: A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda on the Religious and Intellectual Capacity of the American Indians* (De Kalb, 1974), 161. For information on the many publications related to this topic, see pp. 177-195.

² *Northern Perspectives*, VI; 4 (Ottawa, 1979), 1-6.

³ Dorik V. Mechau in a letter to L. H. dated July 11, 1984.

tially change? How much autonomy can the natives actually have within the framework of U.S. law?

To begin our reflections on these fundamental questions, let us turn briefly to the history of Russian Alaska, for the experiences of the natives before the U.S. acquired this immense territory naturally had an influence on the way they now think about their future. Such a consideration provides some useful background for the problems of today, although much research needs to be done before we have a clear and definite picture of those experiences.

ALASKA UNDER RUSSIA

What effect on the culture and life of the Alaskan natives did Russia have in the period between the voyage of Vitus Bering to Alaska in 1741 and the purchase of Alaska by the U.S. in 1867? Apparently not much, if we may judge from papers presented at the Conference on Russian America held at Sitka in 1979⁴. The economy was

⁴ This section is based on the following papers: James R. Gibson, "Russian Expansion in Siberia and America"; Winston L. Sarafian, "Economic Foundations of Russian America." Both cite a rich bibliography of publications that appeared in Russia, the United States, and elsewhere. For a detailed note on material in Soviet archives, see the report by Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, "Archival Materials and Manuscripts in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on United States History up to 1917", in the forthcoming work edited by Lewis Hanke, *Guide to the Study of United States History outside the U.S., 1945-1980*, I (1985), 562-92.

Frank A. Golder, the American historian who spent three years teaching in Alaska beginning about 1900, published various articles of interest; "A Survey of Alaska, 1743-1799", *Washington Historical Quarterly*, 4 (Seattle, 1913), 83-93; "Mining in Alaska Before 1867", *ibid.*, 7 (1916), 233-38; "The Songs and Stories of the Aleuts, with Translation from Father Veniaminov", *The Journal of American Folklore*, 20 (1907), 132-42; "Primitive Warfare Among the Natives of Western Alaska", *ibid.*, 22: 85 (1909), 1-4; and "Eskimo and Aleut Stories from Alaska", *ibid.*, 22: 83 (1909), 1-16. For other information on Golder, see the M.A. thesis at San José State University by Allen Wachhold, "Frank A. Golder: An Adventure in Life and History" (1975?). This thesis is based on the extensive Golder papers in the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace. The chapter on Alaska (pp. 5-23) contains some material on Golder's relations with the natives. He had a "strong belief in the Aleuts as products of 'God's children'." He realized that in the shock of cultural shift and social collapse the natives had reached a low cultural state. Nevertheless, having experienced daily contact with them, he had little sympathy for the prejudiced statements of their detractors. He wrote: 'I learned to love them and I try to think that three years was not too high a price to pay for that' (p. 23). Wachhold's chapter was based on "Reminis-

based on fur hunting and trading, and was largely underdeveloped. Fur trade companies relied heavily upon the skilled natives, mostly from the many Aleut communities that had long hunted sea otters and other fur-bearing animals with Stone Age weapons. During this period the Aleuts were virtually enslaved; at least eighty percent of the Aleut population was lost⁵. In addition, a smallpox epidemic in the 1830s reduced the native population in Alaska as a whole by twenty-five percent⁶.

The Russian American Company, chartered in 1799, attempted to develop shipbuilding, coal mining, agriculture, and lumbering particularly after 1840, but with limited success. The Russian male population of Alaska was only 563 as late as 1833, and from the beginning they took native wives. Their offspring, who were called creoles, came to form almost one fifth of the population, outnumbering the Russians themselves. To offset the shortage of Russian employees, the company resorted to hiring others, "foreigners, creoles, American Indians, Finns and Yakuts, and to enticing useful employees to remain in its employ after their contracts expired."⁷ For supplies, the Russians had to turn "to American shipmasters, Californian missionaries, and Hudson's Bay factors."⁸

The influence of the Russian Orthodox Church appears to have been relatively slight, except among the Aleuts through the extraordinary work of one notable priest—Ivan Veniaminov (1797-1879). It was therefore not surprising that czarist Russia made no determined effort to hold onto Alaska; "Ruthless exploitation of the fur bearers and the fur hunters, stiff international competition, monopolistic complacency, hopeless logistics—these are some of the compelling factors which persuaded Russia to retreat to a more tenable position in the Siberian Area."⁹

œnces of Alaska", an item in Golder's papers.

Other useful studies, based largely on sources in Russian, are by C. L. Andrews, "Alaska Under the Russians: Baranof the Builder", *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, 7 (Seattle, 1916), 203-16; "Alaska Under the Russians", *ibid.*, 278-95. Another study based on Russian sources is the unpublished Finnish M.A. thesis by Michael Andrew Karie, "The American Purchase of Russian America in 1867" (University of Helsinki, 1967).

⁵ Gibson, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷ Sarafian, 21, 30.

