

**SOLD AMERICAN: THE STORY OF ALASKA NATIVES AND THEIR LAND, 1867–1959.** By DONALD CRAIG MITCHELL. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2003. ISBN 1-889963-36-4. Rev. ed. (Originally published by University Press of New England, 1997.) 544 p., map, b&w illus., bib., index. Softbound. US\$29.95.

For decades one of the most famous advertising slogans in the world was the auctioneers' cry of "Sold..... American," a phrase that the American Tobacco Company popularized in its commercials for Lucky Strike cigarettes. However the title of Don Mitchell's masterful history of the early years of the Alaska Native land-claim issue was more immediately inspired by a mournful and ironic 1970s song by Kinky Friedman, novelist, humorist, philosopher, and one-time band leader of "Kinky Friedman and His Texas Jew Boys." Friedman's ballad *Sold American* (slightly misquoted in Mitchell's introduction) is a sad song about a drunken, down-and-out country singer on the streets of Nashville, who has "no place to go...no place to stay" because everyone and everything has been "Sold American."

The story that Mitchell tells is about the struggle of Alaska's Native peoples, between 1867 and 1959, to find a place to go and a place to stay in a land to which they officially had no rights. The book was originally published by the University Press of New England at Dartmouth in 1997. This newly revised and reformatted edition from the University of Alaska Press is the first half of a two-volume work; the second volume, also from the UA Press, picks up the story where this one leaves off, with Alaska Statehood in 1959, and continues on through the actual passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971.

Unfortunately, many readers will find the sheer physical dimensions of these books overwhelming and intimidating; together, the two phonebook-thick volumes total more than a thousand densely packed, oversized pages. Mitchell, a former vice president and general counsel of the Alaska Federation of Natives, appears to have the Bill Clinton approach to editing. (An incautious editor of Clinton's memoirs reportedly asked the former president if he planned to run for office again, and if not, whether it was really necessary for him to name every single person he had ever met in Arkansas.) Mitchell is hardly one to kiss up to potential voters, but like the ex-president, he is a windy attorney with a large vocabulary and is prone to being an exhausting companion. Words such as *lethiferous*, *facinorous*, *concupiscent*, *marmoreal*, and *peculations* (p. 18, 31, 158, 254, 284) are not the stuff of casual conversation or easy reading.

But those with the stamina to make it all the way through *Sold American* will be richly rewarded. Mitchell's volume is an invaluable reference work to anyone curious about Alaskan history, and no one who has not read it closely can pretend to be educated about the issues behind the Alaska Native land-claim movement and the modern-day sovereignty movement. Don Mitchell is without

question the most knowledgeable person in the world about the long history of Native land claims in Alaska since 1867. Like Lance Armstrong, Mitchell is alone in the field; no one comes close to him in regard to the thoroughness of his original research and the depth of his understanding.

One of Mitchell's core themes is that in much of Alaska, Native Alaskans had been intimately involved with the Western economy since the 18th and 19th centuries. He demonstrates convincingly that the conventional wisdom in Alaska today—that most Natives were somehow not economically part of the wider world until the passage of ANCSA in 1971—is a myth that masks the complex history of the past 250 years. The assimilation of Alaska Natives began, he argues, as soon as early explorers and trading ships appeared anywhere along the coast, stocked like floating Wal-Marts full of tools, utensils, weapons, and manufactured trade goods. Once these treasures were introduced, no one was willing to do without them. The basic cause of this economic assimilation was not any overt policy of the federal government, but rather "the desire to modernity that lurks in every human's nature" (p. 111).

While Mitchell clearly recognizes that the historic collision of Alaska Native cultures and the Euro-American world caused much harm and readily points the finger at deplorable racist practices, he is realistic enough to warn that the "rhetoric of victimization" has had disastrous consequences, trapping Native Alaskans "by the tens of thousands in a cycle of poverty and dependence on white institutions over which they have little control and from which there is no realistic expectation of escape" (p. 8).

Mitchell profiles many interesting individuals, but much of the book revolves around the biography of William Paul, the early leader of the Alaska Native Brotherhood, loved by some as an inspiring leader and detested by others as a crooked lawyer, extortionist, rogue, and scoundrel. Undeniably Paul was one of the fathers of the Alaska Native Land Claims movement, but when he died in 1977 at age 91, most Alaska Natives "paid little mind to the passing of the man who was their most important link to their historic past" (p. 439).

To Mitchell, the neglect of William Paul symbolizes another central argument in *Sold American*: that lack of knowledge in the current generation about the true nature of Alaska Native history has encouraged a distorted and bitter view of the past, in which ANCSA is mistakenly seen as a gigantic swindle of the Native people rather than a grant of "unprecedented compensation" that was "a logical consequence of the Alaska Native historical experience" (p. 10, 12).

