Rebuilding the Political Economies of Alaska Native Villages

Thomas A. Morehouse

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Thomas A. Morehouse is professor of political science at the Institute of Social and Economic Research. He holds a Ph.D. and an M.A.P.A. from the University of Minnesota and a B.A. from Harvard College.

E. Lee Gorsuch, Director of the Institute

Linda Leask, Editor

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by

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This paper comes closer to being a collective product than most other work I have done as a sole author. The notes to the paper indicate the extent of my indebtedness, and I hope they will be sufficient acknowledgment for my involuntary, absentee collaborators without implicating them in the final product—for which I alone am accountable.

Several people contributed to the preparation of this paper in more direct ways as well. Matthew Berman supplied encouragement, ideas, and information, and I probably wouldn’t have completed the paper without them. Gunnar Knapp also contributed ideas and some very useful comments on an earlier draft. Linda Leask’s editing did much to improve the intelligibility of the paper. Others commented on previous drafts and, by their questions and objections, also helped me think about what I was trying to say: Gary Anders, Patrick Dubbs, Bart Garber, Gordon Harrison, Thomas Lonner, Gerald McBeath, Lloyd Miller, and William Morrison.
Alaska Natives today face overwhelming problems. After more than a century of U.S. rule, they have little control over basic conditions affecting their health and survival, they are undergoing extreme social stress and turmoil, and their traditional cultures continue to disintegrate. The political and economic development of their village communities is critical to the survival of the Native peoples of Alaska. In this paper I use the concept of "political economy" to assess problems of Alaska Native political and economic development and to formulate some proposals for dealing with them.\footnote{I have previously dealt with related themes in "The Meaning of Political Development in the North," \textit{Polar Record}, 23(145): 405-410 (1987); "Native Claims and Political Development," \textit{ISER Occasional Papers}, No. 18 (Anchorage: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, 1987); and "The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, 1991, and Tribal Government," \textit{ISER Occasional Papers}, No. 19 (Anchorage: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, 1988).}

The political economy of a society consists of its interrelated political and economic processes. A society's politics affect the production and distribution of wealth, and its economics affect the production and distribution of power. Power and wealth tend to reinforce one another, and if a group lacks one of these values, it is likely to lack the other as well. A political economy perspective thus can tell us more about how a society works than can either political or economic studies done separately, and it can be

Many other Alaska researchers have dealt with pertinent aspects of the political economy of Alaska's rural, Native villages. Those whose writings contributed significantly to the preparation of this paper include Gary Anders, Thomas Berger, Matthew Berman, David Case, Stephen Conn, Patrick Dubbs, Lee Gorsuch, Lee Haukey, Gunnar Knapp, Stephen Langdon, and Gerald McBeath; their works are cited selectively below.
useful in designing strategies for redistributing power and wealth.\(^2\)

Just as political and economic factors together make up a political economy, the political economy in turn is part of a culture—a dynamically adaptive pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting that distinguishes a people as a group, community, or nation. Culture shapes and integrates their shared experience and gives it social meaning. Using a political economy perspective within the changing cultural context of Alaska Natives may help us to understand how their political subordination and economic privation reinforce one another, and how both are part of, and contribute to, the breakdown of traditional Native cultures.

Below I outline conceptual models of the political economy of Natives in rural Alaska and apply them in exploring questions such as the following: Can the conflicting claims of Native village sovereignty and state authority be reconciled in building Native self-governing institutions? Can Natives achieve local economic self-sufficiency, given rural Alaska’s economic limits? What is the relationship between economic self-sufficiency and political self-determination? In what ways might changes in Native political economies help preserve what remains of traditional Native cultures? These are difficult questions, but even if they cannot be answered satisfactorily, neither should they be ignored.

I discuss these questions in four parts. First I review basic political and economic obstacles to Native self-determination and self-sufficiency. Next I examine "mainstream" and "tribal" models of the Native political economy; these models define conflicting approaches for change in Native political and economic conditions. Third I develop an alternative "concurrent" model that attempts to account for the political and economic

realities of rural Alaska and suggest steps to rebuild Alaska Native village political economies. Finally I summarize the proposed strategy for change and comment on the problem of political feasibility.

**Political and Economic Obstacles**

The obstacles to Native political self-determination and economic self-sufficiency are interrelated outcomes of a long-term process. Like Native Americans generally, Alaska Natives have a history of dependence on government for their social and economic welfare. Nearly a century ago Alaska Natives became "wards" of the federal government, and later they became a "problem population" of the state. Even many of the Natives themselves came to assume they did not have the capabilities for self-sufficiency expected (though not always realized) in the majority culture.

The dependence and loss of self-esteem of Native Americans elsewhere resulted from their subjection to the United States government and the imposition, beginning in the early nineteenth century, of what we now see as paternalistic policies. This widely acknowledged source of Native American dependency later had similar effects on Alaska Natives. Another factor seems more apparent in Alaska than elsewhere because of the relatively short period—less than a century—that most Alaska Native groups have been directly subordinated to dominant westerners. The traditional Native economy based on hunting, fishing, and gathering ran up against its natural limits after contact with the west undermined the ecological balance of the old subsistence culture. Then, as Natives became increasingly accustomed to the benefits of modern technology—guns, electricity, manufactured clothing and building materials, processed foods, and snow

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I am indebted to Gunnar Knapp and Matthew Berman for calling my attention to this point.
machines and fuel—they became even more dependent on the welfare state for cash and services. Finally, television and exposure to modern consumer society reinforced and added to the new needs.

Alaska’s Natives were not conquered by the United States, subjected to one-sided treaties, or forced onto reservations. Alaska was a late acquisition of the U.S., and because it was too remote and northern, the lands occupied and used by Natives were not in demand. Alaska’s Natives were nonetheless placed under the paternalistic Indian policies of the U.S. Office of Education before the end of the nineteenth century. In keeping with its national charge, the office’s job in Alaska, according to the Commissioner of Education in 1898, was “to provide such education as to prepare the natives to take up the industries and modes of life established in the States by our white population, and by all means not to try to continue the tribal life after the manner of the Indians in the western states and territories.”