⁸ Gibson, 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14. See Aleh W. Gerus, "The Russian Withdrawal from Alaska: The Decision to Sell", *Revista de Historia de América*, 75 (México City, 1973), 157-

Native life was apparently not deeply affected. The Russian presence seems to have been on the whole superficial and largely economic. Except for the hapless Aleuts, the natives seem to have maintained their cultural independence and to have escaped political domination. Frank A. Golder stated that "in Western Alaska the Russians were massacring the Aleuts, while in Eastern Alaska the Tlingits were exterminating the Russians." The warlike Tlingits, for example, even managed to capture the Russian American Company's capital of New Archangel (Sitka) in 1802: "Indeed, thanks to their bountiful economy and cohesive society, as well as American military aid, the Tlingits resisted Russian encroachment more successfully than any other indigenous group in the course of tsarist eastward expansion."¹⁰

Nor does the U.S. appear to have had a great impact on Alaskan native life during the years between the purchase in 1867 and the outbreak of World War II. One may tentatively conclude that during this period the native population, though widely scattered in an enormous territory where climatic conditions are generally rugged and transportation difficult, were largely able to maintain the economic and cultural life they had been accustomed to for centuries. Only during the last half century have Western goods, laws, and influence led to fairly rapid change. These changes have been particularly marked since Alaska was admitted as the 49th state in 1959. The steady movement of some natives to urban centers and other influences have already led to some economic and cultural changes in their lives.

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMMIGRATION IN AMERICAN LIFE

In the light of the history of Alaska during most of its centuries, it is easy to understand why the natives wish to preserve their way of life. The recent discussions of Judge Berger with Alaskan natives clearly reveal the desire of many that American influences not be allowed to disrupt their basic cultural patterns. They are intent on preserving their subsistence way of life, both economically and culturally, that

78; Frank A. Golder, "The Purchase of Alaska", *American Historical Review*, 25 (1920), 411-25.

¹⁰ The Golder quotation comes from his article on "The Attitude of the Russian Government Toward Alaska", in *The Pacific Ocean in History*, ed. H. Morse Stephens and Herbert E. Bolton (New York, 1917), 272. The other quotation comes from Gibson, 7.

has developed in the centuries since they too were immigrants from Asia. Many of the immigrants to America over the years have desired to retain some at least of their former ways of life.

Coupled with this powerful desire is a sense of alienation from at least some of the Western influences to which the natives have been exposed. In this they share an attitude felt by many Americans who are uncomfortable with some aspects of U.S. culture. Let me confess that rock music and TV fundamentalist evangelists have only a limited appeal for me! Other Americans choose other parts of our culture they could live without. With all the emphasis on the melting pot and "assimilation", we must never forget the strong streak of individualism in many of those who have come to the U.S. since the seventeenth century. Some, such as the Pilgrims who left their temporary refuge in Holland in the early seventeenth century because they did not want their children to grow up in an alien culture, decided to migrate to the New World where their own way of life and religion would prevail. Later on whole families trekked westward in the nineteenth century across the plains and the Rocky Mountains for somewhat similar reasons. And always some moved on because they could not bear to live so close to other pioneers that they would see the smoke of other log cabins even miles away. Today there is a global movement toward the U.S., the largest such movement the world has ever seen, that continues this immigrant influence in American life.

Many Americans are a restless lot, and this restlessness and the constant, ever-increasing flow of immigrants to the U.S. constitute essential facts of our national life. Immigrants have generally been uprooted from their old way of life and forced to come to terms with a wide variety of new circumstances in a pluralistic society. Just as the Alaskan natives have been strengthened in their present convictions by their history, so my attitudes result from my experiences. Many Americans must have had similar experiences.

While in grade school in Cleveland, Ohio, I used to study with a boy from a Scottish family whose father earnestly impressed on us the need to strive for good grades. In grammar school in Manchester, Connecticut, we had hot arguments with a Swiss boy during those difficult months in 1917 when the nation was supposedly neutral. Those who favored the Allies and those who sympathized with the Central Powers were both offended by the complacent explanation he gave us of the superiority of the Swiss policy of permanent neutrality. Then as a graduating high school senior in 1921 in the small town of Piqua, Ohio, I was surprised to observe what seemed to us the strange attitude

of a classmate who had been born in Italy and who had gone back for a visit. Frank Capello had been thrilled by the order and strength he had found there, and was outraged on his return to find that some in Piqua looked upon Mussolini as a Fascist dictator, and were not impressed by his success in getting the trains to run on time. Cultural differences were involved, too, and his classmates were amused when the Italian colony in Piqua ostentatiously presented him with a huge bunch of roses as he received his diploma to celebrate his having passed this important American milestone.

As a student at Northwestern University in the early 1920s I became aware of the great mix of people then in Chicago, and was fortunate enough to know Jane Addams and her famous Hull House there where immigrants were helped to adjust to the new life in which they found themselves in that turbulent city known as "hog butcher to the world."

My first teaching experience, at the University of Hawaii 1926-27, introduced me to the variety of people in what was to become the 50th state. There were Hawaiians, mainland whites, descendants of Portuguese fishermen, and others in my classes as well as a student from Japan who systematically showed me Japanese Honolulu. We visited the language schools, where American children of Japanese parentage learned Japanese after the public schools were over—all paid for by the parents. We went to restaurants, Buddhist temples, and karate schools. One of my colleagues on the university faculty was the tenth son of a Chinese butcher on the outskirts of Honolulu, a studious young man who had put himself through Columbia University by working in a Chinese bank in New York City. This unusual opportunity to learn about the Japanese immigrants helped me to understand developments in World War II: the illegal removal of over 100,000 U.S. citizens of Japanese descent from the West Coast for alleged reasons of "national security"; and the impressive record in Italy of the U.S. army unit made up of loyal Americans with Japanese names. I remember, too, the young historian of Japanese descent from the University of California in Los Angeles who in 1942 spent the year completing his M.A. thesis, on some aspect of Latin American history, in the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress where I was then a staff member.

