

# Terms of engagement: The collaborative representation of Alutiiq identity

## Une représentation en collaboration de l'identité alutiiq

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Article abstract

The book and exhibition *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People* present both Alutiiq and anthropological perspectives on a complex Alaska Native ethnicity. This community-based project, produced by the Smithsonian Institution and Alutiiq Museum in Kodiak, is considered within several frames: cultural identity and revitalization in the Alutiiq region, the new paradigm of collaborative anthropology, and contrasting essentialist and constructivist models of cultural change. An Alutiiq “cultural logic” of connection to ancestors, kin, place and a provident natural environment is proposed as the basis for continuity of identity through two centuries of cultural transformation. Collaborative engagement in Indigenous heritage projects is discussed as a complex but indispensable commitment for contemporary anthropology.

# Terms of engagement: The collaborative representation of Alutiiq identity

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Aron L. Crowell\*

**Résumé:** Une représentation en collaboration de l'identité alutiiq

Le livre et l'exposition *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People (Regards croisés: patrimoine et identité du peuple alutiiq)* présentent une perspective à la fois alutiiq et anthropologique d'une société autochtone d'Alaska. Ce projet, fondé sur un partenariat communautaire et mené par la Smithsonian Institution et le Musée alutiiq de Kodiak, est considéré sous plusieurs angles: identité culturelle et revitalisation de la région alutiiq, nouveau paradigme de l'anthropologie en collaboration et opposition des modèles essentialistes et constructivistes du changement culturel. On propose l'existence d'une «logique culturelle» alutiiq de liens ancestraux, de parenté, de lieu et d'un milieu riche qui agissent comme fondements de la permanence de l'identité à travers deux siècles de transformations culturelles. L'entente de collaboration dans le cadre de projets sur le patrimoine autochtone est présentée comme un engagement complexe mais indispensable à l'anthropologie contemporaine.

**Abstract:** Terms of engagement: The collaborative representation of Alutiiq identity

The book and exhibition *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People* present both Alutiiq and anthropological perspectives on a complex Alaska Native ethnicity. This community-based project, produced by the Smithsonian Institution and Alutiiq Museum in Kodiak, is considered within several frames: cultural identity and revitalization in the Alutiiq region, the new paradigm of collaborative anthropology, and contrasting essentialist and constructivist models of cultural change. An Alutiiq "cultural logic" of connection to ancestors, kin, place and a provident natural environment is proposed as the basis for continuity of identity through two centuries of cultural transformation. Collaborative engagement in Indigenous heritage projects is discussed as a complex but indispensable commitment for contemporary anthropology.

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## Introduction

In contemporary anthropology, ethnicity is understood as a socially negotiated consensus about similarity and difference, constructed both from within (personal and collective self-identification) and without (assignment by others). It is reproduced, created, and renewed through the signification of history and heritage (Dorais and Searles 2001; Friedman 1992, 1994; Hutchinson and Smith 1996; Jenkins 1997; Thompson 1989). The exhibition project *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People*<sup>1</sup> explores ethnicity in the southern Alaskan region of Kodiak Island, Prince William Sound, lower Cook Inlet, and the Alaska Peninsula, and relates contemporary ethnic identity to the continuities, disruptions, and innovations that have marked the Alutiiq path through colonial and post-colonial history. Thematically constituted from community-based dialogue about “what it means to be Alutiiq,” *Looking Both Ways* reflects a shared commitment to reciprocity, information sharing, and multi-vocal representation. My focus here is on the purposes and contexts of this collaboration and on the exploration of “inside” and “outside” views of contemporary Alutiiq identity.

## Collaborative research and representation

A new paradigm of collaborative research and representation has been forged in recent years among North American anthropologists, museums, and indigenous communities (Ames 1992; Archambault 1994; Clifford 1991; Fienup-Riordan 1996, 1999; Jonaitis 1991; Karp *et al.* 1992; Karp and Lavine 1991; Peers and Brown 2003). Self-representation through the work of Indigenous curators, scholars, and advisors is the defining characteristic of this approach. Anthropologists take active roles as curators and organizers in some projects; in others, they work for Native American museums and tribal organizations as “cultural technicians” who facilitate access to collections and data (Nagel 1996: 198).

Anthropology’s “crisis of representation”—the dissolution of its once confident authority to scientifically portray non-Western “others”—is partially responsible for this shift in museum practice (Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Haas 1996; Fox 1991; Jones 1993; Marcus and Fischer 1986). Equally influential have been Indigenous objections to the exclusion of first-person voice in exhibitions (Ames 1992; McLaughlin 1999; National Museum of the American Indian 2000) as well as a

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<sup>1</sup> *Looking Both Ways* is a project of the Arctic Studies Center (Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution), the Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository, and the Smithsonian Office of Exhibits Central, with support from the Anchorage Museum of History and Art. Principal financial support for *Looking Both Ways* was provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Smithsonian Institution, Conoco Phillips, Koniag, Inc., and the Alaska Humanities Forum. Numerous other sponsors included Alaska Native regional and village corporations and tribal governments (Crowell *et al.* 2001: 14-18). Aron Crowell is Alaska Director of the Arctic Studies Center and the project director and curator for *Looking Both Ways*. Amy Steffian, Deputy Director of the Alutiiq Museum, is the co-curator. A catalog edited by Crowell, Steffian, and Gordon Pullar (Crowell *et al.* 2001) and a school curriculum with CD and video (Arctic Studies Center/The Alaska Native Heritage Center) accompany the exhibition, which tours Alaska (Kodiak, Homer, Anchorage, Juneau) and Washington, D.C. from 2001-2004.

broader critique of anthropology and its appropriation of cultural information. Indigenous concerns have centered around the lack of community control over field research; the inaccessibility of publications; disrespect for privacy and cultural values; unrestricted use of oral traditions; removal of cultural objects without permission; disturbance of burials; and lack of credit to Native experts and colleagues (Biolosi and Zimmerman 1997; DeLoria 1997; Smith 1999; Swidler *et al.* 1997; Thornton 1998).