Apart from federal paternalism and indoctrination in the schools, Alaska’s Natives were mostly ignored during the first half of the twentieth century—that is, until Alaska’s lands and resources became more widely known and in demand. Statehood in 1959 marked a new political era for all of Alaska’s residents. In retrospect, Native Alaskans seem to have been even more affected than were the non-Native immigrants who led the political battle for statehood and who still celebrate their victory.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, government and private interests proposed major development projects that threatened Native lands and subsistence resources. A proposed massive dam near the village of Rampart on the Yukon River would have flooded several Athabaskan villages and destroyed thousands of acres of subsistence habitat. The Atomic Energy Commission’s proposed Project Chariot would have used an atomic explosion to create a

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new harbor at Cape Thompson near the Inupiat village of Point Hope, contaminating the natural food chain of the region. Both of these proposals were subsequently abandoned, in part because of Native protests. What finally stopped the Rampart Dam was its high cost and economic inefficiency. Project Chariot was cancelled after independent scientists documented its high environmental risks, and it became too great a political liability for the Atomic Energy Commission.

At about the same time, the new State of Alaska began selecting the 104 million acres granted it under the statehood act, laying claim to lands traditionally roamed and harvested by Natives—including some lands still seasonally used and occupied by them. The Native response to these threats was the land claims movement. By the late 1960s Natives had claimed virtually all land in Alaska, and at least temporarily blocked the state’s land acquisition program. The U.S. Secretary of the Interior ruled that state land selections could not continue until the claims were settled. After a 10-billion barrel oil field was discovered at Prudhoe Bay on Alaska’s North Slope in 1968, those unsettled Native claims caused the federal government to withhold permits needed for construction of a trans-Alaska oil pipeline. It was primarily pressure to bring the huge field into production that prompted Congress to pass the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA). That act granted Alaska Natives $1 billion and 44 million acres—with the land and money to be managed by village and regional corporations also established under the act.

The political momentum generated by the land claims movement combined with Native reactions to ANCSA to launch the Native sovereignty movement of the 1980s. This movement went beyond land claims into the broader political claim that Alaska Natives, like Indians on reservations and elsewhere in the lower forty-eight states, have inherent self-governing powers, or sovereignty, and that Indian country, where Native governments have authority rivaling the state’s, exists in Alaska.6

From the start, the State of Alaska has opposed this claim to

Native sovereignty, and an ambivalent and fragmented federal government has taken positions on all sides of the issue. The record of laws, executive decisions, and court rulings is complex and often contradictory, but on this issue in Alaska, dominant values and interests have prevailed. This is most clearly reflected in ANCSA, the law that extinguished aboriginal land and hunting and fishing rights, and made business corporations central vehicles of social and economic change. And though the federal trust relationship remains intact, federal authorities have placed much greater emphasis on the guarantee of federal social programs for Natives than on the recognition and support of inherent Native self-governing powers.

The State of Alaska has consistently asserted its jurisdiction throughout Alaska in opposition to the sovereignty claims of tribal councils. The state recognizes the financial advantages of the federal social programs guaranteed by the trust relationship and, apparently for this reason, supports limited federal recognition of the tribal status of Native villages. But the state's overriding interest has been in exercising the same jurisdiction over territory, resources, and people in rural Alaska as it does elsewhere. Reflecting the interests of dominant groups based in urban centers, the state supports ANCSA's extinguishment of aboriginal property rights and opposes claims to aboriginal political rights. State government especially resists Native claims affecting fish and wildlife, taxation, and regulation of people and property.

From the time of the early missionary schools, to Native allotments (which divided tribal lands among individual private owners), to the Indian policy reforms of the New Deal, to ANCSA, to recent laws and policies, there is a clear, long-term trend in the complex history of government-Native contact in Alaska, despite short-term variations. Federal and state govern-

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8Ibid., p. 7.
ments have used their political authority, control of land and resources, and social and economic programs as levers to move Alaska Natives toward mainstream political and economic institutions and behavior. ⁹

Dominant institutions traditionally have used religion and ideology to rationalize their efforts to assimilate, or absorb, Alaska Natives. In more recent times, politics and bureaucracy have been the chosen instruments as evidenced in the statehood movement, the extension of state government power, and implementation of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. But a greater long-term threat may not be assimilation but rather the economic realities and limits of rural Alaska. It is the weakness of the market economy in rural Alaska, not its assumed capacity to absorb traditional populations, that makes rural Native people so vulnerable to the most disruptive forces of change today. In most of rural Alaska, Native economic dependency undermines the goals of self-government and cultural preservation.

Although this condition exists in all parts of rural Alaska, it is most obvious in central and western Alaska, a vast region known as "Village Alaska" (Map 1). This 300,000 square-mile area contains about half the state's Native population, or roughly 35,000 Natives. The people live in about a hundred scattered villages, most of which are far from the state's road system. The land is remote, harsh, and sparsely settled, and the costs of living are extreme—about twice those of Anchorage or Fairbanks. Per capita incomes are about half, and unemployment rates two to three times, those in urban Alaska. Poverty is a persistent problem, with rates two to four times those of the state as a whole. Although subsistence can account for half or more of their food, Native villagers in this region depend heavily on cash and service transfers and on government employment. These sources accounted for about half of the personal income and two-thirds of

Map 1. Village Alaska
the economic base of this region in the mid-1980s.\textsuperscript{10}

Village Alaska simply cannot support a competitive, private market economy. It instead has a "transfer economy" — an economy that depends on public programs, government employment, and various forms of subsidy.\textsuperscript{11} Even at its current marginal levels, this transfer economy does not appear to be sustainable. State oil wealth in the 1980s has been the primary source of the state spending on which this part of Alaska particularly depends. But petroleum revenues have fallen because of low oil prices, and they will fall further because Prudhoe Bay production will begin to decline in the early 1990s. While federal spending for Native programs in rural Alaska is significant, it cannot fill the gap that will be left when state spending drops, and it is in any case likely to be limited because of federal budgetary politics.