While not everyone may agree with all of Mitchell's interpretations, it is outrageous that some of those who glibly disparage his views—such as his belief that the modern sovereignty movement is based on a mistaken interpretation of Alaska Native history—have taken to personal attacks. (He was recently accused, in another context, of being "anti-Native" and no better than a

member of the Ku Klux Klan [*Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, 2/10/05]). Anyone who does his or her homework, as Don Mitchell has done, or at the minimum actually reads *Sold American*, will know better.

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RELATIONS BETWEEN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND WESTERN SCIENCE: A NORTHERN FORUM HELD AT CARLETON UNIVERSITY, OTTAWA, ONTARIO, 7 MARCH 2003. Conference Report by MARY McGUIRE; Technical Production by MARK VALCOUR. CD-ROM. (Available from Dr. C.R. Burn, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, 8349 Loeb Bldg., 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6).

Over the past 30 years, recognition of the validity of indigenous peoples' geographies and resource-management practices by the broader society, evident shortcomings in the way in which much scientific investigation has proceeded, and the assertion of Aboriginal rights, have contributed to making Traditional Knowledge (TK) an increasingly important component of investigation in northern Canada. The requirement to incorporate TK into decision-making processes is entrenched in land-claim and co-management agreements, and it plays an important role in a wide range of activities, which include yielding information on environmental change, generating primary data for scientists, and prescribing appropriate courses of action for resource management. As TK has assumed wider significance, it has spawned a veritable cottage industry churning out papers and conference presentations addressing its use, limitations, relevance, and translation. Over the past 20 years, these works have dealt with the relationship between TK and what is often referred to as "Western science," its role in decision-making and co-management processes, and appropriate contexts for its use. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the initial reaction of this somewhat jaded reviewer on receiving *Relations between Traditional Knowledge and Western Science* was "No, not another one!"

"Relations between Traditional Knowledge and Western Science" was the theme of a panel discussion held at Carleton University in 2003, which brought together some of Canada's leading practitioners and academics with interest in TK. The forum proceedings are in the form of an edited audio CD, with no accompanying written text, and this break with convention initially appeared to be highly appropriate, given that the principal means for communicating TK has always been oral. The participants—Alestine

Andre, Julie Cruikshank, Peter Usher, Barney Smith, Rosemary Kuptana, Mary Tapsell, George Wenzel, and Rachel Crapeau—brought with them a healthy mix of high scholarship and pragmatic application. Between them, they have contributed in no small way to facilitating broader understanding of the nature and validity of TK and its contemporary applications, and it is refreshing to hear experts and practitioners whose works are largely known through print express themselves freed of the strictures and protocols of academic journals. Julie Cruikshank speaking with eloquent verbal economy telling stories about the telling of stories, Peter Usher conveying wisdom and a gentle curiosity as he discusses the nature of traditional environmental knowledge, Rosemary Kuptana speaking passionately of the need to integrate TK and science, and Rachel Crapeau explaining the importance of local knowledge in explaining environmental trends encapsulate the spirit of the group's deliberations.

At the outset, the work seems somewhat contrived. The narrator introduces the discussion by stating that Traditional Knowledge and Western science see and interpret the North differently, and consequently, reconciliation of the two is very difficult. This assertion ignores the considerable progress that has been made in integrating TK and science over the past several years, and the qualifying adjective "Western" provides scope for all sorts of mischief. Nowhere is "Western science" clearly defined. Are its properties different from those of "science"? Was science only the prerogative of the West? Or does the prefix "Western" carry so much colonial baggage that science becomes the whipping boy for a wide range of socially generated evils? Similarly "traditional" as a prefix to "knowledge" leaves the impression that the body of knowledge is archaic and immutable: it is a powerful semantic alienating it from "science," which to the popular mind is current, dynamic, and always discovering. That indigenous knowledge is current is well known. That the panel members were well ahead of the conference organizers in recognizing this was reflected in a perhaps unintended riposte offered by almost every participant who one way or another argued that "traditional" as a prefix to "knowledge" does some disservice to a broad understanding of TK's currency and validity in describing and explaining environmental processes.

Two broad arguments usefully emerged from the deliberations, one revolving around the way in which TK and science operate from an epistemological standpoint, and the other around the institutional context in which TK is used. Although the two are clearly related, the distinction is a useful one because it allows us to separate characteristics inherent to processes of investigation and explanation that may distinguish TK from "science," from institutional factors or bureaucratic arrangements that run foul of wider use of TK.

George Wenzel incisively argues that the problem is not the way in which scientists or users of TK approach investigation (it is accepted that they may do things