In the United States, the federally mandated repatriation process has been a major factor for reform. Both the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 and the National Museum of the American Indian Act of 1989 (which applies only to the Smithsonian Institution) mandate the transfer of human remains and sacred, funerary, and patrimonial objects from museums to tribes. These laws redress some of the most fundamental grievances of Indigenous communities and, to the surprise of many, have stimulated productive research collaborations as well as legal contentions (Bray 2000; Bray and Killion 1994).

Today, researchers seek permission, collaboration, and communication as a matter of course. Ethical standards of informed consent, Indigenous participation, data sharing, and respect for privacy are pre-conditions for project approval and funding<sup>2</sup>. There is growing recognition that reciprocal, community-based models of research and representation can be effectively implemented as part of a reinvented anthropology. But has anthropology truly “de-colonized” its methodologies, its positionality, and its frames of analysis? How can anthropologists and Native Americans—and there is still relatively little overlap here—work together across the historical divide of Western conquest and colonialism?

Anthropology’s origins and complicities in the colonial era are relevant to this question, and the record of museum collecting in Alaska is an important backdrop to *Looking Both Ways*. Human remains and objects of Alutiiq cultural heritage are housed at museums in the United States, Europe, and the Russian Federation (*e.g.*, Desveaux 2002; Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988; Varjola 1990). Collecting by the Smithsonian Institution began during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century “scramble” for the artifacts of Alaska Native peoples, who were thought to be rapidly assimilating or dying out (Cole 1985; Fitzhugh 1988, 2002; Hinsley 1994). Alaskan ethnographic holdings at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), acquired in large part during the 1860s—1930s, today number more than 30,000 items. Naturalist-collectors such as William H. Dall, Edward Nelson, and William Fisher served government agencies or commercial trading companies in addition to their Smithsonian attachments. Fisher, a marine biologist whose collections of clothing, weapons, tools, and ceremonial items from the Alutiiq region (1879-94) are featured in *Looking Both Ways*, made his living as an agent for the Alaska Commercial Company and as a tidal observer for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey (Crowell 1992). With some exceptions<sup>3</sup>, the priority during this period was not detailed cultural description but

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<sup>2</sup> New standards pertaining to northern research are encoded in the Alaska Federation of Natives’ *Guidelines for Research* ([www.ankn.uaf.edu/afnguide.html](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/afnguide.html)) and the National Science Foundation’s *Principles for the Conduct of Research in the Arctic* ([www.nsf.gov/od/opp/arctic/conduct.htm](http://www.nsf.gov/od/opp/arctic/conduct.htm)).

<sup>3</sup> Nelson’s *Eskimos About Bering Strait* (1899) is an early classic of scientific-realist ethnography.

rather the systematic collection of objects that were usually purchased but sometimes “found” at burial sites.

Smithsonian anthropologists and archaeologists also collected the biological remains of more than 2100 Alaska Native individuals<sup>4</sup>. Aleš Hrdlička, the Smithsonian’s first curator of physical anthropology, excavated and removed hundreds of human skulls and skeletons from the Uyak Site on Kodiak Island (1931-36) for comparative anatomical studies. A protracted legal struggle between the village of Larsen Bay and the National Museum of Natural History led to the return and reburial of these human remains in 1991 (Bray and Killion 1994).

The modern legacy of early museum anthropology in Alaska thus includes the alienated ownership of objects and ancestral remains, as well as contentions about their return and rightful ownership. Bitter feelings remain in the Alutiiq region (and elsewhere in Alaska) about this historical appropriation of Alaska Native people and culture (Pullar 1994, 2001). In fact, the Smithsonian’s well-remembered historical baggage, especially its resistance to repatriation of the Larsen Bay remains, underlay an initial reluctance on the part of the Alutiiq Heritage Foundation (governing board of the Alutiiq Museum) to engage in the co-development of *Looking Both Ways*. The organization gave its full endorsement only after the collaborative structure had been fully developed and the potential benefits to the community had been established<sup>5</sup>.

## Identity and anthropology

Cultural identity, the explicit focus of *Looking Both Ways*, is central to almost all projects in collaborative anthropology. Such projects are based on what anthropology, specifically its techniques, professional resources, collections, and archives can bring to the Indigenous *exploration* of identity (e.g., heritage studies incorporating archaeology); to its *expression* and *transmission* (e.g., museum exhibitions and educational programs); or to its *legitimation* in legal domains such as land treaties, resource rights, tribal recognition, political sovereignty, and repatriation (Dybbroe 1996; Hodgson 2002; Nagel 1999).

These efforts are important today precisely because Native American groups have been to varying degrees fragmented and severed from the fundamental wellsprings of their original identities—land, resources, languages, oral traditions, religious practices, and social solidarity. The majority-culture view of this situation (with no little support

<sup>4</sup> See [www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/repatriation/](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/repatriation/) for inventories of human remains at the National Museum of Natural History. Most from Alaska have been repatriated under the NMAI Act.

<sup>5</sup> *Looking Both Ways* and other Arctic Studies Center (ASC) programs at the National Museum of Natural History are committed to cooperative projects that are co-designed with Indigenous communities, and thus a new direction for Smithsonian anthropology (Chaussonnet 1995; Fitzhugh and Dubreuil 1999; Krupnik and Jolly 2002; Krupnik *et al.* 2002; Loring 2000). *Looking Both Ways* builds on the earlier ASC exhibitions *Inua: Spirit World of the Bering Sea Eskimo* (1984) and *Crossroads of Continents: Culture of Siberia and Alaska* (1988) that toured rural Alaska as well as national urban centres. Alaska Native museums and cultural centres, many built during the last decade, provide an important remedy to the vestigial colonial structure of the museum world through the local re-centring of cultural ownership and representation.

from early American anthropology) tends to be that “authentic” Native Americans are situated only in the past and that contemporary Native peoples have been largely assimilated. This pervasive notion is illustrated by a 1977 court case in Massachusetts (*Mashpee Tribe v. New Seabury et al.*), in which the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council, Inc. sued in federal court for possession of lands in the town of Mashpee on Cape Cod (Brodeur 1985; Clifford 1988). The defense challenge to this claim centered on whether the Mashpee Indians of the 1970s were really the same “entity” that had received title to land in the 1600s. With adoption of a colonial language, Western material culture, and new political and economic institutions, had a specifically Native American identity been lost? Or had its defining characteristics remained intact despite all of these changes? Anthropologists and historians testified to the cultural continuity of Mashpee identity, while the opposition asserted otherwise. The Mashpee lost in court and on appeal; in official judgment, the tribe had dissolved into mainstream America and, by consequence, lost its claim to ancestral lands.