Even if the transfer economy were sustainable at about its current level (which does not appear likely), the result would be continuing dependence — real, externally imposed limits on actions and alternatives available to Native villagers. These limitations show up in several ways. Political decisions about the provision of cash, services, and jobs — on which the survival of individuals, families, and whole communities depend — are made in distant centers of government and commerce. Native entrepreneurial energies are consequently diverted to the political activity of pressuring state and federal policymakers to meet the basic and acquired needs of Native villagers. Further, village economic dependence on federal and state governments weakens tribal leaders' bargaining positions on issues of tribal government structure and powers. Finally, villagers spend a great deal of time


\textsuperscript{11}Knapp and Huskey, "Effects of Transfers."
waiting for state and federal agencies to discharge routine responsibilities or deliver on their more ambitious promises. While such conditions are not unique to rural Alaska, they cannot be other than demoralizing for many Natives who feel trapped between cultures, and they undoubtedly aggravate many villagers' feelings of helplessness, loss of self-esteem, and despair.

The extent of despair and the symptoms of a disintegrating culture were revealed in a Pulitzer Prize-winning series of articles in the *Anchorage Daily News* in early 1988. Entitled "A People in Peril," the series reported an epidemic of alcohol abuse, violence, suicide, homicide, disease, and accidental death among the Natives of rural Alaska. In the mid-1980s, Native suicides and homicides were four times the national rate; accidental death was five times higher; fetal alcohol syndrome and sudden infant deaths were more than twice as high. These and other measures indicate that conditions are even worse in Village Alaska than in other rural regions and that Native young people are at greatest risk. Native men in their late teens and early twenties are 10 to 15 times more likely to commit suicide than are members of the same age group nationally. Young Native women commit suicide at about five times the national rate. These conditions were not new or otherwise unknown when they were reported by the *News*, but their dramatic presentation created a new level of public awareness and emotional response throughout the state.

The health and well-being of Native Alaskans were deteriorating at the same time the transfer economy of Village Alaska was reaching a financial peak in the early to mid-1980s. This does not demonstrate that government transfers somehow perversely caused the very conditions they were intended to ameliorate. Given the history of cultural disruption outlined above, this is a simplistic and short-sighted notion, at least as applied to Village Alaska. What this relationship does suggest is that a sustained transfer economy is not in itself an answer to the problems of

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Village Alaska, if it is an answer at all.  

From a political economy perspective, the broader, longer term relationship between economic and social change in rural Alaska appears to be as follows: The cumulative changes associated with the settlement of Alaska, the emergence of a modified market-government transfer economy, and the economic development of Alaska as a whole have profoundly disrupted and transformed Native community life. In Alaska as elsewhere, traditional sectors in modern economies undergo transformation of economic, social, and political structures and relationships. As political scientist Robert Gilpin has noted, "individualism, economic rationality, and maximizing behavior drive out age-old values and social mores," and these changes destabilize and ultimately "dissolve traditional structures and social relations." This assessment may convey the impression that, as painful as such changes may be, somehow they all work themselves out. But even this ambiguous prospect seems unduly optimistic when applied to Village Alaska.

Village Alaska no longer has a traditional, local-exchange economy based on subsistence activities, extended kin relationships, and sharing, though these traditional elements survive in modified forms. Nor has Village Alaska been integrated into the market economy, though cash and imported goods are indispensable there. The economy of Village Alaska is instead an inconsistent and tenuous mix of subsistence, market, and government transfer elements, with the latter providing the greatest share of

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13Huskey, in "Transfers, Mobility, and Rural Poverty in Alaska," suggests that transfers may reduce rural Alaskans' incentives to move to places with more viable economies; however, the evidence does not show that transfers cause or perpetuate poverty in rural Alaska.

14Gilpin, *The Political Economy*, pp. 20, 66; also Chance, "Alaska and American Arctic Policy." There are extensive literatures in the fields of political development, modernization, economic development and culture change, and related areas concerning these kinds of fundamental transformations and the problems they entail. There are also wide differences in viewpoints, findings, and emphases concerning the many complex normative and empirical issues involved in analyzing and assessing these transformations.
material support in most villages. The function of the transfer economy is to fill some of the more obvious gaps left by the erosion of the subsistence economy and the absence of a market economy. Instead of being in transition to a self-sustaining economy and society, Village Alaska appears to be collapsing.\textsuperscript{15}

**Mainstream and Tribal Models**

Alternative directions for change in the political economy of Village Alaska can be portrayed in two models of the Native political economy: mainstream and tribal. Each of these models selectively accounts for some of the harsh realities discussed above, and they reflect competing sets of values, goals and interests.\textsuperscript{16} My descriptions of these two models are distilled from writings, public statements, and activities of their advocates. Although the advocates of each model might generally subscribe to my descriptions of their positions, none would necessarily agree with all features of the models I outline below. Indeed, few advocates of either model are likely to have a comprehensive vision of what such models might imply.

For the policy purposes of this paper, I focus on certain elements of the models that appear most susceptible to control or modification by policymakers and the groups and communities affected. Thus, the following discussion emphasizes institutions and policies that can be modified to help ameliorate the problems of cultural change and disintegration discussed above.


\textsuperscript{16} These might be called "ideal type" models in the sense (identified with Max Weber) of simplifying and idealizing a selected set of institutional values and functions. Constructing a conceptual model is thus a method of identifying and analyzing central features and behavioral tendencies of selected institutional patterns.
The mainstream model incorporates the regional and local political institutions promoted throughout Alaska by the state government and the economic institutions created by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. It also reflects the values of modern liberal democracy and market capitalism: individualism, equality of opportunity, liberty, private property, and limited government. Its objective is to bring economically and socially marginal groups into the mainstream economy and society, reinforcing the change from traditional to modern values, interests, and behavior.

The tribal model, on the other hand, incorporates the sovereignty goals and village institutions advocated by Native tribal government leaders. Its values are those that many Natives remember or think of as part of traditional Native community life. These include identification with land and the resources that sustain subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering activities; sharing of resources; respect for elders; and consensual community decisionmaking. Its objectives are to transfer political and economic controls now exercised elsewhere to the villages and to restore and preserve the village as a tribal community.

