

**SOLD AMERICAN: THE STORY OF ALASKA NATIVES AND THEIR LAND, 1867–1959. THE ARMY TO STATEHOOD.** By DONALD CRAIG MITCHELL. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1997. Dartmouth College, Arctic Visions Series. ISBN 0-87451-748-6. 476 p., 3 maps, 36 b&w illus., endnotes, bib., index. Softbound. US\$24.95.

*Sold American* is the first of a two-volume history of Alaska from 1867 to the present. Douglas C. Mitchell, former attorney for the Alaska Federation of Natives, wrote *Sold American* because he realized that Congress had lost its “institutional memory” of the decades of debate regarding the Native peoples of Alaska and their lands. Yet Congress regularly considers legislation which can have a major impact on the people of our state, especially the First Alaskans. Through this history of the Alaskan land controversy, Mitchell hopes to remind Congress of earlier disputes and, at the same time, dispel some of the widespread ignorance on the part of many Americans surrounding the Great Land.

The first four chapters trace the early years of territorial administration through the lives of the appointed officials and missionaries who shaped government policies and practices. Their earlier experiences with Indians, personal beliefs, and ambitions greatly influenced many of their relationships with the Native people. Pervasive ethnocentrism, as well as blatant racism, colored government policy up to statehood. The Native people were portrayed as “primitive,” or “simple,” and inferior to whites. For the most part, the newcomers simply ignored the rights of Eskimos and Indians in order to take their lands and resources and turn them over to their friends and political supporters. Mitchell vividly describes several cases of brazen injustice and discrimination under the early military administrations.

The second half of *Sold American* begins with the response by the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, including the biography of one of their most controversial leaders, William Paul. Hampered by prejudice and discrimination, the Natives had an uphill fight against the powerful fishing, mining, and timber industries. The First Alaskans were denied full citizenship until 1924, and by that time, large tracts of land, as well as portions of the coastline, had been appropriated for fish traps, canneries, missions, and timber and mining claims. The Natives were treated as second-class citizens for a hundred years. Even Native children had been spirited off to mission schools to be “civilized” in the ways of American capitalism and the Protestant ethic. The teachers punished children for speaking their Native languages and ridiculed their families and culture. This first volume closes with the lengthy debates over reservations and statehood.

Although the book is well-written, it is difficult reading because of the labyrinthine intrigues involved. Several characters resurface in succeeding chapters with some new plot to take the lands and resources from the Natives. The author shows with lengthy documentation that many of these men, including some famous Alaskans, were simply liars and swindlers. At times, I felt that his comments were somewhat

contentious, inflammatory, and acerbic, but the documents he quotes tend to justify many of his statements. Personally, I was amazed at the lies, deceits, and outright dishonesty by representatives on both sides.

Meanwhile, in Congress and the territorial legislature, proposals to take away Native lands surfaced repeatedly, disguised under new names and titles. Mitchell often refers to certain legislation simply by its House or Senate number, while the reader is expected to remember both the legislation and its earlier forms. After 130 years of countless schemes and conspiracies to steal their lands, I’m surprised that the Indians and Eskimos have fared as well as they have.

Fifty pages of endnotes and ten pages of “Works Cited” persuaded me that the author of *Sold American* had done an enormous amount of research. Extensive quotations supplement factual data gleaned from a wide variety of sources. Readers may not always agree with Mitchell and his writing style, but he has certainly woven an incredible amount of information into a story that makes sense.

In my opinion, *Sold American* is a “must read” for any anthropologist, politician, political scientist, attorney, teacher, student, or lay person who hopes to understand Alaskan issues today. For instance, the questions of subsistence rights, “Indian country,” and sovereignty can only be understood in light of their historical origins and development. The book also provides a broad basis for comparative studies of government policies and their impact on indigenous peoples.

The second volume, from statehood to the present, promises to be equally informative and probably more controversial. When it is published, this two-volume set will make a fine, thought-provoking textbook for a variety of college courses in anthropology, history, and political science.

Douglas Mitchell took on a monumental task and has, in my opinion, put together the best history of Alaskan Natives and their lands that I have seen so far. Highly recommended.

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**SIR JOHN FRANKLIN’S LAST ARCTIC EXPEDITION: A CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF THE ROYAL NAVY.** By RICHARD J. CYRIAX. West Midlands, United Kingdom: The Arctic Press, 1997. (Available from The Arctic Press, 60 Sunnybank Road, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5RJ, U.K.: Fax: 44 121 3861251.) xvii + 222 p., 4 maps, 2 appendices, index (bib. as footnotes, list of principal authorities cited, list of abbreviations). Hardbound. £25/US\$42.00.

Sir John Franklin’s final attempt to find a Northwest Passage through the Canadian Arctic and the subsequent expeditions sent out in search of him and his men have been the subject