The conceptual basis of the Mashpee judgment contrasts sharply with a “social constructivist” view of identity that was first articulated by Max Weber and anthropologist Frederick Barth (Barth 1969, 1994; Fischer 1999; Jenkins 1997; Hutchinson and Smith 1996; Tompkins 1997). Social constructivism distinguishes between identity as a sum of cultural traits and identity as defined by actors. Identity as defined by social actors is “ethnicity”—a complex, situational, and flexible notion of belonging that incorporates changing symbols of social unity, exclusion, and resistance. From this perspective, language, custom, homeland, religion, clothing, etc. have strategic rather than historically fixed or absolute significance as ethnic markers, and new symbols of belonging may be adopted and valorized by social practice. Moreover, actor-defined social identities are supported by constructed representations of the past; in Jonathan Friedman’s (1992) phrase “making history is a way of producing identity.” This statement simply acknowledges that all reconstructions of the past, however carefully derived, are situated in specific social and ideological contexts. Making history and defining “otherness” are activities of both majority and minority cultures and a fundamental activity of anthropology itself (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Fabian 1983; Said 1978; Trouillot 1991; Wolf 1982).

The “essentialism” of an earlier anthropology, in which indigenous groups were externally classified as fixed, bounded entities on the basis of definitional racial, linguistic, and cultural traits bears little resemblance to social constructivism. Yet essentialist definitions—for example, blood quantum requirements for identification as Native American—are embedded in legal codes that have widespread implications to the present day<sup>6</sup>. A key difference between the two perspectives lies in their respective interpretations of cultural continuity and change. If Native American identities are defined in rigid essentialist terms, most are no longer “authentic.” Like the Mashpee, contemporary Native Americans no longer resemble their colonial portraits. A

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<sup>6</sup> Proof of a 1/4 quantum of Alaskan Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut descent was one of the requirements for eligibility to receive corporate shares under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (an essentialist requirement). However, anyone who in the absence of such proof was “regarded as an Alaska Native by the Native village or Native group of which he claims to be a member and whose father or mother is (or, if deceased, was) regarded as Native by any village or group” could also qualify (a constructivist criterion).

constructivist outlook, on the other hand, accommodates ways that Native American groups have changed and found, in Clifford's (1988: 5) phrase, their "specific paths through modernity."

The constructivist stance may be regarded as empowering, in that the emphasis is placed on Indigenous self-definition rather than external judgments about cultural continuity and authenticity. However, constructivist interpretations are no less *external* than essentialist ones—they assert the same distanced, omniscient position for analysis that is adopted in realist ethnography. In some instances, Indigenous communities may judge this perspective to be detrimental in practical terms, especially in situations where discussions of constructed or reconstructed identity undermine their arguments for rights (*e.g.*, tribal recognition) that are legally based on asserting cultural continuity with the past (Briggs 1996; Field 1999).

Further, some constructivist studies focus on the concept of wholly "invented traditions" and their deployment as part of indigenous political movements or corporate strategies (Clifton 1990; Dirlík 1999; Dombrowski 2003; Fischer 1999; Hanson 1989; Haley and Wilcoxon 1997; Linnekin 1991). Mason's (1996, 2002) claim that an assimilated Alutiiq bourgeoisie leverages corporate power and profits through "ideological claims to authenticity" is discussed below.

Differences between insider and outsider views of identity are thus likely to emerge in any project in which Indigenous people and non-Native anthropologists work together. Alutiiq scholar Gordon Pullar writes that anthropological characterizations of Alutiiq cultural identity have "sometimes caused anger, resentment, and confusion as Alutiiq people have tried to fit themselves to these varying and contradictory definitions" (Pullar 2001: 95). He continues, "The right to decide who [the Alutiit] are and what they will be called is clearly the exercise of self-determination" (Pullar 2001: 95). Establishing an open, dialogical structure in which multiple views and voices could respectfully coexist was a necessary foundation for *Looking Both Ways*.

### **Planning and implementing *Looking Both Ways***

The Smithsonian Institution produced *Looking Both Ways* in close cooperation with an Alaska Native-run institution, the Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository in Kodiak<sup>7</sup>. This partnership grew from the success of previous projects in collaborative archaeology, oral history, and linguistics, in which anthropologists from several museums and universities worked with and for Alutiiq organizations (*e.g.*, Crowell 1997; Knecht 1994, 1995; Leer 1990; Partnow 1993, 2001; Steffian 2001). The Alutiiq Museum, which receives funding from Alutiiq regional and village corporations, houses many thousands of artifacts produced by archaeological excavations on Kodiak Island as well as historical objects, contemporary Alutiiq art, and an extensive oral history archive. Under current director Sven Haakanson, Jr. the Museum's programs include traditional arts, language learning (*e.g.* the *Alutiiq Word of*

*the Week* program), exhibitions, archaeology, and an ongoing project to document the island's prehistoric rock art<sup>7</sup>.

