



A · M · E · R · I · C · A · N  
A N T H R O P O L O G I C A L  
A S S O C I A T I O N

WILEY

---

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Aleuts in Transition: A Comparison of Two Villages* by Dorothy Jones

Review by: Gerald D. Berreman

Source: *American Ethnologist*, Nov., 1977, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Nov., 1977), pp. 786-788

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/643634>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*American Anthropological Association* and *Wiley* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Ethnologist*

but primarily by the sale of *peurat*, unmarked deer, to meat buyers or Skolts who wish to increase their herds. Mavericks have increased greatly since calves are born in the wild and once separated from marked mothers are ownerless. Relatively uniform herd size for each household has given way to economic disparities between a few big owners and the majority of Skolts who often have trouble obtaining deer for sale and home consumption if their few animals escape roundups. The introduction of snowmobiles, trucks and cars, improved roads, the telephone, and new retail establishments purveying consumer goods have all contributed to the revolutionary change in reindeer management with consequent repercussions on all aspects of Skolt life.

The remaining chapters on economy discuss fish and other natural resources, wage incomes, the complications of exploiting an essential unemployment and welfare payment system designed for the dominant Finnish society, and the effects of emigration on Skolt demography.

The second part deals with social relations within the community and between the Skolts and their neighbors. As Ingold notes, in such a small community, it is sometimes hard to distinguish social forces from personal idiosyncracies, but because he supplies data in minute detail (with the curious exception of information on religious activities) the scholar who uses the study comparatively should be able to discern major trends in a broader perspective.

The final section is devoted to "the minority culture" in which Ingold develops his concept of "leap-frog politics." He shows how the former role of headman is transformed into that of broker between Skolts and the national bureaucracy, largely bypassing the local administrative scene. Doubtless, some of Ingold's conclusions will rankle some Lapp specialists, to say nothing of the headman himself, whom Ingold considers estranged from day-to-day Skolt concerns, though widely quoted in the press and consulted as the Skolt expert. In Ingold's opinion, the drive to perpetuate Skolt cultural distinctiveness can only lead to economic disability for the community. He views the pan-Lapp movement as generally unrealistic. While one can argue with some of his generalizations, they are a refreshing counter-balance to well-meaning outsiders' doctrinaire acceptance of any expressions of nativism. The Skolts' persistence as an ethnic entity is genuine. They do not perceive themselves as Lapps and reject the notion promoted by pan-Lapp leaders and their own intelligentsia (who borrow the colorful trappings of Norwegian reindeer Lapps for gala occasions) that the term Skolt is "abusive." Granted that it relates to a now extinct skin disease to which they were once supposedly prone, Skolts accept it as defining them as a special people.

***Aleuts in Transition: A Comparison of Two Villages.* DOROTHY JONES. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976. vii + 125 pp., appendix, bibliography, index. \$9.50 (cloth).**

GERALD D. BERREMAN  
*University of California, Berkeley*

Considerable anthropological research has been undertaken in the Aleutian Islands during the past thirty years, most of it directed to the prehistory and physical anthropology of the decimated population of the region. This short book fills an important gap in that it deals realistically with the contemporary situation of the Aleut people, who have heretofore contributed heavily to our knowledge of the area but have benefited little from that knowledge.

Aleuts have inhabited their homeland for at least eight thousand years, living at the water's edge and securing their livelihood primarily from the sea. In 1741 they got their first look at Europeans: Russian explorers, followed shortly by their countrymen seeking wealth, territory, and converts. The Europeans soon overcame determined Aleut resistance by force of arms and alien diseases. They reduced the population from well over twelve thousand to less than fifteen hundred by the year 1875, converted the remaining population to Russian Orthodoxy, and conscripted most of the male population as hunters in their relentless pursuit of fur-bearing mammals, notably sea otters. This quest took Aleuts as far away as Fort Ross in California (where they comprised fully half of the population) and even to San Francisco Bay. In the process, Aleut family and community life was altered and their system of cooperative economic activity, combined with self-reliance, was severely damaged. When Alaska proved to be an economic liability, the Russians sold the territory, including the Aleutian Islands, to the United States in 1867. Although the sale proved ultimately profitable to U.S. economic interests, it was no blessing to the Aleuts: economic dependency increased with the introduction of unreliable wage labor and a market economy; outside political and social control was increased; Aleut traditions and life ways were undermined through alien education, administration, and entrepreneurial activity; poverty, ill health, and social disorganization became the devastating rule.

