

STUHL, Andrew. 2016. *Unfreezing the Arctic: Science, Colonialism, and the Transformation of Inuit Lands*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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Volume 44, numéro 1-2, 2020

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081811ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081811ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (imprimé)

1708-5268 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Neufeld, D. (2020). Compte rendu de [STUHL, Andrew. 2016. *Unfreezing the Arctic: Science, Colonialism, and the Transformation of Inuit Lands*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.] *Études Inuit Studies*, 44(1-2), 401–404. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081811ar>

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Book Review by David Neufeld<sup>i</sup>

**I**n the summer of 1987, Gary Adams, an archaeologist, and I were assigned to complete a preliminary cultural resources survey of what was then known as North Yukon National Park (renamed Ivvavik National Park in 1992). With our pilot, we choppered back and forth across the park—guided by previous regional archival and archaeological research—seeking the tangible traces of human activity of both Indigenous and newcomer. I was immediately impressed by the rugged vitality of the place. The deep canyon of the Firth River with its thrashing waters and the run of Arctic char in the upper river, so densely packed it seemed we could walk across the river on their backs, were impressive. In early August, we began to see small groups of caribou escaping biting flies on the Firth Valley aulice. A week later, we flew over the origin valley of the Babbage River (the park's eastern boundary) and were overwhelmed by tens of thousands of the Porcupine caribou herd filling the whole bowl. The human world was also fascinating. We walked the trails and studied the camps of both hunters and prospectors, followed seismic lines and photographed caribou runs, visited the ancient lookout of Engigstcak, the three-hundred-metre knob where the Firth River leaves the hills, and went for coffee at the long-eyed dome and antennas of the Distant Early Warning Line radar station at Komakuk Beach. Later, we crafted chronologically organized accounts of the human use and presence on the land in the new park, highlighting the features and management issues related to their preservation, investigation, or clean-up.

In the last days of our survey, we flew to Herschel Island, just off shore, to visit the archaeology crew working at the Yukon territorial heritage site. Victor Allen, an Inuvialuit Elder then working as a heritage steward, took me for a hike around Pauline Cove, past the buildings of the whaling station, the underground permafrost cold stores, and the cemetery. As we walked, Victor spoke about the importance of working together to meet the objectives of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. Victor described his efforts to build understanding with the archaeologists and planners visiting Herschel Island. As he continued his first-person narrative of guiding and learning, I

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gradually realized he was speaking metaphorically; “his experiences” described events covering somewhat more than a century—the Mounted Police stationed on the island in the 1950s, the fur traders of the 1920s and 1930s, and the whalers who overwintered in Pauline Cove in the 1890s. The passage of calendar time, the basis of history as a chronological, causal chain of events, was only incidental to his purpose. Victor’s story organized the past as a series of object lessons on relationships among family members, place, neighbours, and newcomers. And these relationships all focused on the enhancement of Inuvialuit identity and interests. The Western ordering of progressive material culture and the incremental application of science to bring order to place had no presence in Victor’s history of the region. The importance of the ongoing dynamic work of negotiating, practicing, and maintaining of positive relations between all elements—some old, some new, but all embraced—in the Inuvialuit lands created a different understanding of this place.

Andrew Stuhl’s *Unfreezing the Arctic* neatly brings together these different ways of understanding of place, chronology, and relationships. In an introductory “call to arms” (13) and five descriptive chapters, he charts the dynamic character of the relationships between Inuvialuit and the “scientists” that exploited, tested, and analyzed their lands in pursuit of profit, national sovereignty, “civilization,” defence, and environmental protection. His perceptive analysis of western Arctic “knowledge production” as a “human rights issue” (11, 12) rests upon two pillars: thorough archival research and interpretation of the “science” done in the western Arctic, and two lengthy terms living in Inuvik, NWT, working with the Inuvialuit. The first provides insights into the purposes of the sponsors of science, while the second ensures there is space for the expression of Inuvialuit values and interests informing an understanding of contemporary politics. The importance and value of Stuhl’s extensive personal engagement with a contemporary Indigenous community is clear in his framing of meaningful research—how can historians make worthwhile contributions to contemporary debates. Stuhl recognizes that his work as a historian does not qualify him “to speak on behalf of Arctic residents, but [it] enable[s] us to shed a different light on the interconnected nature of global social and environmental transformation” (157).