One of the most important differences between the two models is that the mainstream model locates critical economic and political decisionmaking authority in large institutions far from the village, and the tribal model places such authority in villagers' hands. Another difference between the two models is that the mainstream model separates political and economic institutions and locates them in different sectors of a liberal-capitalist society, while the tribal model integrates political and economic institutions and assumes that they are but two aspects of life in a unified, traditional community.

Mainstream Model

The central political institution in the mainstream model in Alaska is the state government. It is the state, authorized by the Alaska constitution, that determines the framework for government at regional and local levels. State officials and others who want to extend state-sanctioned borough (county) and city
governments throughout rural Alaska probably are among the advocates of the mainstream model, which tends to concentrate public authority in state institutions.

The mainstream model would have Native villages use the standard governmental structures prescribed by state law that are used in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and other urban places. These consist of local executive and legislative bodies and a statewide judicial system, all with their distinct functions and procedures. The village governmental institutions, in turn, are separate from the ANCSA village and regional corporations, which own most Native lands and resources. In the mainstream model, authority and property occupy different spheres, and Native leadership and administrative skills are spread very thin.

The model requires that all citizens of borough and city governments have equal voting rights, be permitted to run for office, and are free to live, work, and play as they see fit, provided they follow rules that apply to everyone.

A fairly strict rule of equal protection under the law applies. The state is required to assure that all people have equal access to state programs, including even such unusual benefits as monthly longevity bonuses for the elderly and annual Permanent Fund dividends for all Alaska residents, regardless of need. Also, under the "common use" provision of the Alaska constitutional article on natural resources, everyone should have access to the fish and wildlife of the state. Where there are restrictions on access to natural resources, the mainstream model holds that they should be applied even-handedly to all residents of the state. Thus, if limited entry into the state's commercial fisheries results in keeping Native young people out of the fisheries, and in transferring limited entry permits out of Native hands, these should be taken as acceptable consequences of a program that is good for Alaskans overall.

While the mainstream model has state and federal governments providing services, financial assistance, and jobs equitably to rural and urban areas, it does not advocate economies becoming overdependent on government spending. Such dependence particularly concerns mainstream economists. They maintain that
local dependence should be avoided in the first place because
government support, subject as it is to political decisions, is
unreliable. Worse, this dependence on government tends to
devour efforts away from productive enterprise and into what
economists call "rent-seeking"—a quest for government handouts
of all kinds—or toward political instead of economic
entrepreneurship.\footnote{In a broader Alaska context, see Gary C. Anders, "Rent-Seeking, Predatory
Economies, and Lopsided Development," paper presented at the 1989 Annual
Meeting, Western Regional Science Association, San Diego, California,
February 1989 (photocopy).}

Rent-seeking merely redistributes and uses limited resources
or wealth on the basis of political influence; it does not create or
produce wealth. Although some economists might propose a
different distribution of property than now exists—e.g., some
might even consider expanding Native property rights to Alaska's
fish and wildlife—they are likely to be among the principal advoc­
cates of the mainstream model.

Mainstream economic activity is best conducted free of
governmental regulation or control. As much as possible, property
should be in the hands of private individuals and groups. Native
corporations should compete in the marketplace like all other
businesses, without special privileges or protections. Given the
economic limitations of Village Alaska, few of the ANCSA village
corporations will survive as much more than paper organizations,
and some of the regional corporations may fail as well. For that
matter, private businesses generally will have a hard time surviv­ing
in Village Alaska. That is the nature of the market. The
mainstream model says that by directing resources and human
energies away from uses of lower value to uses of higher value
(measured by prices and costs), the market operates more effi­
ciently and works best for all in the long run.

If economic conditions in Village Alaska make it necessary for
people to move in order to make a living, then, according to the
mainstream view, they ought to move to more promising places,
such as the regional centers of Bethel, Nome, or Kotzebue, or to
Fairbanks or Anchorage, or even to cities outside the state. They and especially their children will be better off in the longer run. If government can help people make it through such transitions, then government ought to help. But government should not help too much or in ways that spoil people's incentives to move and better themselves on their own.

In the mainstream view, state government unfortunately has done just that—helped too much and spoiled incentives—in providing high school programs and other expensive services in Native villages, regardless of the sizes, locations, and economic potentials of the villages. Such programs not only help destroy incentives, but, worse, they do not prepare young people to function adequately in the villages, let alone in the larger world. Studies of the village high school programs have in fact supported this view with reports of limited resources, low achievement test scores, lack of college preparation, and poor preparation for adult roles either in the villages or outside. Government social programs have thus hindered the movement of Native villagers into the mainstream, which has otherwise been the overriding goal of U.S. policies in rural Alaska for most of the past century.

Tribal Model

The tribal model represents first of all a reaction to the disruptive forces of assimilation that have converged on and built up in rural Alaska during the past century. More immediately, it is also a reaction to mainstream policies—more perhaps to their pretensions than to their failures—especially to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and the state's anti-sovereignty policies. The main proponents of the tribal model are Native


19 A full description and rationale of a tribal model that is in some ways similar to the one I outline here is developed by Thomas Berger in *Village Journey: The Report of the Alaska Native Review Commission* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985). Berger's study, a review of the effects of ANCSA on Alaska Native
leaders associated with the United Tribes of Alaska and its successor, the Alaska Native Coalition, the latter recently having led an unsuccessful effort to add tribal government provisions to the ANCSA "1991" amendments enacted by Congress in 1987. In contrast to mainstream Native leaders associated with the ANCSA regional corporations, these tribal leaders appear poorly organized and fractious, commanding few resources — other than an inherent political appeal — needed to pursue their cause.

If the central political and economic institutions of the mainstream model are state government and the ANCSA regional corporations, the core institution of the tribal model is the Native village, which is both a political authority and a collective economic enterprise. Instead of the assortment of councils, assemblies, mayors, managers, courts, committees, and boards that state law requires at local and regional levels, the village consolidates most local governing functions in a traditional tribal council. The focus of authority is likely to be a small group consisting of both younger leaders, who might primarily deal with the outside world, and elders, whose principal role is to resolve conflict and maintain traditional norms of order and behavior within the village. Given the family politics prevalent in many small villages, this governing group might be a village faction.