Today, even when living in a small town in New England, it is impossible to avoid the history and results of immigration. Our famous poet Emily Dickinson was carried in 1886 to her grave on the shoulders of Irish laborers, then an important and visible part of the economic

and religious development of Massachusetts. Irish immigrants were very visible in many of the Northeastern states. In 1850 26 percent of the population of New York—133,000 of 513,000—had been born in Ireland.

The obituary columns today of our local paper usually include one or more notices on aged citizens born in Poland, for the rich farmlands nearby are often owned by families with long, difficult-to-pronounce names. When I first came to Amherst in 1969 a French-American barber cut my hair. I learned that many immigrants had come from Canada to work in the mills of Lowell, and that Fitchburg once had a flourishing Finnish newspaper.

There are many children in the Amherst public schools today whose native languages are not English; the University here regularly teaches Armenian, Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, and a number of other languages. The janitor of Grace Episcopal Church is Sokna Mao, born in Comphongchang, Cambodia. He and his family are among the one hundred immigrants from Cambodia in Amherst, and there are probably at least one hundred more from other countries of South East Asia. These emigrants constitute a small part of those 700,000 immigrants from South East Asia that have come to the U.S. since 1975 in the hope of becoming citizens and a part of American life. The new arrivals come from many countries, including Albania. There are 35,000 people of Albanian descent in the metropolitan area of New York City alone. It is estimated that 400 Albanian-Americans own about 600 apartment buildings in this area. They are concerned about what they perceive to be the prevalent image of Albania as a backward, closed, Stalinist nation.

This flood of immigrants is not likely to diminish soon. In August, 1984, "the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok had registered the names of 490,450 residents in Vietnam who apparently are qualified to be considered for resettlement in the U.S."¹¹ If this moral commitment is to be met, the arrival of these immigrants might make difficult the maintenance of commitments to the Alaskan natives. Few of the immigrants pouring into the U.S. would probably locate in Alaska, but their effect on the life and economy of the U.S. (and nothing has been said about the millions of Central Americans, Colombians, and Mexicans crossing our southern border) might cause the Congress to take

¹¹ *The Christian Science Monitor* (January 9, 1985), 40.

decisions that the Alaska natives might consider inimical to their interests.

What does all this have to do with the future of Alaskan natives? John Higham has emphasized the global nature of immigration to the U.S. He believes that the remarkable movement of people to the U.S. could best be watched from a space-ship high above the earth: "American scholars of immigration have traditionally been too American centered, European scholars are understandably Eurocentric. Immigration history calls for a global point of view in which the symbol of the Statue of Liberty facing toward Europe will have to shrink to its true provincial scale."¹²

Is it not clear that immigration has been and will continue to be a powerful influence in the political and cultural life of the U.S.? Ethnic votes still are often important to those seeking political office. Moreover events in far-off places have a connection with political pressures developed in the U.S. —witness the fact that our largest foreign aid program goes to Israel. The reverse is also true. When American women stopped using human hair nets in the 1920s, thousands of workers in China lost their jobs. When properly understood, this massive and practically unique movement of people to the U.S. from many countries will be rightfully understood as one of the prime and permanent influences in U.S. history. Immigration surely affects all states in the Union now, including Alaska, and will in the future too.

HOW FAR CAN ANY MINORITY DETERMINE ITS OWN WAY OF LIFE?

From the evidence collected by Judge Berger in discussions throughout Alaska, it appears that some natives would like to preserve their languages and in general their way of life intact, with the connection between them and the other 49 states a peripheral matter. All the natives would like to make the essential decisions themselves on their way of life—as who would not? But is this possible? How can the natives of Alaska, indeed the natives of any state, be certain that they will be able to control their lives?

There have been, and still exist, enclaves of Mormons and Mennonites and other minority groups in the U.S. that have managed to retain

¹² Higham made this comment in his review of *Destination America*, by Maldwyn A. Jones, in *The American Scholar* (Winter, 1976-77), 141.

significant parts of their way of life. Some of these groups may cherish some at least of the same ideals as the natives of Alaska: who "want control over their schools, teachers and curriculum; their own law enforcement, courts, and judges; their own laws pertaining to hunting, trapping and fishing, and perhaps the right to say who can enter their villages and upon what terms . . . it would appear that the acquisition of such powers would remove these tribal villages from the mainstream of the legislative and executive controls [that] exist within the framework of the state and federal government."¹³

Though generalizations are perilous, it seems to me that history teaches us that aborigines and other minorities never have been able to control the development of their own lives. Bartolomé de Las Casas and his fellow Dominicans earnestly attempted in the sixteenth century to establish a "Land of True Peace" in southern Mexico where Indians would be unmolested by Spaniards and the ecclesiastics could gradually inculcate Christian virtues.¹⁴ This effort failed, as did the "reductions" organized by the Jesuits later in Paraguay.

In Alaska, given the economic and defense realities that follow, will not the lives of Alaskan natives be vitally affected by circumstances over which they will have little influence? Is the hope of some natives to live generally isolated in their world an objective possible to accomplish in Alaska or elsewhere?