With planning funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), an advisory panel of 17 Alutiiq elders, educators, leaders and non-Alutiiq anthropologists and humanities scholars convened in 1995 to discuss the *Looking Both Ways* project<sup>8</sup>. The panel provided strong direction from the beginning, and made several key recommendations. First, the project needed to involve the entire Alutiiq region—Kodiak Island, Prince William Sound, lower Cook Inlet, and the upper Alaska Peninsula—despite the political and economic divisions between these areas that were created by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. Second, as many elders and rural residents as possible should be involved in the planning process. As envisioned by the curators and advisors, *Looking Both Ways* and its catalog would incorporate the perspectives and cultural knowledge of Alutiiq culture-bearers and leaders, and at the same time “bring home” the results of scholarly research in anthropology, archaeology, and history, making this knowledge accessible to Alutiiq communities for the first time. The project needed to tell the whole story of the Alutiiq people, not just a chronicle of loss and disappearance. The point of view would be situated in the present consciousness of a living Native people, treating history as a foreground for contemporary life.

A new round of fund-raising, this time from regional and village Alaska Native corporations and other local sponsors, enabled the Arctic Studies Center and Alutiiq Museum to organize the first *Looking Both Ways* planning conference in September 1997. The conference was designed as a forum for sharing information and as a means of building the type of widespread community involvement that had been recommended by the advisory group. Almost 40 elders from 17 communities across the Alutiiq region attended the well-publicized event, in addition to Alutiiq advisors and facilitators, museum staff, and a large public audience. Most elders, who received travel expenses and a modest honorarium, were selected as representatives by their local tribal councils in response to a joint invitation letter from the organizing museums. Pre-conference materials announced that the purpose of the gathering was to discuss objects and themes for an exhibition, centering on the question: “What does it mean to be Alutiiq?” Elders signed release forms and knew in advance that all sessions would be recorded (video and audio) for use in creating the exhibition.

The conference opened with an evening reception at the Alutiiq Museum, a performance by the Kodiak Alutiiq Dancers, the ceremonial lighting of a seal oil lamp by the late Akhiok elder Larry Matfay, and a dinner featuring traditional foods prepared

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<sup>7</sup> See [www.alutiiqmuseum.com](http://www.alutiiqmuseum.com) for current programs.

<sup>8</sup> Alutiiq advisors on the panel were: Lena Anderson, Lucille Antowak Davis, Martha Demientieff, John F.C. Johnson (Chugach Heritage Foundation), Margie Macaulay-Waite (Council of Katmai Descendants), Donald Nielsen (Bristol Bay Native Association), Mary Jane Nielsen (Alaska Peninsula Corporation), Cindy Pennington (Alaska Native Heritage Center), Gordon Pullar (Department of Alaska Native and Rural Development, University of Alaska, Fairbanks), Feona Sawden, and Marlane Shanigan. Non-Alutiiq advisors were William Fitzhugh (Arctic Studies Center, Smithsonian Institution), Nelson Graburn (University of California, Berkeley), Aldona Jonaitis (University of Alaska Museum), Molly Lee (University of Alaska Museum), Patricia Partnow, and William Workman (University of Alaska Anchorage). Gordon Pullar served as chair of the panel.



by members of the community. In a series of presentations over the next three days, exhibition curators and workshop facilitators showed slides of objects in the Smithsonian's Fisher collection as well as hundreds of archival historic photographs depicting village life. The Alutiiq Museum opened its exhibit cases and collections storage area, making it possible for elders and other community members to see, handle, and comment on artifacts representing Kodiak Island's 7500-year history.

Participants' specific comments on images and objects were invaluable for exhibit interpretation, but the spontaneous and unstructured dialog recorded at plenary sessions of the conference proved to be the richest source of themes and content for *Looking Both Ways*. These discussions—as well as private interviews granted by individuals at the conference—refracted the theme of identity into a broad spectrum of topics. These included cultural values, Native language and its loss, spiritual beliefs, kinship, social problems and healing, political self-determination, subsistence laws and practices, Native and Western educational systems, and repatriation. One Alutiiq facilitator, commenting on the gathering's atmosphere of sharing and cultural unity, said it felt like the "reunion and rebirth of the Alutiiq Nation." Participants expressed various thoughts about the goals and purposes of the exhibition: it would pass on traditions and values to younger generations; help Alutiiq people understand more about their history; put Alutiiq culture "on the map" for a broader audience; help communities to heal from historical trauma; instill pride in a unique Native identity; and reverse the emotional damage caused by racial and ethnic prejudice. One said: "The more I learn about the Alutiiq culture, it seems to me the more advanced it is [...] I think a lot of people grew up under the belief that the Alutiiq people were inferior or barbaric or illiterate or uneducated." The late Kodiak Island elder Sven Haakanson, Sr. crystallized the spirit of the project, saying: "This conference is looking two ways. You have to look back and find out the past and then you look forward [...]."

Subsequent steps in the planning, production, and tour of *Looking Both Ways* can be only briefly summarized here. The \$1.1 million project was supported by major implementation grants from NEH, the Smithsonian Institution, the oil company Conoco Phillips, and Koniag, Inc. (the Alaska Native regional corporation for Kodiak Island). Planning involved a second elders conference in 1998 (where the focus was on kinship and genealogy) and additional meetings of the advisory panel to review progress on the catalog, exhibition script, and educational materials. The Arctic Studies Center undertook the principal responsibility for fundraising, research, writing, and exhibition production, in cooperation with the Anthropology Department staff at the National Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian's Office of Exhibits Central, where the cases, panels, and 40 large pink crates that comprise *Looking Both Ways* were designed and fabricated. Alutiiq Museum staff contributed extensively to community contacts and educational outreach, organization of the planning conferences, oral history research, exhibition loans (about half of the objects in *Looking Both Ways* are from the Museum's holdings), photo research, and the installation of the exhibition for its première in Kodiak. The Anchorage Museum of History and Art provided invaluable staff assistance in support of the exhibition tour.

