

Negotiating Change: An Overview of Relocations in Alaska with Detailed Consideration of Kaktovik

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The purpose of this thesis is to explore the consequences of relocation and resettlement for indigenous communities in Alaska due to a changing social, economic, and political climate brought about by the colonial presence of the American state. This work first addresses the larger changes in settlement patterns by briefly examining the disappearance of 100 such communities over the last century within the context of the colonial history of Alaska, and with a focus upon the interaction between state involvement and community action in the negotiation of change. This process of negotiation is then examined in greater detail by focusing on the historical case of the community of Kaktovik, an Inupiaq village which was relocated 3 times between 1947 and 1964 by the United States Air Force in order to make way for the construction and expansion of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line. This thesis concludes that even in cases in which local choice is constrained or severely limited during relocation, local actors are full participants in negotiating the changes imposed upon them and actively work for their own best interests. In light of the potential for environmentally-induced relocations of indigenous communities at a massive scale in Alaska due to a changing climate, it is perhaps timely to consider that prizing local interest and knowledge and recognizing the negative consequences of earlier state actions may offer an avenue by which to avoid the mistakes of the past.