At this point, I should like to refer to the "great dangers" Ralph Lerner sees in the present situation in Alaska. He means "loose and misleading talk about sovereignty", "seeking exemptions for native peoples from the burdens of membership in the United States", "the repeated expression of disdain for the white man's law."¹⁵ These points all seem to me, a 'non-native' who comes from one of the lower states, as sound and substantial reasons for proceeding with caution.

Presumably no basic changes will be made by Congress in the laws relating to Alaskan natives until after it has held hearings on the subject to supplement the material being brought together by the

¹³ Editorial in *The Anchorage Times* (July 13, 1984), p. A-10.

¹⁴ André St. Lu, *La Vera Paz: Esprit évangélique et colonisation* (Paris, 1968). The treatise by Las Casas explaining his doctrine of peaceful preaching has been printed, *Del único modo de atraer a todos los pueblos a la verdadera religión* (México, 1942).

¹⁵ Ralph Lerner's statements come from the paper he prepared for the Alaska Native Review Commission entitled "Notes and Observations".

Alaska Native Review Commission. Surely some of the following considerations will be brought out in Congressional hearings:

1. *The Congress has already set aside vast areas of Alaska for public purposes.* Besides the 44 millions of acres included in the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the Congress passed the 1980 Alaska Lands Bill (officially the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act) which "sets aside over 104 million acres of the 49th state as parks, refuges, monuments and wild and scenic river areas. It created over 43 million acres of new parks—designating 32.4 million of those acres as wilderness. Overall, the act created 13 major additions to the federal national park system and designated 56 million acres of Alaska as wilderness."¹⁶

2. *The significance of Alaskan Oil Resources.* The discovery of oil in Alaska probably doubled U.S. oil resources, even though problems are caused by the remoteness of the deposits and the extreme climate. Oil production expanded from 187,00 barrels in 1959, the year Alaska became a state, to 73 million barrels in 1968. This boom caused a reorientation of the focal points of U.S. oil economy. Alaskan agriculture, fisheries, and tourism profited immensely from the availability of cheap energy.¹⁷ The unpredictability of OPEC oil supplies from the Middle East means that Alaskan oil must always be protected as much as possible for the economic security of the U.S. as a whole.

3. *The military importance of Alaska.* The strategic significance of Alaska has long been recognized. In the period immediately after 1867, the U.S. Army and then the Navy administered it for a time. With the coming of World War II, military installations at Anchorage and elsewhere became an important part of the U.S. defense. The Japanese attack on the Aleutian Islands and the bloody fighting at Attu Island emphasized the strategic value of the area. Dutch Harbor became a major key of the U.S. defense system.

Alaskan oil fields are vulnerable to attack. The sensitivity of the situation that results from the proximity of Alaska to our principal

¹⁶ From the Foreword by Jay Hammond (Governor of Alaska 1975-1982) in the book by Nancy Lange Simmerman, *Alaska's Parklands: The Complete Guide* (Seattle, 1983), 5.

¹⁷ See the unpublished treatise by Rolf Braunegg, "Der Ölboom in Alaska und seine Folgen für Wirtschaft und Tourismus" (University of World Trade, Vienna, 1969).

competitor in the world today may be illustrated by the fact that following the 1983 incident when the USSR shot down a Korean plane, Soviet citizens were prohibited for a time from entering Alaska. I do not know long this prohibition was in effect.

One must wonder, too, whether contacts can be so controlled that the native culture is essentially protected while the benefits of those parts of Western civilization that the natives may choose to adopt will outweigh the dangers of others. Some anthropologists have been so shocked by the actual effects of contact of Europeans and natives in the New World that they thought it would have been better if America had never been discovered. The late Clark Wissler once wrote: "As to what a few more thousand years of this freedom would have done for the New World, we can but speculate, for in the sixteenth century a calamity befell the New World, the like of which has no parallel in history. A military civilization from without, fired by a zeal not only to plunder the material treasures of mankind, but to seize the very souls of men in the name of its God, fell upon the two great centers of aboriginal culture like a thunder bolt from a clear sky. The blow was mortal. But the man of the New World went down fighting."¹⁸

Such emotional manifestoes have no relevance today, in my opinion, nor does the romantic notion, developed particularly with respect to Brazil, that the Indians there were simple and pure "natural men" especially sensitive to the "tropical paradise" in which they were fortunate enough to live.¹⁹ Another untenable and even dangerous view, denounced by Wagley as "Social Darwinism", is that certain societies encountered are so vulnerable to changes in the environment by Europeans that such groups are doomed to perish anyway and they "cannot be allowed to stand in the way of 'progress' and economic development". Wagley comments that "such an explanation has helped salve the guilt of 'civilized' men who, through armed warfare, transfer

¹⁸ Lewis Hanke, *Bartolomé de Las Casas: Bookman, Scholar, and Propagandist*, (Philadelphia, 1952), 96. The California historian Hubert Howe Bancroft went even further than Wissler. He maintained: "Left alone, the natives of America might have unfolded into as bright a civilization as that of Europe. They were already well advanced and still rapidly advancing towards it when they were unmercifully struck down." As quoted in "Alaska's Native People", edited by Lael Morgan, *Alaska Geographic*, 6: 3 (Anchorage, 1979), 36.