Under the tribal model, the village lands now owned by the ANCSA corporations would be transferred to the tribal governments, and these lands would be a collective legacy of the tribe. If there were timber or other surface resources with commercial value on these lands, the tribal government would have final authority over their disposition. In determining the use of resources, tribal authorities would have the responsibility of balancing commercial and subsistence values. As a general rule, Native lands would not be sold or otherwise alienated, not even to individual members of the tribe.

villagers, was co-sponsored by the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples.

This tribalization of Native lands would, in the view of its advocates, help repair the damage that ANCSA did to Native self-determination when it severed Native political authority from land and resource rights and then confined the land base largely to specified checkerboard areas around the villages. In divesting Natives of ecological as well as political territory, ANCSA jeopardized the remaining subsistence culture at the same time it undermined the grounds for recognition of Indian country in Alaska. Tribalization of lands would thus help restore the traditional cultural ties between land and subsistence rights on the one hand, and political and social organization on the other.

Generally, only members of the tribe—that is, those recognized as members by the larger group—have a voice in tribal government decisions. This does not necessarily mean that non-Natives living in the village are denied rights of local citizenship. In fact, non-Natives have participated in the traditional governments of many villages. The general rule in a tribal government village, however, is that non-Native residents are not allowed to hold local office or vote or have a voice in tribal decisions unless recognized and accepted by the tribe. And although many villages welcome non-Native residents, the latters' presence in the village requires at least the tacit approval of the tribal government. This government has general powers over people and property in the village, subject to the limits of federal Indian law and state law consistent with it.

Tribal government advocates also seek authority over the use of fish and wildlife on Native lands and want a share of such authority on state and federal lands. Like Indian groups in other states, Alaska village tribal governments might seek to reinforce and extend such authority by petitioning Congress and the courts for property rights to the fish and wildlife in the villages' subsistence areas.

These kinds of tribal powers and rights would go well beyond the advisory role in state fish and wildlife regulation that Natives were provided under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act passed by Congress in 1980. Revised laws and policies
could also increase Native participation in fisheries that are under limited entry restrictions and remove some of the constraints on Native commercial use of marine mammals that were imposed by the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Proponents of the tribal model believe such changes would help remedy ANCSA's extinguishment of aboriginal land and hunting and fishing rights, its negligence concerning subsistence lands, and its silence on Native rights to marine resources.

Advocates of the tribal model recognize the economic limitations of Village Alaska, but they do not respond to them as mainstream advocates do. They know there is little potential for commercial enterprise in Village Alaska and that most village corporations have no economic future. They also expect that very little of the wealth controlled by the regional corporations will ever be seen in the villages. But, in the tribal view, the life and death of villages should not be determined by market forces, nor should such forces dictate where Natives live or what economic activities they pursue. Instead, tribal advocates believe that village economies should continue to be based on a combination of subsistence, federal and state transfers, wage employment, commercial fishing, trapping, and other activities common in rural Alaska. They believe, moreover, that this could be a long-term, sustainable economic base if federal and state governments continue to meet their legal and moral responsibilities to Alaska Natives, and if Natives were guaranteed greater access to their region's fish and wildlife.

Tribal advocates might argue that their model—if all its essential features could be realized—represents the only viable approach to self-determination for Alaska Natives. In contrast to the assimilationist mainstream model, the tribal model would work for the survival of the village as a total political economy and the self-determination of the tribe as a whole, not merely of its individual members.

Assessment of Models

Both the mainstream and the tribal models are responses to the problems of Village Alaska's political economy. The
mainstream solution to these problems is to open Village Alaska more deliberately and completely to the forces of social and economic change. These forces have transformed the village culture during the past century, and continued change is inevitable. Mainstream advocates say village people cannot return to past ways of life because history cannot be reversed, and they should not be encouraged to stay where they are because the village of today is not a viable political economy. The mainstream view sees the challenge as completing the movement of Native people from Village Alaska into the American mainstream in ways that will minimize the human costs of the transition.

The tribal solution to the problems of Village Alaska is to renew and strengthen the village as a tribal homeland. Tribal advocates maintain that although the village culture has been eroded, even destroyed in some places, it has not disappeared. They are committed to preserving what remains of the traditional culture and restoring the health of the village. This model requires a reversal of policies associated with the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and re-establishment of the village as a Native political economy in which the tribe controls land and resources and other essentials of village life.

Although advocates of the mainstream and the tribal models could doubtless make better cases for themselves, the above discussion has tried to indicate that both have strong arguments. But the models also have obvious weaknesses. The critical weakness of the mainstream model is that the market economy has not worked for most of the Native people of rural Alaska. They have not moved out of their villages, and they have not been absorbed into the mainstream economy. Most have stayed in their villages despite the social and economic costs, only some of which are subsidized by the transfer economy. Yet, advocates of the mainstream model apparently remain eager to trade the cultural values of Alaska Natives for the individualistic values and rewards of the market economy. They would allocate property rights to fish and wildlife, for example, as if subsistence hunting and fishing had only economic and recreational values. They tend to view traditional Native values as obstacles to individual
achievement and social progress.

The basic weakness of the tribal model is that, in its own way, it also fails to deal adequately with the real limits of the rural political economy. It is particularly deficient in dealing with the problem of Native dependency. Nor does the tribal model appreciate the inexorability and pervasiveness of long-term forces of economic and social change, and the pressures these forces impose on Native young people who need to learn to function in the larger society. Thus, both models are seriously flawed: the mainstream model with its idealized notions of a liberal polity and market economy that can successfully absorb Natives as it has many other ethnic and racial groups, and the tribal model with its vision of a traditional village community somehow insulated from, yet highly dependent on, the rest of society.