In the late 1960s, Dorothy Jones, social worker, social scientist, and resident of the region, lived and did research in two of the thirteen extant Aleut villages (whose total population numbers about 1,650). The result has been this study of the processes and effects of economic exploitation, political domination, and social subordination visited upon the Aleuts by white American society in recent years. The study is comparative, emphasizing differences in conditions, experiences, and effects in the two villages. Both are economically dominated by whites, although Aleuts are a numerical majority. "Iliaka," an ancient Aleut village that became an administrative headquarters and center for white exploitation of the region, is now dominated by five crab-processing plants that rely on fishermen from outside for their catch and on workers from outside as their labor force. The 170 local Aleuts (and twenty additional "natives") are employed, if at all, almost exclusively as unskilled, temporary laborers; the 108 whites are employed in administrative and skilled jobs in the plants, they run bars and stores, are government employees, teachers, and the like. The other village, "New Harbor," was settled in 1911 as a fishing and processing site. Its 277 Aleuts and other Native Americans are the labor force for the local fish processing plant and, as boat owners and fishermen, are the primary source of fish for the plant. The twenty-eight local whites run the industry but are dependent upon the local Aleuts as laborers, fishermen, and participants in local self-government. In Iliaka, whites control the community, white racism is pervasive and blatant, Aleuts are poor, disorganized and demoralized; in New Harbor, Aleuts dominate the community and its government, white racism is relatively inconspicuous, Aleuts wield economic power, they are reasonably well-off, self-confident, and they derive evident satisfaction from their lives. Jones describes the differential degree of control over sources of livelihood—over production and consumption—as the crucial difference for Aleuts between Iliaka and New Harbor, reflected in differential susceptibility to the power and self-interest of whites and consequent differences in use of community funds and other resources for programs that could contribute to the well-being of Aleuts.

The Aleuts' experience is, as the author puts it, that of "a racial minority in a racist society" (p. 89), doubly stigmatized as both a racial minority and a cultural minority. On both these grounds they have been systematically denied access to the rewards of

American society, which has denigrated, destroyed, and largely replaced traditional Aleut society. Her analysis suggests that only where Aleuts have wielded countervailing power, as in New Harbor where they are economically indispensable, have they been able to mitigate the devastating effects of racist exploitation.

It would be interesting and instructive to contrast these two villages with Aleut communities (of which there are several), having neither industry nor significant numbers of whites. It would also be illuminating to contrast any or all of the thirteen American Aleut villages with the two Soviet Aleut villages (unmentioned in this study), made up of people removed from the Aleutian Islands to the Commander Islands by the Russians in the late 1700s. From available evidence, the Soviet Aleuts appear to be incomparably better off, both socially and economically, than most of their American counterparts.

With implementation of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, a byproduct of the Alaska oil pipeline and Native American militance, "for the first time since white contact, the potential now exists for solving the terrible problems of poverty, powerlessness and exclusion assailing [the Aleuts and] most natives of Alaska" (p. 99). This potential is created by the unprecedented possibility of using resources generated by that Act for the Aleuts: to capitalize Aleut economic development in order to meet Aleut needs as defined by the Aleut people themselves. Heretofore, the resources of the Aleutian Islands and of Alaska generally have been extracted for the benefit of alien profiteers.

This book is an anthropologically informed account of a colonized people within America, which combines empathy for the people, straight-forward description of their lives, and tough-minded analysis of the causes and possible cures for the oppressive economic, political, and social situation that has been imposed upon them. As its author makes clear, the nature and consequence of acculturation among the Aleuts is not a matter of adaptability but of the opportunity "to influence and control events in their lives" (p. 87). Her book will give scant comfort to romantics, but it will give direction to anyone seeking to understand or belatedly redress this little-known but authentic atrocity of white racism and internal colonialism in North America.

***Culture and Practical Reason.* MARSHALL SAHLINS. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976. xi + 256 pp, index, figures, table. \$17.50 (cloth).**

STEPHEN GUDEMAN  
*University of Minnesota*

Directly at the outset of his book Sahlins presents us with the first of several delightful surprises. Transcending the petty divisions of the day, he groups together utility theory and praxis theory, both as varieties of "practical reason." Against these two unlikely bedmates he then poses the anthropological concept of culture. Sahlins's central purpose is to argue that only the latter—symbolic or meaningful reason—affords a final understanding of human action. It has been anthropology's privilege to present this special mode of understanding, although at times the vision has been lost by individual practitioners. (In the end the only true heroes to emerge in the account are Lévi-Strauss and to a lesser extent Boas.)

To set the argument going, Sahlins first offers a three-sided debate among Marxism and the British and French versions of structural theory. The central issues here concern whether historical materialism is capable of meaningfully grasping societies other than capitalist ones and related variants, and whether the structuralist approach is