¹⁹ Charles Wagley, *Welcome of Tears: The Tipirapé Indians of Central Brazil* (New York, 1977), 301.

of disease, forced labor, and other gifts of progress have brought about their destruction."²⁰ This is an ancient dispute. Some European reactions to the native populations in North America since the days of Christopher Columbus have all too often been based on what may be called the "deficiency theory"; i.e., "the assumption that native culture lacked certain vital features of Western European culture and the misperception of culturally different structures as cultural deficiencies." According to Raymond D. Fogelson, "Indians seemed to have always viewed themselves as a separate and distinctive, if not unequal, people, and they transformed their attributed deficiency into a virtue." Sometimes the Indians were just as convinced of their own superiority as the Europeans they encountered.²¹

Whatever view one holds of the place of Indians in Brazilian society today, their actual condition is dismal. Despite the leadership of General Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon in his establishment of the Brazilian Indian Protection Service in 1910, the story of what happened to the Indians there can only be described as a continuing tragedy, according to John Hemming in *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians*.²² Rondon's imaginative and dedicated efforts to save the Indians are not well enough known, but sometime the world will come to recognize him as a great figure comparable to Las Casas.²³ Inasmuch as Brazil still has one of the largest aboriginal populations of any country in the Americas, it is well to keep in mind their experiences when considering whether the present discussions concerning

²⁰ *Ibid.* Wagley particularly condemns Desmond Morris for the views expressed in his *The Naked Ape* (New York, 1969).

²¹ On the deficiency theory, see Christian F. Feest, "Zur Domestikationsgeschichte der nordamerikanischen Indianer", *Wiener Beiträge zur Geschichte der Neuzeit*, 7 (Vienna, 1980), 95-119. The Fogelson quotation comes from the paper he gave at the 1984 meeting of the American Ethnological Society, "Some Historical Notes on the Psychology of the American Indian", 32. The Indians' concept of their superiority has been described in the dissertation of Colin Gordon Calloway, "British Relations with North American Indians from the War of Independence to the End of the War of 1812" (University of Leeds, 1978).

²² Cambridge, 1978.

²³ For a general view of Rondon, see Wagley, 280-83. David Hall Stauffer's dissertation provides a fuller account: "The Origin and Establishment of Brazil's Indian Service" (University of Texas, Austin, 1955). Part of the dissertation appeared in Portuguese translation in the *Revista de História*, 18: 176 (São Paulo, 1959), 73-95; 20: 41 (1960), 435-53; 21: 43 (1960), 165-83, 427-50; 22: 45 (1961), 413-33.

Alaskan natives have any application there or elsewhere in the Americas.

The bibliographical information available on the history of natives in the New World is so vast that it tends to overwhelm the student.²⁴ Certain conclusions seem justifiable, however: 1. Indian activism is growing,²⁵ and 2. controversy still exists on the actual conditions of the Indians in some areas. For example, one is inclined to take with many grains of salt the Public Broadcasting Service documentary shown on October 8, 1984, that presented an upbeat view of the reawakening and revitalization of Indians in the U.S. Called *The New Capitalism: Econonty in Indian Country*, this program described the development of business enterprises on Indian reservations in the U.S. "Alcoholism is decreasing", this documentary reported, "employment is rising, mental health problems are dissolving, families stabilizing, and education is improving. Many seemingly vestigial tribes—who were once close to 95 percent dependent on government largesse—have become independent as loggers, industrialists, commercial fishermen, ranchers and resort owners. Narrated by Eric Sevareid, *The New Capitalism* lists the achievements of the 1.4 million native Americans

²⁴ Francis Paul Prucha, *A Bibliographical Guide to the History of Indian-White Relations in the United States* (Chicago, 1977) lists 9705 unannotated items. There is a supplement covering later publications. See also *Guide to Research on North American Indians*, by Arlene B. Hirschfelder, Mary Gloyne Byler, and Michael A. Dorris (Chicago, 1983) which contains 285 pages of carefully annotated items. It includes information on a wide range of specialized bibliographies and monographs, beginning with *Ethnographic Bibliography of North America*, edited by George Peter Murdoch and Timothy J. O'Leary (New Haven, 1975), which lists about 40,000 items in 5 volumes.

²⁵ Michael Tate, "Red Power: Government Publications and the Rising Indian Activism of the 1970's", *Governmental Publications Review, an International Journal*, 8³ (1981), 499-518; "Studying the American Indian Through Government Documents and the National Archives", *ibid.*, 5 (1978), 285-94.

During the Symposium held October 8-13, 1984, in Mexico on "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas: Trascendencia de su Obra y su Doctrina", there was held at about the same time, in San Cristóbal de Las Casas in the southern state of Chiapas where Las Casas had been bishop, the I Congreso Indiano. The agreements reached at this meeting on "Land", "Trade", "Education", and "Health" were printed in Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolab'al, Ch'ol, and Spanish in *Acuerdos del I Congreso Indiano* (San Cristóbal de Las Casas, 1984). Our academic session in San Cristóbal de Las Casas was postponed one day to allow the Comité de Defensa, supported by about one hundred Indians from the region, to present their position and to distribute copies of a booklet in Spanish entitled *Amenazados, perseguidos y expulsados de Chamula*.

on 272 reservations, who now own 52 million acres of land."²⁶ Yet apparently consensus has not yet been reached among Indians in the lower 48, for the National Tribal Chairmen's Association on January 11, 1985, decisively voted down the recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Indian Reservation Economies that tried to direct economic development efforts on reservations away from social goals and toward private ownership and the profit motive²⁷.