*Looking Both Ways* opened at the Alutiiq Museum in Kodiak (June 2001) and subsequently traveled to the Pratt Museum in Homer, the Anchorage Museum of History and Art (where it was accessible to a large Alaska Native urban population), and Juneau, the state capital. It will be shown at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. for about one year, beginning in December 2003. Outreach and public programming at the various venues have included opening celebrations, arts classes and demonstrations, a symposium on “Cultural Futures” (in Anchorage), teacher training, Native student docents and interns, and hundreds of visits from public school classes. An educational curriculum and web site<sup>9</sup> were co-developed by the Arctic Studies Center and the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage, and adopted for use by the Kodiak Island Borough school district.

The *Looking Both Ways* catalog (Crowell *et al.* 2001) enlisted some 40 Alutiiq and non-Alutiiq authors to discuss heritage and identity from a variety of perspectives. There are chapters on history and anthropology, contemporary identity, archaeology, spiritual life, and *súgucihpet*, “our way of living” (subsistence, broadly considered), intermingled with several dozen shorter essays. Short and extended elders’ quotes from the planning conferences and from the Alutiiq Museum’s oral history archives are incorporated throughout the text, which also references hundreds of published sources in anthropology, archaeology, and history. The catalog was intended as a textual construction of the cross-cultural dialogue that informed the whole project, and as a sourcebook for exploring Alutiiq identity and history. It includes voices critical of anthropology, most prominently that of Alutiiq co-editor Gordon Pullar, who points to the discipline’s Western biases, intrusiveness, and history of appropriating information, objects, and human remains. Included as well are unsolicited statements of appreciation for work done by anthropologists and museums to preserve objects and cultural data (*e.g.*, song texts, oral traditions) that can now be returned to Native communities. Reflecting on the terrible losses of people and cultural patrimony suffered under Russian and American colonial rule and on the process of cultural revitalization, Ruth Dawson, chair of the Alutiiq Heritage Foundation, writes: “The science of anthropology allowed us to regain a little of what had been taken from us” (Dawson 2001).

## History and identity

*Looking Both Ways* tells the story of an ethnicity that was reshaped by Western contact. Immigration and colonial rule (Russian, then American) brought foreign languages, economies, and missionary religions to the region, contributing to historical “layers” of a changing indigenous culture. Racial prejudice and acculturation policies implemented by the U. S. government bestowed a sense of confusion and shame about being Alutiiq (Pullar 1992, 2001). Yet a core of beliefs, values, and cultural practices has persisted as the basis of ethnic identification, to which new and recovered elements are being added in a contemporary process of cultural revitalization.

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<sup>9</sup> See [www.mnh.si.edu/lookingbothways](http://www.mnh.si.edu/lookingbothways).

The first external contacts with Alutiiq peoples came in the 18th century, when Russian, English, and Spanish exploring and fur trading expeditions penetrated the Gulf of Alaska region. The autonomous Native societies they observed were populous, competitive, and organized into hierarchies of wealthy headmen, commoners, and slaves (Crowell and Lührmann 2001; Davydov 1977; Gideon 1989; Merck 1980; Townsend 1980). Alutiiq people were variously classified by early observers as the descendants of Siberians who had crossed the Aleutian Island chain (Steller, in 1741), as “Eskimos” (Cook, in 1778), and as “Indians” (Arteaga, in 1779). These external assignments to already established Western ethnic categories were based on recognition of parallels between Alutiiq, Unangan (Aleut), Inuit/Eskimo, and Northwest Coast Indian cultures in trait complexes such as clothing, dwellings, hunting technology, and ceremonial practices. Modern studies suggest that these cross-cultural similarities were the result of millennial patterns of trade, warfare, and social interaction that spanned the Gulf of Alaska and beyond to the greater North Pacific (Arutiunov and Fitzhugh 1988; Clark 1982, 1984a; Crowell 2000; Dumond 1987). Linguistically and culturally, the Alutiit are most closely allied with the Yup’ik (Eskimo) of mainland southwestern Alaska, hence “Pacific Eskimo” as a commonly assigned (but locally rejected) ethnological identity (Clark 1984b). Perhaps the most important general perspective to be derived from research into the region’s deep history is one of cultural dynamism. Alutiiq people at the time of Western contact were neither culturally static nor isolated from interaction with other peoples. Ethnic constructions that defined similarity, difference, and affiliation must have been integral to these interactions. Ethnic distinctions were communicated by Alutiiq material culture, including clothing, jewelry, and tattoos (Hunt 2000; Steffian and Saltonstall 2001).

The Russian colonial system, established on Kodiak Island and adjacent areas by the 1780s, was designed to exploit Alutiiq labor for the harvest of furs from sea otters, fur seals, and other animals (Crowell 1997). Most Alutiit did not engage in the “fur trade” on free terms and received only token compensations. Russian-American Company labor and disciplinary policies led directly to death and hardships for many, but the most destructive forces of the Russian period were deadly epidemics of smallpox, measles, influenza and other diseases that swept through the Native population (Fortuine 1989). Population losses that exceeded 80% by 1840 led to the abandonment of villages and breakdown of the indigenous social order. Consolidation and resettlement during the Russian era displaced families from ancestral villages (Lührmann 2000).

Russian-American Company policies promoted intermarriage with Russian men and the assimilation of Russian culture, language, and Orthodox religion. Colonial Russians called the Native population of the Alutiiq region “Aleut[y],” originally a self-designation for inhabitants of the Near Islands in the Aleutian chain (Black and Liapunova 1988: 52) but extended in Russian usage to coastal peoples of the Aleutian Islands, Gulf of Alaska, and Bristol Bay (Leer 2001). This name (which became Alutiiq, or plural Alutiit, in local pronunciation) partially supplanted the original autonym Sugpiat, meaning “real people.” For some people today, self-identification as “Aleut” or “Alutiiq” acknowledges the Russian aspect of the region’s heritage, including the acceptance of Orthodoxy. Oleksa (1990, 1992) emphasizes the degree to

which Orthodoxy was adopted (and adapted) as a Native church, becoming a significant element of Alutiiq ethnicity. Russian colonial society, like New Spain and New France, elevated bicultural individuals, known as Creoles, to a relatively prosperous and well-educated middle class (Fedorova 1975; Oleksa 1990).