**Concurrent Model**

Below I present an alternative, "concurrent" model of the Alaska Native political economy that attempts to incorporate the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of the mainstream and tribal models. I call the model "concurrent" because, although it gives priority to tribal over mainstream elements, it builds upon both tribal and mainstream values and institutions. The concurrent model recognizes, too, that the people of Village Alaska cannot avoid continuing, disruptive changes in their lives, and it assumes that they should be better prepared to deal with them. Finally, the concurrent model looks toward greater integration rather than assimilation of Village Alaska Natives into mainstream society.

By "integration" I mean group and institutional coordination and mutual adjustment. In an integrated society, culturally or

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racially distinct groups, while maintaining their distinctiveness, have access to society's institutions, and they achieve a reasonable degree of harmony or accommodation with other groups under a consistent body of general law. "Assimilation," on the other hand, refers to the absorption of diverse groups into a dominant culture and their acquisition of similar habits, attitudes, and values. Assimilation occurs in a melting pot society, where culturally diverse groups are assumed eventually to dissolve into the mass.

The mainstream model is assimilationist. The tribal model, while rejecting assimilation, seems also to disregard or even dismiss integration, which requires that villagers develop the capacities to participate effectively in the economic, political, and social institutions of the larger society. Turning inward to the village, the tribal model tends toward separatism. The concurrent model, on the other hand, is integrationist. It values the cultural distinctiveness of Native village life as part of, rather than separate from, the larger society. Table 1 summarizes and compares the main features of the three models.

The concurrent model focuses on issues of village government, regional governance, land ownership, subsistence use of resources, and commercial use of resources. It reinforces tribal powers at the village level through recognition of Native governmental powers and tribal land ownership. It integrates Native authority with state and federal authority in regional governmental institutions. It increases Native access to subsistence resources and expands Native participation in commercial fishing, handicrafts, guiding, trapping, and other renewable resource enterprises. Finally, it strengthens the Native role in fish and wildlife regulation in shared, or co-management, arrangements with state and federal authorities.

Native Village Government

The federal government should recognize the tribal status of villages and the state should authorize Native village governments. These state-sanctioned village governments should be based on federally-recognized traditional councils or IRA governments authorized by the federal Indian Reorganization Act.
Table 1
Summary of Models

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Features</th>
<th>Models</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mainstream</td>
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<td>Orientation</td>
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<td>Institutions</td>
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<td>Regional corps.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal Status and Rights</td>
<td>Equal protection</td>
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<td>Land</td>
<td>Private</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subsistence</td>
<td>Rural residence</td>
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Act of 1934. They should be identified in the state municipal code as "Native village home rule governments" exercising state municipal powers concurrently with federally authorized powers of tribal government. 22

This new form of local government would not be constrained by the structural and procedural limitations that state law imposes on state-authorized municipalities. Native village home rule governments could combine legislative, administrative, and judicial functions in simple organizational structures centering on the village councils. They could establish local courts or magistrates and law enforcement authorities with jurisdiction over civil and minor criminal matters, much as is done now with local magistrates and Village Public Safety Officers in many villages. These Native local institutions would be integrated with the state court system at regional and statewide levels. While using the authorities provided to tribes under federal law in such areas as child welfare and control of alcohol, they could also exercise the usual functions of small local governments in the provision of social services, utilities, and the like.

As it does now with Native councils in unincorporated villages, the state would continue to support local service programs under contracts and agreements that assure equal protection and due process to all village residents, both tribal and non-tribal. Because these governments would have legal status under the federal constitution and federal law, which supercedes that of the state, their governing bodies could be made up exclusively of Native members.

Alaska Natives as tribal members are part of an exclusive group. They are eligible for the special kinds of recognition and benefits that are inherent in their status as Natives under federal law. Natives are also citizens of the State of Alaska. They are eligible for the same benefits the state provides to all its citizens, and they are subject to the state laws not preempted by federal

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Finally, as members of Native home rule village governments, they would combine these statuses to create new options for local control consistent with their distinctive cultural traditions and identities.

Regional Governance

While the Native village home rule government would unify tribal authority at the local level, other institutions would integrate the tribes with state and federal authority at the regional level. One type of regional-integrating institution includes boroughs, school districts, fish and game boards, whaling and other international resource commissions, and coastal resource service areas. Natives would be represented and have decision-making roles in these and similar regional bodies established under state or federal authority. A second type comprises the exclusively Native regional institutions that support local tribal governmental and economic organization: federations of Native tribal governments, such as the Yupiit Nation in southwest Alaska, non-profit regional associations, and the Native regional corporations established by ANCSA. A third type includes the state’s regional (superior and district) courts under which local tribal courts, magistrates, and enforcement officers would operate.

The state would authorize and support regional boroughs only at the initiative or with the concurrence of residents of the affected areas. The Native regional non-profit associations would continue to operate at the regional level, planning and carrying out social programs for Natives as they do now. Where boroughs are incorporated, the Native associations would operate both in cooperation with and independent of the borough or other regional authority. The Native regional corporations, as part of their broader business interests, would contract or enter into agreements with village governments or village corporations for

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resource development and other economic activities.

Some regional groups of villages may choose to establish boroughs, as did the people of the Northwest Arctic Borough centering on Kotzebue. The incentives for creating such boroughs would be acquisition of the state-authorized powers of land use control and taxation over entire regions and stronger controls over public education. These were the main reasons for the incorporation of several boroughs in rural Alaska since statehood. Regional government powers and responsibilities become real incentives to borough creation when resource development—such as oil on the North Slope, zinc near Kotzebue, and fish in Bristol Bay—creates both the need for borough governments and the revenues to support them.

Unlike the village tribal governments, regional boroughs would not be exclusively Native governments because they are established under the state constitution. Similarly, regional school districts, whether part of or outside boroughs, would be state-sanctioned authorities in which all residents of the region would be represented. The assemblies, boards, and executives of these institutions, however, would likely be controlled by Natives in regions where Native populations predominate. The status of Natives in regional fish and wildlife management institutions would combine forms of exclusive, shared, and subordinate Native rights and authority as discussed below.

