

## **Iñupiaq Ethnohistory: Selected Essays**

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INUPIAQ ETHNOHISTORY: SELECTED ESSAYS. By Ernest S. Burch, Jr., and edited by Erica Hill. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2013. 274 pp. \$35.00 (softcover). ISBN 9781602232143. Includes foreword, introduction, maps, illustrations, references, notes and suggestions for further readings.

This volume represents a compendium of favored works selected by Ernest S. (Tiger) Burch prior to his death in 2009. The nine papers in the volume are presented in an order selected by Burch that tracks his thinking (and rethinking) on the concept, meaning, and implications of Iñupiaq ethnohistory. Erica Hill provides a thoughtful introduction that frames the following chapters, all of which have appeared as stand-alone contributions in journals and edited volumes from 1970 through 2012.

Hill's introduction calls out several of Burch's major contributions, not the least of which is his recognition and reconstruction of multiple coeval independent Iñupiaq Eskimo nations, which thoroughly "disarticulates" the notion of Iñupiaq society as a monolithic entity. Paraphrasing Burch, it is necessary to speak in the plural regarding Alaska Native histories, for each nation has its own (p. 10). Burch also reconstructed and revealed Iñupiaq seasonal rounds as carefully planned and executed endeavors that were decidedly nothing akin to nomadic "wanderings." Last, based on Burch's work, Hill notes that northwest Alaska was anything but an unpopulated wilderness given the 1000-plus years of history layered onto and into this livable and familiar landscape.

The first chapter, "From Skeptic to Believer: The Making of an Oral Historian," is spellbinding. It has a conversational tone that vividly conveys the dynamic and deep living history of Iñupiaq Nations. If a picture is worth a thousand words, the second chapter, "Eskimo Worldview," is the longest in the book. It includes more than a dozen photographs of objects of material culture. I was particular stuck by Burch's straightforward description of the animating forces that occupy topographic features. "When an Eskimo gazed out across the countryside, he did not see a static arrangement of land forms as we would. He perceived a complex, exciting, and often frightening world of natural and supernatural phenomena in which even inert topographic features contained within them the potential for dynamic action" (p. 17). There are important implications in this and other statements for archaeologists; in some instances, culturally potent locations were avoided and as a consequence evidence of material culture could be minimal or absent altogether. Thus, the absence of material culture at a given location cannot be synonymous with the absence of cultural importance.

Chapter 3, "The Nonempirical Environment of the Arctic Alaskan Eskimos," begins with a re-statement of sociologist

William Thomas' theorem, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." This chapter, along with Hill's introduction, would make excellent fodder for classroom discussions with one of the take-home messages being that environmental factors alone cannot account for the distribution of people on the landscape. For Burch, such overly simplistic or reductionist thinking was replaced or at least enhanced with more complex socio-cultural explanations.

In Chapter 4, "The Iñupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska," Burch explores the rapid conversion of Iñupiat to Christianity, including the role of powerful actors (missionaries) in concert with the prevailing circumstances of overharvest and disease. In Chapter 5, "Modes of Exchange in North-west Alaska," Burch ploughs the classic anthropological fodder of trade and exchange by exploring types of Iñupiaq property including societal, local, domestic, conjugal, and personal. As an archaeologist, in particular, I liked the discussion regarding how these types of property were demarcated through the use of ownership marks. The topic of Chapter 6, "Marriage and Divorce among the North Alaskan Eskimos," is self-explanatory and ultimately concludes that divorce for Eskimos is more or less the dissolution of a residential tie. In Chapter 7, "The Ethnogenesis of the Kuuvaum Kaniagmuit," Burch and three co-authors explore the relationship between Indians and Eskimos.

I found Chapter 8, "The History of Caribou Herds of Northwest, Alaska 1850–2000," to be an especially salient topic that would be of interest to ecologists and archaeologists alike. The chapter advocates for the necessity of a long-term, historic perspective to understand population dynamics of animal species. This is a view that has been put forward with regard to the management of the Yellowstone bison herd as well (Cannon and Cannon, 2004). Concluding the compendium is Chapter 9, "Rationality and Resource Use among Hunters: Some Eskimo Examples," which takes on the oft-explored axiom of Native American hunters existing in ecological harmony. After a careful review of terminology and several fascinating cases, Burch concludes that early-contact Native American hunters were ordinary human beings with context specific hunting practices, the nuanced understanding of which will make for better science as opposed to blanket statements.

Each chapter has its own references cited as well as suggestions for additional readings, which complement the topic of each article under consideration. My only complaint with the book was a wish for more and better maps. As noted by William Fitzhugh in the short foreword, Burch was a pragmatist who honored facts and was able to draw conclusions. This book is an excellent overview of Burch's work and is well suited to scientists, historians, and students interested in topics ranging from Northwest Alaska to ethnogenesis and caribou. An obituary for Ernest S. "Tiger" Burch appears in Csonka (2010) and a publications list is available in Stern et al. (2012).

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