Stuhl builds his case for a rethinking of an understanding of the Arctic through the study of the relationships between western Arctic Inuvialuit and scientists between the late nineteenth century and the 1990s. In five chronological episodes, he examines the infrastructure opportunities supporting a scientific presence, the social, and sometimes cross-cultural, character of the creation of Arctic knowledge and its cultural and political consequences.

The initial extension of the Western powers' reach into the western Arctic in the mid- and late nineteenth century, driven by imperialism and trade, led to significant contact with Inuvialuit. Stuhl studies the American-based harvesting of whales for oil. The success, and survival, of the whalers' and their ships demanded knowledge of the sea conditions of the region. The presence of the industry also supported the arrival of scientists, mostly Americans, during the first International Polar Year (1881–1883) who studied both the geography and character of the region and interacted with its Indigenous inhabitants. The resulting Canadian concerns about western Arctic sovereignty spawn Stuhl's second instance of scientific contact: the Canadian Arctic Expedition (1913–1918), a massive scientific investment designed to produce an authoritative narrative of Canadian ownership and control. The resulting natural history collections "became the basis for... reports...displays, and policies concerning Arctic nature" and demonstrating sovereignty (55). Stuhl also notes that while this work was accomplished only with the co-operation and thorough knowledge of the Inuvialuit, the government dismissed "Inuit—and their long history of settlement—as a possible avenue toward sovereignty" (48).

Having determined the content and utility of the Arctic, the government moved to tame the tundra, making it a civilized and profit-making part of the Dominion. This domestication program focused on regulating both people and animals. As the large caribou herds endemic to the North were deemed intractable, the government imported both reindeer from Alaska and Sami herders to precipitate an Inuit pastoralist culture (56–57). Biologists searched the western Arctic for suitable ground, the Sami herders worked to pass on their herding skills to a hunting people (62), and various management strategies were applied to try and make this Western imposition work. Stuhl notes that by mid-century the reindeer experiment was abandoned by government. However, this writer notes the dream of civilizing the North through agriculture did linger in curious postwar government discussions (never implemented) of relocating Inuit to Ontario to become hog farmers.

Stuhl describes the growing alienation between scientists and the Arctic, resulting from the demands of military defence and oil exploration in the 1950s and 1960s. "Terrain intelligence," the distant abstraction of knowledge production resulting from the completion of the aerial photography of the North, meant Arctic research took place in an office building in Ottawa (102). Prime Minister Diefenbaker celebrated the creation of Inuvik—the base for oil exploration—as a place "with no past to leave behind—only a future to look forward to" (107). Trading companies also withdrew from the region with the coincident collapse of the fur market, leaving the land-based Inuvialuit hung between the land and the towns where their children were placed in school. While the dislocation was visible

to those working with Inuvialuit—the two-man RCMP detachment at Herschel Island operated a modest trading outpost for families still on the land in the early 1950s—for Canada, the reliance upon and relationships with Inuvialuit had effectively ended.

The final chapter charts the continued “freezing” of the North into the 1970s by both the oil industry and the resulting environmental advocacy drawing upon the timeless and pristine North, a denial of the presence of the people there. However, Stuhl also charts the growing power of the Indigenous Rights movement, specifically reviewing the powerful advocacy and profile gained by the Inuvialuit as they negotiated the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (1984), the treaty recognizing their presence, knowledge, interests and land rights, with Canada (112–13).

In a lengthy epilogue, Stuhl outlines his vision of how historians can craft a northern history by recognizing the human rights of Indigenous Peoples as critical elements of academic discourse. He calls for a meaningful engagement with Arctic communities, and working with them to gain deeper and more meaningful social and cultural understandings of their interests and experiences. In Stuhl’s “call to arms,” he cautions against advocacy but challenges historians to use their craft to raise questions about the practices and consequences of colonialism, especially looking to Indigenous Peoples to learn about their experiences. Canadians have been challenged by the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Unfreezing the Arctic* offers historians a frontline account of how they can make meaningful contributions addressing these issues.



**Figure 1.** “Old Irish,” RCMP Bill McFarland and Neil Allen, trading for white fox at Herschel Island RCMP detachment, early 1950s. Credit: Jim Hickling.

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