American rule after 1867 brought a competitive commercial climate, new waves of settlement, and dominance of the English language. The Alaska Commercial Company established fur trade posts throughout the Alutiiq region but industrial salmon fishing and canning soon came to dominate the southern Alaskan economy. Drawn by new opportunities, Scandinavian fishermen immigrated to the region and married into local Alutiiq families (Mischler and Mason 1996). Other industries of the late 19th and early 20th centuries included logging, fox farming, mining, and whaling. Traditional hunting and subsistence skills were no longer in commercial demand, and the Native population was drawn into marginal wage labor and debt to the stores and canneries (Davis 1984). Mortality remained high from chronic tuberculosis and other diseases. A major natural disaster—the massive Katmai/Novarupta eruption of 1912—led to the loss of three Alutiiq settlements on the Alaska Peninsula.

Under American rule, which began in 1867, identity was explicitly racialised. Creoles were now called “half-breeds,” “mixed-bloods” or “Russians” (Partnow 2001: 143). Racism was institutionalized through state segregation laws and the denial of voting rights to Natives. The U.S. Bureau of Education and later the Bureau of Indian Affairs suppressed Sugtestun and other Alaska Native languages in the public schools by means of shaming and physical punishment. This policy contributed to a massive decline in Native language fluency and a loss of cultural transmission between generations. Martha Demientieff, an Alutiiq who grew up in Bristol Bay and interior Alaska, recalls her experience at a Catholic mission school in the 1940s: “At that time it was very easy to understand the objective of school, because it was to ‘civilize’ you. To civilize meant that you had to give up your Native ways and wear Western clothing and live in Western housing and be Christian. It was, you know, displace and replace. As a student I knew that I went there to learn white man’s ways” (quoted in Crowell *et al.* 2001: 224).

World War II brought a large influx of military construction and non-Native personnel, especially to Kodiak Island (Chaffin 1967). Mason’s interviews with Alutiiq political leaders who came of age in the 1940s and 1950s reveal their sense that traditional patterns of Alutiiq life diminished rapidly during this period of explosive growth (Mason 2002). Another natural disaster, the 1964 great earthquake, destroyed or damaged seven Alutiiq villages on Kodiak and in Prince William Sound and forced the relocation of survivors from Chenega, Afognak, and Kaguyak villages.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 was a modern milestone in the Alutiiq region, as it was throughout Alaska. Shaped by Indigenous political activism, the act clarified Alaska Native land ownership against competing state and federal claims, established Alaska Native regional and village corporations, and paid \$962 million in cash compensation to the corporations for relinquished land claims. The ANCSA settlement cleared the way for construction of the trans-Alaska oil

pipeline from Prudoe Bay to Valdez and was a major force for Alaskan economic development. ANCSA also exerted a profound but mixed effect on village life and cultural identity (Berger 1985; McClanahan 2000; McNabb 1992; Pullar 2001). Self-identification as Alaska Native carried social and financial benefits for perhaps the first time, but many of the new corporations struggled or failed financially as complex new issues of ownership, resource use, investment, and governance emerged. The Alutiiq region was divided among three regional corporations, so that “shareholder” identity is not congruent with pan-Alutiiq ethnicity<sup>10</sup>.

Most Alaska Natives born after 1971 are not corporation members, and some see the behavior of the corporations as too profit-driven to accord with Native social values or principles of tribal government (McClanahan 2000). Gordon Pullar (2001: 84) discusses internal contentions surrounding the declaration of Native identity under ANCSA, when “Alutiit who had chosen to try to conceal their Native blood but then chose to enroll under ANCSA were ridiculed by those who had not followed this course.”

The 11 million gallon *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989—an unanticipated consequence of the oil development enabled by ANCSA—affected hunting, fishing, and shellfish harvesting in 15 Alutiiq communities. Environmental, economic, and social impacts of the spill were the focus of litigation that included a class action suit for cultural damages against Exxon Shipping Company and Alyeska Pipeline Service Company by Alutiiq residents of several Prince William Sound villages (Wooley 1995). The suit was dismissed as noncompensable. Wooley (1995: 139-140) contends that the spill was a threshold event that came to stand for losses of village autonomy and cultural cohesiveness that were actually cumulative over much of the 20th century, especially in the post-ANCSA era of corporate politics and bureaucracy. Jorgensen (1995), also writing about the spill litigation, argues that while the spill threatened the subsistence-based Alutiiq economy, it did not “destroy Native culture,” as was argued by the plaintiffs. In his view, Alutiiq communitarian values of sharing, cooperation, and consensus were activated by the crisis and enabled a resilient response.

Patricia Partnow’s (1993) research in rural areas of the Alaska Peninsula led her to conclude that contemporary Alutiiq ethnicity is based on village residence and especially on a subsistence way of life that emphasizes the communal sharing of fish, game, and other wild foods<sup>11</sup>. Russian Orthodox religious affiliation, Native language tradition (although not necessarily the ability to speak more than a little Sugtestun), and especially kinship also contribute to “Alutiiqness.” Pullar (2001) suggests that all of these criteria combine in overlapping and socially flexible ways to define whom Alutiiq people accept as Alutiiq (*cf.* Nagel 1996: 337ff). Physical appearance may play a role, although a high percentage of non-Native ancestry can make this indefinite. Pullar concludes that kin connections are perhaps the most important criterion for ethnic inclusion.

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<sup>10</sup> The regional corporations are Koniag, Inc., which includes the Kodiak Island archipelago and parts of the Alaska Peninsula; Chugach Alaska Corporation, which covers Prince William Sound and lower Cook Inlet; and the Bristol Bay Native Corporation, which includes Bristol Bay and most land on the northern Alaska Peninsula.

<sup>11</sup> Chase Hensel (1996) offers a similar view of Yup’ik ethnicity.