Land Ownership

In the concurrent as in the tribal model, land is the base of the Native village culture. ANCSA village corporation lands should be transferred to tribal governments. Where timber and other commercial resources could be developed or where other business opportunities exist, the village corporation could be continued in order to pursue them. For example, the village corporation could lease tribal assets. Similarly, the Native regional corporation could work with the village corporation or tribal government in joint economic enterprises.

One of the significant benefits to the village of such arrangements would be that, whatever the economic outcomes of cor-
porate or tribal business ventures, the land would always remain inalienable. Another benefit would be that Natives, as tribal villagers, would have a more definite voice in regional corporate activities affecting both surface values owned by the villages and subsurface values owned by the regions.

Tribalization of Native lands should be authorized by an amendment to ANCSA. Working through the Alaska Federation of Natives or another statewide Native coordinating body, village and regional corporations and village tribal governments should define and agree to specific provisions of such an amendment. This federal legislation would be part of a general policy to recognize the tribal status of Alaska villages.

In addition to authorizing such transfers, the law should assure that undeveloped Native land continues to be protected from taxation and should remove individual corporate stockholders' veto powers over Native land transfers. These changes in ANCSA could be reinforced by parallel changes in state law affecting Native village corporations. Given the economic interrelationships of the villages with their regions and the rest of the state, developed land—and the activities and improvements on it and the production and income from it—should continue to be subject to state and local taxation.

Because economic opportunities are likely to be limited in most places, villagers will need to continue to depend on a combination of subsistence, transfers, and limited wage employment. But the concurrent model also envisions the creation of some new economic opportunities that would more directly promote greater economic self-reliance among rural Alaska Natives. The principal means of accomplishing this would be to increase Native access to fish and wildlife resources for both subsistence and commercial uses.

Subsistence Use of Resources

Existing state fish and game laws include a subsistence preference provision under which both Native and non-Native residents of rural areas have priority rights to fish and game whenever state authorities declare them to be in short supply.
This state provision is backed up at the federal level by a similar provision in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. To expand and reinforce Native access to resources for subsistence uses, the Alaska lands act (which takes legal precedence over the state's subsistence preference law and constitutional article on natural resources) and related state laws should be changed to accomplish the following:

First, subsistence should be considered a legal-political right of Natives because of its significance to their history, identity, and survival as aboriginal peoples, not because of their race or place of residence. Subsistence rights should be tied to tribal membership and such rights should be federally protected. The Native residents of all tribal villages should have subsistence rights regardless of where these villages are located; this would include villages in urban regions such as the Kenai Peninsula. Second, Native villagers should have exclusive rights to wildlife on tribal lands and strong priority rights in surrounding "subsistence areas" on federal and state lands beyond the tribal lands. Third, the state fish and wildlife regulatory system should be changed so that tribal authorities have control over the actual conduct of subsistence fishing and hunting, while state authorities retain control over both the initial allocations among subsistence, sport, and commercial uses and the total allowable subsistence harvests of the various species in the region.

This co-management system would thus retain overall conservation regulation authority in the state boards of fish and game, but assign subsistence allocation and use authority to a body of representatives of the tribal villages working with or as part of the regional fish and game boards. Existing regulatory systems combine Native and governmental authorities, generally with much less Native control than proposed here. The proposed system is modeled on the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, where Natives appear to have the strongest allocation and use controls within conservation limits. Other co-management systems include the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Goose Management Plan and the Eskimo Walrus Commission in Alaska the International Agreement on the Conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd; and the Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping Coordinating Committee established as part of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement of 1975 between the
subsistence allocation and use of resources would reduce unnecessary conflicts that frequently arise between state regulations (or their interpretation) and changing subsistence practices. The latter are not always clearly defined in static "customary and traditional" terms. Further, by keeping basic conservation authority in state hands, there would be a balancing of subsistence, commercial, and sport uses of resources and an external check on the total subsistence harvest. This would help assure all Alaskans that both Native and non-Native interests would be accommodated and that the health and sustainability of fish and game populations would be preserved.

An example of this kind of co-management is the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission consisting of Native whale hunters from northern and western Alaska. While federal and international authorities set harvest quotas, the commission assigns and coordinates the takes of hunters from the several participating villages. Similar co-management regimes should be established for other marine mammals, land mammals, and birds.

The state and federal conservation limits on Native control of subsistence hunting and fishing do not imply that Natives are not at least equally committed to preserving fish and wildlife populations. Instead, they are a necessary response to the competition for scarce resources among subsistence, sport, and commercial users and to the political realities of this competition at state, national, and international levels.

Inuit, Cree, and Canadian federal and provincial governments.


Commercial Use of Resources

There are several good reasons for encouraging rural Alaska Natives to make greater commercial use of renewable resources and for increasing their access to fish and wildlife resources and to commercial markets. First, Natives could increase their cash incomes from commercial fishing, hunting, and trapping and from other commercial industries indigenous to rural Alaska such as guiding, the production of arts and crafts, and tourism. Second, in addition to creating cash incomes, these commercial activities generally have the added virtue of compatibility with the subsistence culture. Third, unlike many other problem areas, there are some clear policy levers available in the area of renewable resources. Although there are serious potential conflicts with competing interests, changes in certain federal and state policies might nonetheless be made that could significantly increase Native participation in commercial renewable resource industries.

