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## Reviews

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**Alaska Native Political Leadership and Higher Education: One University, Two Universes.** By Michael L. Jennings. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004. 224 pages. \$75.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper.

Michael Jennings's book fills an important gap in the literature on Alaska Natives and education. Although many publications address the American Indian experience in higher education, few focus on the unique experience of Alaska Natives within the broader work, and Jennings is the only contemporary author telling the story of the University of Alaska (UA) system and Alaska Natives in such detail. He presents a disturbing and cautionary tale of a university system systematically thwarting and undermining the efforts of indigenous students, educators, and communities to make higher education relevant and responsive to their needs.

Jennings's main argument is that there are fundamental differences between the worldviews and cultures of Alaska Natives and Alaska's institutions of higher education, and these differences create conflicts and prevent the universities from meeting the needs of Natives and their communities. He explains why Native worldviews inherently conflict with those of Western institutions of higher education and offers multiple examples of these conflicts both at the urban campuses of the University of Alaska system, in particular at Fairbanks and Anchorage, and the rural two-year campuses that are now part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). Whether the immediate issue is creating the Native Student Services office in Anchorage, hiring a vice president of rural affairs for the UA system, or making the rural colleges responsive to local Natives' interests and needs, the result seems to be the same: Native students and communities, at best, get only some of what they ask for and, at worst, are treated with disrespect and end up with little or no satisfaction. Jennings ascribes the universities' failure to respond to Native initiatives to the institutions' "unwillingness or inability to recognize the nature and validity of a Native worldview" (7). Instead they react from a "Western understanding of educational structures and goals" (7-8). He argues that only when the university bases its change initiatives on Alaska Natives' worldview will Natives' needs be met.

Jennings tries to elucidate how the culture and traditions of Western educational institutions differ fundamentally from Native worldviews and beliefs. He focuses especially on how ties to and understandings of the land are central to Native identity, as well as detailing differences in Native and Western practices and beliefs around governance, social life and social control, and education. Unfortunately, this discussion, constituting the bulk of the second chapter, is more theoretical than grounded and becomes very difficult to follow. There seems to be a tension in the book between presenting a history of and perspective on the UA system's relationship with Alaska Natives, which is intended to improve postsecondary education policy making in Alaska, and building a theory on why Western institutional perspectives conflict with Native worldviews. In trying to achieve both objectives, Jennings is not entirely successful in achieving either. It would be far easier to grasp the theoretical arguments if they were more clearly tied to the central story of the University of Alaska's failures around Alaska Native education. Indeed, this book would be much stronger if Jennings first presented the story of the University of Alaska system's failure to meet the needs of the Native community and then brought in the theoretical framework to explain the ongoing conflict and UA's resistance to change.

There are other weaknesses in this work. In the third chapter Jennings provides an overview of some of the key events since Westerners came to Alaska, including the rise of the contemporary Alaska Native leadership in the twentieth century. However, this history is not explicitly linked to the main discussion of the higher-education system, and the reader is left to make the connections between this history, the theoretical frameworks presented, and the story of the university system's interactions with Natives in the remainder of the book. Indeed, in several places in the second half of the book Jennings alludes to the centrality of land claims and subsistence rights in understanding Native responses to the universities, but these links are never made clear.

Jennings's definition of *the* Native leadership in Alaska is very narrow, and his choice of interviewees reflects this. He appears to define the Native leadership as those men who have risen to positions of power within the Native corporation structure. There are multiple ways in which leadership can be defined in Native communities, from village council and tribal government members to leaders of nonprofit and government agencies and elders from respected families. This broad definition of leadership is not reflected in Jennings's choice of respondents, and this oversight may have led to a somewhat biased interpretation of the university's actions or purpose, as it is seen through the eyes of only one slice of Alaska Native leadership.

The most noticeable manifestation of this limited perspective comes in Jennings's failure to include any women among his primary informants. When Jennings conducted his interviews in 1990, there were a number of prominent women involved in Alaska Native politics and education. While not all had leadership roles on the board of regents or in Native corporations at that point in time, they were and continue to be influential as leaders in the Native community. Among these are Janie Leask, who served as president of

the Alaska Federation of Natives in the 1980s; Dr. Edna Ahgeak MacLean, current president of Ilisagvik College and 1989 Alaska Native Educator of the Year; and Dr. Rosita Worl, who was a Sealaska Native Corporation board member from the late 1980s through the 1990s. Jennings also talks extensively about two Native women in higher education in particular, Mary Reeve and Elaine Abraham, but did not select either of them as a primary interview subject. Moreover, in general, Alaska Native women have been more successful in higher education than men. According to the 1990 census, of Alaska Natives age twenty-five and older, 24.5 percent of females had completed one to three years of college, and 5.5 percent had completed four or more years, while only 20 percent of males had one to three years of college, and only 2.6 percent had finished four or more years. That gap continued into the 2000 census. Had he included women's voices more systematically, Jennings may have developed a different perspective on some of the issues he addresses.

