

ESKIMOS VS. WHITES

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is the article written by Jane Pender, editor of Kotzebue News, for the Anchorage Daily News and for which we obtained permission to print from the News. The article is the subject matter of a letter to Stan Abbott, executive editor of the Daily News, printed elsewhere on the editorial page.)

(Courtesy of Anchorage Daily News)

By JANE PENDER

KOTZEBUE - It pains me that what I must write about this morning is not gain, but loss; not good, but evil in its most profound sense; and that in order to write about it, I must make some distinctions which I find deeply repellent.

What I must say is: here is Eskimo, and over here is white and between these two, over what has been a long, hard and very difficult winter, has grown a barrier. Our town, already deeply divided between Eskimo and Eskimo, is now further divided: this time between Eskimo and white. And none of us now can foresee the future.

Our trouble started, actually last summer, when certain gathering places went off-limits to whites: One of the bars, the RurAL CAP office and there

may have been a few more. Not that they were ever so declared, but because it was uncomfortable to have to parry racist dogma. If you have never thought of yourself or others primarily in terms of race rather than of individual achievement, or individual personality, it is hard to know how to deal with "white man, go home."

Some of this got worse, and by the time of the land claims settlement, Kotzebue was boiling. Those of us who had fought hard for an equitable settlement of the claims found ourselves torn, unable to share in the joy of victory; we were made to feel degraded and suspect.

And ambivalent, too. For many of us had lived long enough in the north to know that the impact area of these two cultures, the technological one and the land-based hunting culture, is destructive, ineffectually painful to almost every one caught up in it. We knew the heavy-handedness of the bureaucracies; some of us had fought hard to lessen some of these impacts.

Still, we learned that now nothing counted except race. You were either in or you were out and for reasons which had nothing to do with your own self, but only with - something intangible in many instances.

For color itself is not a distinguishing difference between Eskimo and White.

Much of what has been happening here is a positive good. It is good to see Eskimos assuming control of their own destinies. It is good that the political balance in our village has shifted into the hands of the people who are in the majority here. It is good to hear Eskimo spoken in public meetings. It is good to see Eskimo dancing in the schools, though many of the older people still have reservations about this.

But, it is not good that an integral part of the political power shift is racial hostility and anger; and that the few whites who live here: teachers, technicians, doctors, nurses, the small handful of business people, are being made to assume the collective burden of all the ills which the Eskimos have suffered over the years as a result of contact. It is understandable that these things would be so projected, but understandable does not mean desirable.

And elevation of race, in whatever cause, for its own sake, is a blind and evil force. It is as evil when a white in Anchorage despises his Native neighbor as it is when an Eskimo in Kotzebue despises his White neighbor.