Alutiiq elder Roy Madsen describes the hybrid nature of contemporary Alutiiq culture in part by listing the variety of common surnames that reflect generations of marriage between Alutiiq women and immigrants from Russia, the United States, Scandinavia, and other parts of Europe. Such men brought the languages, foods, clothing, dances, and religious beliefs of their homelands. He writes: “So the homogenous culture of our ancestors has been transformed into the heterogeneous culture that we experience today, mixed, mingled, blended and combined with those many other cultures, retaining some of each but still with some recognizable and acknowledged aspects of the culture of our Alutiiq ancestors” (Madsen 2001: 75). McKibben Jackinsky describes the exchange of kinship information that took place at the *Looking Both Ways* planning conferences and the “excitement as invisible lines connecting villages came into focus” (Jackinsky 2001: 96). In Jackinsky’s recognition that “a family tapestry was being woven, the warp and weft drawing us together” we can read the regeneration of family ties that were broken by colonial displacements.

Speaking at the 1997 exhibition planning conference, Martha Demientieff drew connections between place, ancestors, and the perpetuation of identity through time. She said: “So I found out that we know the place we belong to by where our family is buried, by where we were born [...]. So it's important that for the future that my kids have a home, they know which land they belong to.” This connection between generations living and dead has important implications, especially for repatriation. Graves that are hundreds to thousands of years old surround contemporary villages, and in traditional thought these dead are still part of the living community (Pullar 1994). Margie Macaulay-Waite, one of the exhibition advisors, was scolded as a child for picking berries in a cemetery, and thus “taking food away from the dead”<sup>12</sup>.

Admonitions from elders about the fundamental importance of respect for the land and animals may reflect the persistence of another cyclical concept of renewal—the reincarnation of animal souls. Proper behaviour, cleanliness, and respect toward animals were once thought critical to avoid offending their *sua*, or indwelling spirits, and to ensure that harvested animals would return to the human world to be hunted again. Even today subsistence hunters practice rituals of respect, such as turning a dead bear’s head to face the east or cutting a caribou’s heart into four pieces and placing them on the ground in a gesture of “giving back to the animal spirits” (Crowell *et al.* 2001: 142). Virginia Aleck of Chignik Lake said: “My dad always told me that before you go out on any kind of hunt, you have to cleanse yourself [...] you have to get your whole body, mind, and soul ready (*ibid.*). Today, in some villages, masked dancers (*maskalatalhit*) appear at syncretic ceremonies associated with Russian Christmas and New Year, an echo of dances once performed at winter ceremonies to perpetuate the cycle of animal rebirth.

In the social reproduction of identity, changes in material culture may have little real consequence. Martha Demientieff said that people today use all kinds of new technologies to save time, yet the meanings of work and of caring for one’s family and community are the same. And in this process of change, historical objects undergo

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<sup>12</sup> There may be a connection between these beliefs and pre-Christian Alutiiq cosmology, in which souls of the deceased were reborn as new children in the village (Crowell and Leer 2001).

transformations of significance. At the 1997 elders conference, the late Larry Matfay held up a kayak (*qayaq*) prow that his grandfather had carved in the late 1800s, and which Mr. Matfay had recently donated to the Alutiiq Museum. He talked about the skill with which his grandfather and father hunted from *qayaq* and about the shared labour of building the boats; men constructed the frames and women sewed the sealskin covers. In his oratory, the prow became an evocative sign of these activities, and a symbol of Alutiiq community. In its new museum context, the object would convey these meanings to future generations.

## Discussion

These perspectives and observations suggest that core practices and values that define Alutiiq identity have persisted despite two centuries of cultural transformation. Many younger Alutiiq adults carry important parts of this heritage forward while at the same time rejecting tradition for tradition's sake and insisting on the right to define identity in their own ways. Sharon Anderson (born on Kodiak Island in 1969) gave her impression of the *Looking Both Ways* planning conference in a 1998 interview: "There was an Elder's Conference, and it united all the people—elders from Prince William Sound, Kodiak, and the Alaska Peninsula—last year. And they talked about being Alutiiq and realized how much the same we are. I think people are trying to come up with what it means and we're trying to bring back the culture in some ways. But I don't feel that it's appropriate to go back to being really traditional. You're going into a new millennium, and you can't really go back that far. You have to work with what you have right now" (McClanahan 2000: 293-294).

Despite the evidence of substantial cultural continuity, the existence of a conscious Alutiiq revitalization movement indicates disquiet over what has been lost or abandoned by present generations, as well as an active process of identity construction. Alutiiq cultural revitalization is at least partially a process of reviving and re-contextualizing cultural images, expressions, and skills that have been discontinued. For example, many contemporary Alutiiq artists refer to published museum photographs and descriptions of 19th century masks and ceremonial clothing to create new works for sale, exhibition, or use by dance groups. Groups of young dancers perform at newly created cultural events (*e.g.*, annual festivals, exhibition openings) that are very different from the original sacred contexts of performance. Urban children and others who have grown up away from a subsistence life style learn to skin seals and gather shellfish at summer spirit camps. Kayaks are constructed as heritage objects for museums or festivals, rather than as working boats for hunting and travel. Speakers at public functions introduce themselves in Sugtestun even if they are not fluent speakers.

Such processes of cultural revival, restoration, revision, and innovation invite functionalist interpretations of "invented tradition." Mason (1996) identifies the "appropriation" of rock art symbols and other graphic icons for use as logos by Alaska Native ANCSA corporations as a strategy that "provides the basis for legitimizing monopoly control over the means of production" (Mason 1996, 2002: 13). One could

argue whether “appropriation” is the right term for this usage, in that it suggests a complete disconnection between Alutiiq people and their past. Perhaps such re-contextualized icons now stand most importantly for economic self-determination. Mason extends his critique to conclude that the Alutiiq Museum was established to centralize and professionalize the production of Native identity and that heritage projects like *Looking Both Ways* are part of a commodified identity industry carried out in alliance with “academic culture brokers.” Mason’s interpretations ignore the real continuity of basic ethnic markers (e.g., the subsistence lifestyle and its sharing ethic), especially in the rural areas where most Alutiit still reside. He also discounts the many inspirations and sources for cultural renewal, both personal and collective, which do not fit the narrow mold of his class politics model. Nonetheless, Mason’s work usefully identifies ethnicity as a strategy in the capitalist marketplace where Native corporations must attempt to survive.

