

# Letters from Here and There

## *Impact of Urban Culture*

RFD 8, Box 784  
Stonybrook Road  
Gales Ferry,  
Connecticut 06335  
January 7, 1973

The Tundra Times  
Box 1287  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99707

Dear Mr. Rock:

I have over the past couple of years observed the attitudes expressed in your paper by various people which in general concern the impact of urban-American culture on rural Alaska. When I collect these thoughts with my own experience in rural Alaska (as a VISTA volunteer), I see two basic attitudes emerging, both critical of the outside culture. I am writing to you because I think it is important for each native person to make an effort to clearly distinguish the two trends of thought, which in my opinion are contradictory.

The first of these popular attitudes is that the urban culture has intruded too far into native life and is destroying what is left of the original native cultures. The English-oriented schools pose the threat of possible loss of the native languages which are so essential in giving each native person his identity and place in the world. Introduction of money and services costing money such as electricity, fuel oil, gasoline, hardware and ammunition has forced people from a self-sufficient economy to one in which a father has little choice but to leave his home for many months of the year to find a money-paying job in a lean labor market which often discriminates against his kind. The influx of the urban culture also has displaced local law and government with irrelevant and cumbersome legal procedures

and bureaucracy. Increasing numbers of outsiders have brought pollution, liquor, drugs, emphasis on materialism, and upsetting new ideas about ownership of land. In short, rural Alaska must pay dearly with loss of tradition and self-respect for the benefits which the urban-American culture can provide.

The other commonly-expressed attitude is that by responding too slowly to the growing needs and wants of rural Alaska, the American establishment and government are treating native Alaskans as second-class citizens. For instance, the State has not provided schools in each local village, so students must leave home for most of the year. Mail service, a vital line of communication and source of clothing and hardware, is generally inadequate because of plane scheduling and performance. The future of shipping services provided by the North Star III upon which the western coastal villages depend is threatened by outside economic considerations, and only the natives and the North Star appear concerned. The few new industries appearing in Alaska are not living up to promises of native employment quotas. People like Fred Stickman, Sr., are dissatisfied that the government has not sent them personal cash-in-hand resulting from the Land Claims Act. And a RurAL CAP regional director is dumbfounded that the village of Telida has been neglected and spared the government services which other villages have come to depend upon.

Each of the criticisms described above is valid in its own context. Political groups have taken or should try to take action to correct each individual situation. However, in my opinion it is necessary for concerned Alaskan natives to make clear distinction in their minds between the two attitudes, since the solution to one group of problems is to DECREASE involvement with the government

and non-native people, while the solution to the other group is to INCREASE involvement. There is no simple answer to this complex situation. Nevertheless it does seem inevitable that native and non-native cultures will mix further since the outside culture offers the advantages of modern medicine, communication, and transportation, which are attractive even to the most self-sufficient villages. We can only hope that in the process of mixing cultures the number of people whose lives are ruined or made unhappy is minimized.

Sincerely yours,

Stephen Bayes

## *Unfolding History In Far North*

9 Waldron Terrace  
Sloatsburg, N.Y. 10974  
January 2, 1973

Tundra Times  
Box 1287  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99707

Dear Everybody:

Let me take this opportunity to wish the Tundra Times staff a very Happy New Year, and to congratulate you on the fine work you are doing on behalf of the Native People of Alaska, and the profession of journalism.

I am pleased to renew my subscription for another two years. I certainly do look forward to reading the Times every week. To date I have saved every issue that I have received because it adds to the unfolding history of an exciting and challenging era of the long history of our fellow citizens in the far north.

Sincerely yours,

Dorothy M. Pinkert