Probably the two most important policies directly affecting renewable resources are the Alaska limited entry fisheries law and the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Access to Alaska's commercial salmon and herring fisheries is limited to those holding limited entry permits. Originally assigned in grandfather rights to those who had established a history of participation and dependence on fishing incomes, the permits are freely transferable: their owners can sell them, trade them, or give them away. There has been a steady erosion of about two percent a year in the share of permits held by rural Natives since the program was initiated in the mid-1970s. In addition, the high and rising prices of permits — now as high as two and three hundred

thousand dollars in some fisheries—has placed them out of reach of many, but particularly of young Natives.\textsuperscript{28}

The state should create a new category of leasable limited entry permits. It should buy back a number of existing permits, or issue as many new permits as necessary, or do both, making them available for the exclusive use of Alaska Natives. These new permits could be assigned to Native fishermen as fixed-term leases. At the end of the term, they could revert to the state for renewal or for a new round of leasing among Natives. This system should be administered under state supervision by Native organizations—regional non-profit associations or regional corporations working with village tribal governments.\textsuperscript{29}

Congress passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act to restore and maintain threatened marine mammal populations including polar bears, sea otters, Stellar sea lions, and certain species of walruses, seals, and whales. While outlawing the harvest of the protected species and prohibiting commercial sales of marine mammal products, the act provides a subsistence exception. This exception permits Native hunting of the protected species unless the populations are reduced to certain minimum levels. It also allows Natives to sell authentic Native handicrafts fashioned from marine mammal products. Natives, however, are otherwise subject to the general prohibition against commercial sales. Although some Natives, particularly in western and northern regions, have earned significant incomes from handicraft sales, the outlawing of commercial markets has limited Native participation and incomes, and it has contributed to inefficiencies and waste in the "traditional marketing" that has been allowed and


\textsuperscript{29} This proposal is similar to that of Berman in "Strategies for Economic Self-Reliance," p. 32.
the underground marketing that has generally been ignored.\textsuperscript{30}

The Marine Mammal Protection Act and related international treaties should be amended to permit—within the limits of harvest quotas set by national and international authorities—commercial production and marketing of marine mammal products by Alaska Natives. What needs to be limited by external authorities is the resource harvest, not what Natives do with the harvest allowed them under the law. There is no reason why Alaska Natives should not profit commercially from allowable harvests that are also an important part of the subsistence culture.

Conclusion

If neither mainstream nor tribal models of political economy provide adequate answers to the overwhelming problems of Alaska Native villages, what can be done? I have made several suggestions in the form of a concurrent model that would strengthen tribal political and economic institutions of Native villages and integrate them with mainstream institutions.

- Villagers should have as much local control as possible over their internal affairs and subsistence way of life. The federal government should recognize their status as tribes, and the state government should authorize Native village home rule governments.

- Native village governments should be integrated with state and federal political institutions at the regional level in boroughs, school districts, regional fish and game boards, and state courts.

- ANCSA village corporation lands should be transferred to the village tribal governments, and these governments should be able to use these inalienable lands for both subsistence and commercial purposes.

• Subsistence should be recognized as a Native legal-political right tied to tribal membership and not as a privilege based on race. Tribal authorities should have exclusive rights to fish and wildlife on tribal lands and priority subsistence rights on federal and state lands in extended subsistence areas.

• Natives should control subsistence and related commercial hunting and fishing by Natives under conservation limits set and enforced by state and federal officials.

• Natives should have increased access to occupations related to subsistence—commercial fishing, guiding, handicraft production and marketing, and trapping—and the state limited entry fisheries program and the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act should be changed to promote such participation.

These several steps toward Native political self-determination and economic self-sufficiency combine into a two-part strategy. The first part is built on federal recognition of villages as tribes and state support for Native home rule governments. Tribal recognition and home rule powers provide legitimacy to Native institutions, signify respect for Native cultures, and strengthen the cultural identities of individual Natives. The second part of the strategy builds on and strengthens the subsistence economy and supports Natives' commercial use of renewable resources. This part reinforces Natives' relationship with the land and provides them increased access to the market economy in ways that are compatible with traditional subsistence culture.

Beyond the scope of this paper is a potential third part of the strategy—the education of Native young people for life in the city as well as in the village. Although Native education has been mentioned above only in passing, it is at least as important as the political and economic concerns of this paper. Despite all that might be done, many Native villages of rural Alaska may not be economically and socially sustainable in the long run. The young people in particular must be prepared to move elsewhere in rural or urban Alaska or beyond if that is their best choice. Whatever
the outcomes for individual villages, Natives should assure that their children are prepared for fuller participation in the institutions of mainstream society.

The proposals made in this paper include highly controversial redistributions of political authority and property rights that many non-Native (and some Native) Alaskans would strongly oppose. In fact, it is not likely that such proposals would be supported by most state political leaders or be enacted by the state legislature. The political feasibility of these proposals is a serious problem mainly because many non-Native Alaskans perceive that their own political or property rights might be curtailed as a result, or they feel that Natives either don’t or shouldn’t have special political status.

The problem of political feasibility is not just a matter of current public sentiment, however. It is rather one that traces back to the beginnings of U.S. rule in Alaska. The political reckoning between the Native peoples and the immigrants to Alaska was put off for a century after the American Purchase. During that period, an ever-increasing number of immigrants and "outsiders" made and entrenched their own claims to Alaska and its resources long before the official "settlement" with the Natives in 1971. The statehood act had left undefined Native claims for later action by Congress, and the Constitution of the State of Alaska did not even mention the existence of the Native peoples.

It should not be surprising that there is now substantial opposition within Alaska to measures that would push beyond the limits of the 1971 claims act and grant broader political rights and control of resources to Natives. Immigrants to the territory and state, the U.S. government, and outside corporations had already imposed a new set of rules, and staked their claims to Alaska’s resources, well before Natives were mobilized politically to press their prior claims and protect their aboriginal rights. For most Alaska Natives, this mobilization did not occur until after statehood and, even then, it required the drive for Prudhoe Bay oil development to bring about a settlement act that has at best had ambivalent consequences. Since the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, policy on Native political and economic
development issues has largely been a choice between politically feasible but piecemeal approaches that have not worked or have been too limited in scope, and more comprehensive but apparently "infeasible" proposals like those discussed above.

If significant changes in policies affecting Alaska Native political and economic rights are to be achieved in the political arena, it appears they will have to be initiated at the federal level where more balanced and disinterested deliberations can occur. If breakthroughs on the issues of tribal recognition and subsistence rights can be made there, possibly with reinforcement from the federal courts, then further supportive action may occur at the state level as well. At both levels, breaking the political feasibility barrier will require that a strong public case be made that the identity, dignity, and well-being of the Alaska Native peoples depends on a rebuilding of their village political economies. Americans in general and Alaskans in particular must be persuaded that the benefits to society of rebuilding Native political economies and preserving their cultures will far outweigh the costs to non-Natives in Alaska and elsewhere.