Fischer’s (1999) concept of cultural logic—the “essential continuity of cultural forms”—seeks middle ground between constructivist and essentialist approaches, and may be helpful in the interpretation of Alutiiq ethnicity. Fischer argues that, “Shifting our focus away from individual cultural elements (and thus away from issues of their authenticity) to the dynamic relationships between them (the cultural logic in which they are situationally implicated), however, makes meaningful boundaries reappear.” In the Alutiiq case, the cultural logic of connection—to ancestors, living relatives, village, land, and subsistence resources—would seem to be an enduring framework for identity, even as new (or old) ways of asserting ethnic distinction are deployed.

## Conclusion

Taking place within the contemporary Alutiiq cultural revitalization movement, with extensive community involvement and support, *Looking Both Ways* can be seen as a project of explicit identity “construction” rather than simply a representation of it. I have argued that this is a fundamental entanglement of collaborative anthropology, in which the expression, exploration, and legitimation of indigenous identities are the common purpose of a shared enterprise. In this work, the collections, records, and reconstructive work of anthropology and archaeology are used in conjunction with oral traditions and community-based knowledge to construct endogenous histories that fill voids left by colonial erasure.

This raises questions of the “terms of engagement” under which anthropologists participate in this new, close-in, reciprocal relationship. James Clifford (2004) sees in *Looking Both Ways* (especially its catalog) a successful “negotiation of agendas” that allows a multiplicity of views to be juxtaposed without insisting on a single, coherent perspective, either “Alutiiq” or “scientific.” In other words, independent non-Alutiiq scholarship finds peaceful coexistence with the perspectives of Native leaders and cultural authorities, even where these are incompatible. As he notes, this requires shared attitudes of equality and respect. These attitudes took time to develop, and were built during many different projects in the years preceding *Looking Both Ways*, especially in archaeology. The institutional participation of the Alutiiq Museum and



Archaeological Repository—a place where Alutiiq communities of Kodiak Island preserve their own history and carry forward their own culture—was a key part of the equation.

Molly Lee and Nelson Graburn (2003) view *Looking Both Ways* through a darker ideological lens. They describe the exhibition as a romantic, idealized portrait of Alutiiq culture and suggest unseemly influence from government and corporate funders who wished to cover over “pervasive socioeconomic problems” in the region. In this reading, *Looking Both Ways* becomes almost a tool of oppression, like the “state-sponsored indigenism” critiqued by Dombrowski (2002) in Southeast Alaska cited as a parallel case by Lee and Graburn). These suspicions disregard the broad base of community involvement in creation of the exhibition, the open public process through which it was developed, its endorsement and support by schools, tribal and non-profit organizations<sup>13</sup>, and the enthusiastic reception given to the finished project by both Alutiiq and non-Alutiiq audiences<sup>14</sup>.

Perhaps the most important rejoinder to the Lee and Graburn critique is that the exhibition really *is* about Alutiiq self-representation. Alcoholism and severe social problems in some Alutiiq communities were acknowledged at the 1997 planning conference, and Pullar (2001: 76-77) discusses the historical roots of this “epidemic of self-destructive behavior” in the *Looking Both Ways* catalog. But elders spoke of social ills as symptoms of the *loss* of identity, not characteristics that define it. Alutiiq organizers hoped that the larger story of the Alutiiq people, including historical resilience in the face of oppression and disaster, would help to overcome despair. At the conference, Donald Nielsen of the Bristol Bay Native Association said: “To sit and listen and think about the social ills that we’re all faced with—and they’re common—that is for another time. To lay the foundation for the generations that we represent, that is what we should be doing.” In effect, Lee and Graburn ask Alutiiq people to define themselves, at least in part, by the damage their communities have sustained rather than by the values and beliefs they hold.

Peter Brosius (1999) writes about anthropological engagement with Indigenous communities, saying that “[...] there is no longer any such thing as a distanced academic critique safely ensconced in an obscure academic journal. We are now participants—mostly uninvited—in the production of identities, or in the legitimation of identities being produced by others. To the degree that these movements represent an attempt to create new meanings and identities—which in turn have the potential to produce new configurations of power—such a role cannot remain unacknowledged.” Hodgson (2002) and Field (1999) also reflect on the new and far more complex terms of engagement that characterize contemporary anthropology, pointing out that interpretations of cultural identity and ethnic processes almost inevitably have

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<sup>13</sup> There are letters of support on file from the Kodiak Area Native Association, Alaska Native Heritage Center, Museum of the Aleutians, Natives of Kodiak, Kodiak Tribal Council, King Salmon Traditional Village Council, Kodiak Island Borough School District, University of Alaska Museum, Alaska Council of School Administrators, Lake and Peninsula School District, Kodiak College, Anchorage School District, and the Chugach Heritage Foundation.

<sup>14</sup> Based on written comments left by visitors to the exhibition in Kodiak and Anchorage; a formal visitor survey conducted by the Pratt Museum in Homer; and observations by museum staff at all three venues.

repercussions for Indigenous projects of self-determination. And anthropologists in museums have a special dilemma; as Jonathan Haas (1996: S1) puts it, “The dialectic in the case of museums is between their role as a voice for anthropology in public learning and the movement to cede decision-making power to Native peoples represented in collections, exhibits, and programs.” *Looking Both Ways* represents an effort to succeed at both poles of this dialectic by forging links between different knowledges, sharing the authority and responsibility of representation, and meeting goals of community empowerment and public education.

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