Whether or not we find the TV documentary persuasive, we are led back to the fundamental issues: what are the true goals of the Alaskan Natives as a whole, and are they realizable? Judge Berger reports thus on his discussions: "I have found that, for Native people, their culture is still a dynamic force in their lives. I have found that the culture of Native people amounts to more than crafts and carvings. Their tradition of decision-making by consensus, their respect for the wisdom of their elders, their concept of the extended family, their belief in a special relationship with the land, their willingness to share—all of these values persist in one form or another within their own culture, even though they have been under unremitting pressure to abandon them."²⁸

There appears to be little or nothing said in the discussions on the rights and protections of individuals, and apparently in the natives' conception group rights are and always should be dominant. If so, does this mean that native and non-native thinking and feeling are so radically different that no compromise or accommodation is possible? Is it not possible that more individualism exists among native groups than conventional wisdom admits? A historian must tread warily in these anthropological thickets, but the late John J. Honigsmann has

²⁶ Arthur Unger, *The Christian Science Monitor* (October, 1984). Vine Deloria, Jr., had this to say in his article on "Land and Natural Resources" in the volume edited by Leslie W. Dunbar, *Minority Report: What Has Happened to Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, and Other Minorities in the Eighties* (New York, 1984), 155: "Indian tribes do manage to receive an increasing income from the exploitation of minerals on their lands. In 1982 some 5.5 million acres of Indian land, representing 22,000 leases, produced income for Indians totalling more than \$396 million. The figure represented an increase of 58 percent over the royalties received in 1981, indicating that Indians were starting to be much better businessmen than before."

²⁷ *New York Times* (January 13, 1985), 1.

²⁸ Thomas R. Berger, "Alaska Natives and Aboriginal Peoples Around the World" (p. 10). Report presented at the Tanana Chiefs Conference at Fairbanks on March 13, 1984.

emphasized the high regard of subarctic natives for "personal autonomy or independence."²⁹ He has pointed out that most technical tasks and many social forms have left individuals with considerable scope to determine for themselves when and how to act. Honigmann's conclusion should be pondered by those concerned with the role of the individual in native culture today: "Plainly, the value placed on personal autonomy did not imply total social atomism; it was not so great that it prevented all cooperation and exercise and acceptance of authority. Nevertheless it is likely, judging from what anthropologists observed in the late fur-trade period that the claim for personal autonomy introduced a dynamic tension into interpersonal relations to which leadership and other structural forms perforce adapted. The individual in his turn, despite a positive evaluation of independence, also had to adjust, however reluctantly at times, to his dependence on others, to their claims on him, and to the manifest advantages of leadership in certain circumstances."³⁰

Much depends upon the attitude the majority group holds toward native culture. On this fundamental subject, the sixteenth-century Bartolomé de Las Casas made one of his great and permanent contributions for he never accepted the proposition that the New World natives were an inferior race. At the 1550 disputation in Spain, one of the outstanding jurists and classical scholars of the time, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, felt no hesitation in pronouncing Indians to be not quite men, above monkeys to be sure, but unworthy of being considered in the same class with Spaniards.

Las Casas pitted all of his enormous vitality, wide learning, and skill in debate against these views. He passionately urged that the Indians, though different from Spaniards in color, customs, and religion, were human beings capable of becoming Christians, with the right to enjoy their property, political liberty, and human dignity, and that they should be incorporated into the Spanish and Christian civilization rather than enslaved or destroyed. Today we must take a longer view, in the light of what actually happened after the famous disputation between Las Casas and Sepúlveda in 1550 on the nature of man. Members of

²⁹ See particularly his contributions entitled "Modern Subarctic Indians and the Metis" (pp. 712-17) and "Expressive Aspects of Subarctic Indian Culture" (pp. 718-28) in June Helm, ed., *Subarctic* (Washington, 1981). This valuable monograph is Volume 6 of the *Handbook of North American Indians* published by the Smithsonian Institution.

³⁰ Honigmann, 738.

the council appointed to decide the dispute never were willing to vote formally on the subject, and soon Spanish action in America rolled on as it did before the Emperor Charles V suspended all Spanish conquest in 1550 until the disputation between Las Casas and Sepúlveda could determine whether such action was just.

THE SITUATION IN ALASKA IN 1985

As we descend from the heights of theories and anthropological generalizations, we should recognize several positive elements in favor of Alaskan natives:

1. For most of their history they have been able to a considerable extent to live their own lives; it is difficult to quantify oppression, but certainly they have never suffered such a traumatic disaster as did the Indians of Mexico and Peru through the Spanish conquest. The cultural achievements of the many hundreds of different tribes that have inhabited America had some elements in common, but there were many divergences as well in large and small ways. The small Tirirapé tribe in the Amazon, for example, still have an appealing custom of welcoming back old friends with a flood of tears!³¹

Today the Alaskan natives manifest a political sophistication and recognition of the need for organization that has been rarely if ever shown by other native groups in America. Even so, this development would have been much slower if there did not exist the modern means of communication and travel, or if they were a part of such countries as China or the USSR. After the U.S. purchased Alaska in 1867, the natives gradually began to work for objectives of interest to them. By the early 1900s Alaskan natives were beginning to speak for themselves, and in 1912 organized the Alaska Native Brotherhood to win citizenship, and Congress gave Indians the right to vote in 1924. Their record in World War II was noticed, and their military service "provided many with expanded educational opportunities, and as a result they became more vocal at the war's end." The territorial house, with two Tlingit members, passed Alaska's nondiscriminatory act—the first under the American flag—officially removing from Alaskan eating places,