Also, some of the assertions he makes are based on out-of-date understandings of education theory and practice. For example, in discussing educational leadership theory, Jennings argues that schools are organized into systems of defined rules and formal authority, with centralization of control, as promoted in modern scientific management theory. He cites David Tyack and others from the 1960s and 1970s yet ignores leading theorists from the past two decades, like Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves, whose work has moved educational leadership theory and practice in exactly the opposite direction. Moreover, when he argues that the pursuit of indigenous ways of knowing is not considered an appropriate academic endeavor, he ignores the success of the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, a federally funded, multi-million-dollar initiative "designed to serve as a resource for compiling and exchanging information related to Alaska Native knowledge systems and ways of knowing" ([www.ankn.uaf.edu](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu)).

Factual errors in the text also detract from the important points Jennings makes. For instance, as he discusses the history of the K-12 system for Natives and non-Natives in the early part of the twentieth century, it sounds as though all schools statewide were segregated. While indeed there were two systems of schooling in the Alaskan territory, a federal system for Natives only and a territorial one primarily for white students, there were in fact more Native students enrolled in territorial schools than in federal schools. In several instances he also leaves the reader hanging. For example, at the end of chapter 5 he alludes to the central importance of the subsistence issue in reunifying and energizing the "Bush Caucus," composed of the Native, rural members of the Alaska state legislature, and then fails to pick up this thread in the remainder of the book.

The University of Alaska system continues to struggle with the issues that Jennings highlights. There are still only a handful of Native faculty members across the campuses, no Alaska Studies majors, and low numbers of Native students completing their bachelor degrees and seeking a graduate education. It is thus vital that policy makers and educators in Alaska understand both the history and the central arguments presented by Jennings. The main

story of this work is compelling; hopefully, the limitations will not discourage readers from getting to the heart of it.

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**Alaska's Daughter: An Eskimo Memoir of the Early Twentieth Century.** By Elizabeth Bernhardt Pinson. Logan: Utah State University, 2004. 205 pages. \$42.95 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

Elizabeth Pinson had an unusual childhood. The small community of Teller, Alaska, provided the backdrop where her German father and Eskimo mother shaped not only her youthful experiences but also her telling of them more than half a century later. Nearly dying in the influenza epidemic of 1918, she survived but lost both her legs. In *Alaska's Daughter* the nonagenarian shares with us a collage of memories and diary entries from the early decades of the twentieth century. Included with the text are a small map of Alaska that identifies most of the places she talks about and several photographs from 1900 to 1950. Allusion to what the reader can expect comes early in the book, with Kipling's admonition on the frontispiece: "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet." Pinson gives us a rambling and detailed account that centers primarily on her father; his friends; his contemporaries as settlers, adventurers, and sons of various northern nations; and Pinson's interactions with these men.

With its claim of being an "Eskimo memoir," this book places itself in a potentially authoritative position to relay a story about Alaska Natives similar to Dorothy Joseph's *Fishcamp* (1997) or Velma Wallis's *Raising Ourselves: A Guich'in Coming of Age Story from the Yukon River* (2002). Pinson, however, spins a near classic yarn of frontier Alaskan common to European and American adventurers and settlers coming to Alaska in the early twentieth century, replete with values that are very unfavorable to Natives and women. This memoir is a personal history told from one in awe of the European men of her time, one who was claimed as their "Alaskan Sweetheart" and adopted daughter. Much of the narrative is reminiscent of romanticized diary writings of young Euro-American women of the early 1900s.

Pinson grew up in the former gold-mining boomtown of Teller, a short hundred miles north of Nome, Alaska, and a long hundred west of the Siberian mainland across the Bering Sea. About four or five Eskimo families lived in Teller, along with several hundred Euro-Americans. By the time of her birth in 1912, the lives of her mother's people had been profoundly altered by the presence of European whalers, explorers, miners, and missionaries, with their technologies, germs, and cultures. Populations of both people and their food supplies had been decimated, and the land had recently been sold by one outside government to another. But environmental realities of life near the Arctic Circle had not changed. The land was frozen and dark much of the year, and everyone had to deal with these conditions, no matter where