

Where does Alaska jurisdiction end?

By Alex Scala

Who is the State of Alaska? What are its boundaries; Over which lands does it have jurisdiction and what is the extent of that jurisdiction over those lands?

These are questions being raised by many Alaska Native Tribes in their attempt to define their own sovereignty.

What are the basic human rights that are enjoyed by people indigenous to the lands

we call Alaska? One well-respected Native leader states, "Inupiat rights are human rights as defined and understood in international law which include the right of self-determination (self-government), the rights to be free from discriminatory laws and race discrimination of all kinds; freedom of religion and other cultural rights; the right to own property; (and) the right of nationality.

These inherent rights of sovereignty are based on the fact that for thousands of years the Inupiat have occupied their lands, free from the challenge of outsiders. The Inupiat have jurisdiction to protect the property rights which are essential to their subsistence culture.

But these views are not shared by many non-Native Alaskans. The editorial page of the State's largest daily fre

quently contains opinions questioning the right of Native Alaskan Tribes to exert jurisdiction based on their inherent sovereignty.

One author emphatically believes that to allow Alaskan Natives to be sovereign, independent of the State of Alaska, is like opening up the gates to a minefield. The author claims that racially defined sovereign states are an infringement upon the individual rights of those

who are excluded.

But what of the infringement of the rights of Native Americans? No one group in history has had their individual human rights infringed upon more than have the indigenous people of this continent. Let's not forget the famous words of General Sheridan who said, "the only good Indian is a dead Indian."

Nor should we forget the ac-
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Sovereignty

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tivities of Sheldon Jackson and Commander Glass who, when they first came to Alaska, hung plaques around Native people's necks saying "Speak English" or of them stripping a Medicine Man in public in Sitka and scrubbing him and shaving his head. So whose individual rights have been and still are being infringed upon?

And what of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act? Who has it really benefitted in the twelve years it has been in existence and who will reap the benefits from the Claims Settlement in the years to come?

And who is the State of Alaska? Where does its jurisdiction extend and how will it handle the IRA question? These questions need to be asked and answers need to be given.

The cultural turmoil of the post-ANCSA Native Alaskan is eloquently pointed out in a poem by Fred Bigjim, an Inupiat Eskimo from Sinrock:

Shareholder Native

Alaska Native

Shareholder Native

Corporate Controller

ANCSA created

Legislative action

Federal assimilation

Encourage independence

Assume responsibility

Heritage payment

Native identity

Shareholder vote

Corporate owner

Regional oneness

Native equality

Native clout

1991

Native Alaskan

Individuality sold

Corporate control

Stock exchange

Heritage sold

1991

Termination year

Citizen USA