³¹ Wagley, *Welcome of Tears*.

hotels, and bars all signs that said *We Do Not Cater To The Native Trade*.³²

Through these activities the Alaskan natives have demonstrated a capacity to organize to work for their own interests, such as the Alaskan Federation of Natives and a variety of other groups. According to the *New York Times* of September 16, 1984 ("News of the Week" section) Alaskan natives now constitute 13.7 percent of the eligible voting population. None of the Indians in the lower 48 states represent that high a percentage of voters, in only nine states does the Indian voting population exceed one percent.³³

The civic muscles of Alaskan natives were also exercised to good effect in their campaigns for land rights, and the establishment of the Alaska Native Review Commission is itself a noteworthy accomplishment. So far as I know, the village discussions and Round Tables sponsored by the Commission have had no parallel elsewhere in the United States. A great deal of information has been collected by U.S. government agencies on native affairs, but my impression is that nowhere else in the U.S.—or indeed in Latin America—has such an enquiry been organized at any time. Thus Alaska natives should be in a good position to maintain an active posture to make certain that their objectives are known and respected.

2. The U.S. government in recent years under both Democratic and Republican administrations has demonstrated, to some extent, concern for Indian affairs *and* environmental problems. Sometimes tensions develop in Alaska and in Washington between those who support one or the other of these basic objectives. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 does not satisfy everyone but is generally considered to be a landmark in the settlement of native claims in the modern era. When the history of Alaska is written "from the bottom up", as Enrique Dussel and his colleagues are now doing for the poor of Latin America, there will be plenty of material for the preparation of a stout volume on the story of Alaskan natives—from the year 1867 when both Russia and the U.S. described them as "uncivilized tribes" in the purchase agreement until today when they have become an active force working to maintain the kind of life they prefer in a troubled and complicated world. Some day I hope there will be available an adequate account

³² "Alaska's Native People", edited by Lael Morgan, *Alaska Geographic*, 6: 3 (Anchorage, 1979), 41.

³³ Susan Rasky, "Indians Begin to Weigh Their Political Potential", *The New York Times* (September 10, 1984).

of the efforts of the Alaskan natives have made since 1867 to reach their objectives. The present investigation by Judge Berger and the Alaska Native Review Commission will surely be a important part.

SOME TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

A resident of Amherst, Massachusetts, should be decidedly tentative in any remarks about far-off Alaska, but I set down here for discussion some thoughts that have occurred to me:

1. Let us hope that Alaskan natives have not been so alienated by their contacts with the Western world that they are not willing to explore thoroughly the possible adaptation under U.S. law of the existing protections of life, liberty, and property to their own benefit.³⁴ As Ralph Lerner has stated, U.S. laws and institutions "may afford significant opportunities for native peoples to arrange their lives in ways satisfactory to themselves." Lerner points out, too, that U.S. laws protecting individual rights "are an important bulwark against various kinds of majority tyranny. Presumably native peoples would feel no better about oppression by fellow-natives than they do about abuse by non-natives."³⁵

2. The jury is still out on whether the "special place" of Alaska natives in the U.S. is absolute or unqualified. While the government and people of the U.S. accept some moral responsibility for their fate, Congress must always keep in mind other considerations such as military defense and economic matters mentioned above. Moreover, the world's population doubles now about every thirty-three years,³⁶ a tremendous fact over which the U.S. government has no control. The political and economic winds are constantly shifting outside the U.S., and when coupled with relentless population increase in many countries the inevitable result is continuing immigration to the U.S.

In addition, the U.S. government and society must attempt to allocate national resources available for domestic purposes in the best

³⁴ The experiences of the Alaska Natives with the goldiggers probably did little to impress them favorably with the character and customs of Westerners, who were doubtless also disenchanted as they usually had illusions about the riches they expected to acquire rapidly. See John Coyne's unpublished two volume dissertation, "Alaska: Image of a Resource Frontier Region. 1867-c.1900" (University of London, 1974).

³⁵ Lerner, "Notes and Observations", 4.

³⁶ Brian M. Fagan, *Clash of Cultures* (New York, 1984), 277.

and fairest way possible. Two groups competing today for national economic support are the children and the elderly. At present the government spends about ten times as much per recipient in all federal programs for the aged as for children. At a time when marital instability has greatly reduced the capacity of the family to care for its own children, some authorities are insisting that the allocation of national resources for these two exposed and important groups be radically revised.³⁷ Drugs also are a national concern, with international dimensions.

3. In view of the national problems and international circumstances of the U.S. no single group in its vast and variegated population—not even the Alaskan natives—can expect to establish and maintain an exclusive and permanent legal and moral authority over decisions by Congress. The great issues of war and peace, including nuclear disarmament, demand our national attention. We should all work to assure the achievement of a delicate balance that will represent a reasonable compromise by all concerned.

Two fundamental statements that may help the Round Table as it struggles with the problem of "The Place of Native Peoples in the Western World" have come to my attention, and I commend them to my colleagues in this discussion:

A. Laurence French had this to say in the somber picture he presents in the volume he edited on *Indians and Criminal Justice*: "Indian autonomy, that based upon each group's unique cultural heritage and molded to the contemporary United States scene, remains the foremost requisite for Indian justice. Indian religion and multicultural education are two significant components of this objective. Reciprocity, however, is the key if cultural pluralism is to prevail. American Indians have to realize that 'the days of the buffalo are gone forever' while the majority society must recognize the fact that Indians are here to stay."³⁸

B. Vine Deloria, Jr., a member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and a professor of political science at the University of Arizona, has given this opinion: "Accommodation need not mean assimilation; failure to make unavoidable accommodations with the majority may mean simply

³⁷ Based on Albert Shanker's article in Section E, p. 17 of *The New York Times* (January 13, 1985). Shanker quotes extensively from the article by Samuel H. Preston, "Children and the Elderly in the U.S.," *Scientific American* (December, 1984).

³⁸ Laurence French, *Indians and Criminal Justice* (Totowa, N.J., 1982), 212.

assimilation into the bottom of the social pyramid, not cultural, political, or economic freedom for the minority group."³⁹ To my mind, the term "accomodation" —if it involves a mutual respect and adjustment— offers the most intelligent and hopeful direction in which to go. The honest good will already shown and the systematic attempt to find out what the Alaskans really want seem to me to provide a solid basis for the future.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

My purpose has not been to draw up any firm "conclusions" on the ethical and moral questions involved in the future of Alaskan natives, but to present considerations that seem to me to be worthy of discussion. These discussions take place at a "critical time in the march toward equality in the U.S.", to quote Franklin A. Thomas, president of the Ford Foundation, at a recent address at Columbia University.⁴⁰ The pressure for equality is coming from American Blacks and other minorities that want to hold the nation to its values and to its promises. "The nation seems to be undergoing a shift of attitude", stated Mr. Thomas, "in part because of an overloaded budget and endless deficits". The pressure for change is also coming from women of all races who have awakened to the discrimination in their lives and "will come from America's newcomers who are a microcosm of the world." If the U.S. is to respond adequately to these pressures, Mr. Thomas urged adherence to three principles: "Insuring respect for the individual and a moral and legal framework protecting civil liberties, equitable access to political and economic power, and a 'commitment to peacemaking.'"

As we look back today on that great and unforgettable confrontation between Las Casas and Sepúlveda in 1550, it is natural that we speculate on whether the ideas of Las Casas concerning the Indians of Spanish America may be applied now to the natives of Alaska. Few will be found, in my opinion, ready to follow Las Casas and other Dominicans in their conviction that the aborigines can best be protected by keeping them isolated from the world as the Dominicans tried to in "The Land of True Peace" in Chiapas in the sixteenth century.

³⁹ See his article on "Land and Resources" in the volume edited by Leslie W. Dunbar, *Minority Report: What Has Happened to Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians and Other Minorities in the Eighties*, 184.

⁴⁰ *The New York Times* (October 28, 1984), 56.

Nor will many advocate today that the only way to save them would be by incorporating them into Christian civilization. Nor can the world look at the indigenous peoples scattered in many countries in the same way that Fernando Cortés and his small band first saw the Aztec capital in Mexico gleaming in the sun, or with the fresh eyes of the artist Albrecht Dürer when he first examined the objects obtained from Moctezuma and "marvelled over the subtle ingenuity of the men in those distant lands."⁴¹ Over four centuries have gone by since those early days. Everyone, including indigenous peoples, must take into account their own history and the political and economic circumstances in which they live today. For Alaskan natives as well as for those living in Amherst, Massachusetts, the position of the United States in the world necessarily affects our future in important and profound ways. Our history has been marked by compromise since 1789.

One message, however, comes to us loud and clear across the centuries from Las Casas: that no people may be condemned, as a group, as being inferior; that all people can best be understood in the light of their own culture; that there are no "natural slaves" and that on the contrary "all the peoples of the world are men" who need education.⁴² This message should be heard, it seems to me, especially by the representatives of the politically powerful group in our multi-cultural society. How this sensitivity is to be achieved is an educational problem of critical significance. Anthropologists may have a key role here, with perhaps some support from historians and philosophers.

This is a problem that simply will not go away, and its solution constitutes a responsibility that is being increasingly recognized and accepted—I hope—by the citizens of the 50 states. The complexity and the urgency of this problem has been well illustrated by the collection of papers entitled *Western Expansion and Indigenous Peoples: The Heritage of Las Casas*. The specific studies on many native societies in the Americas included in this volume are prefaced by a remarkable statement by the Swiss-born anthropologist Gertrude Duby Blom who with her husband, the late Franz Blom the Danish-born scholar, worked for many years on behalf of the natives in Chiapas where Las Casas served as bishop in the sixteenth century:

⁴¹ Hanke, *All Mankind is One*, 75.

⁴² Hanke, "All the People of the World are Men." The James Ford Bell Lectures Number 8 (University of Minnesota, 1970), 15.

"Many lament the impact our civilization has had on their way of life. On the other hand, we must nevertheless avoid trying to force indigenous peoples to stay within their culture... There was never a status quo in any society which survived. What we need to achieve is a merging of the existing cultures with a view to saving, morally and ecologically, our vanishing planet."⁴³

⁴³ *Western Expansionism and Indigenous Peoples: The Heritage of Las Casas*, ed. Elias Sevilla-Casas (The Hague, 1977), xi.