HB 109

'Policy failure' stokes crisis in rural Alaska

AFN pushing for change

By BOB ORTEGA
Times Writer

Alaska natives must come up with their own strategies and convince government to change its approach to break a slowly tightening noose of alcoholism and unemployment that may destroy their community, according to a report released Friday by the Alaska Federation of Natives.

It's never been a secret that Alaska natives suffer from high rates of alcoholism, suicide, child abuse and many other health and social problems, or that rural villages often have no economic base, or that natives often don't get what they should out of the educational system.

But Friday, the AFN status report on Alaska natives tied together all the depressingly familiar figures, and placed them in the context of what AFN President Janie Leask called "a fundamental failure of state and federal policies in rural Alaska."

The report concludes that in most cases, policies and actions intended to help native people have created and maintained dependence on the government, instead of encouraging self-sufficiency.

And the report says a rapidly growing native population — expected to double in the next 26 years — will place tremendous strains on villages where there are no jobs or opportunities.

"It's not our intention to point fingers at the federal or state governments and say 'this is your fault,' " Leask said.

"But we really need to have a different way of looking at the problem."

The report, produced with the help of the University of Alaska's Institute for Social and Economic Research, is intended to be a call for action. It does not include concrete suggestions for addressing the web of problems.

Leask said Sen. Daniel In-

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Natives: New way of looking at problem

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ouye, D-Hawaii, chairman of the Select Committee on Indian Affairs, has agreed to hold a March 10 hearing in Washington, D.C., on the issues raised by the report. She said she hoped discussions among native and state leaders would lead to some specific suggestions at the hearing.

In addition, she said the AFN would host what she called an economic summit in May, to discuss ways to develop whatever economic opportunities exist in rural Alaska villages.

In essence, the report documents that natives in rural Alaska are likely to get a poorer education, and are more likely to face health problems while growing up. Once they're out of school, they are less able to compete for jobs; and if they live in villages, increasingly there may not be jobs. Finally, natives are more likely to be drawn into the vicious circle of alcoholism and drug abuse.

In many ways, the report shows that rural natives have seen huge improvements in recent decades, particularly in health care.

Tuberculosis caused 43 percent of native deaths as recently as 1946; in the last seven years, 13 Alaskans died of the disease. There have been similar improvements in combating other deadly diseases.

Also, state spending has brought schools and other benefits to many villages.

But at the same time, the changes have been so great and so rapid that it's been difficult for natives to cope; and often, the programs and services provided by the government at great expense just haven't worked out, the report says.

Some of the the most damning information focuses on the rural school system.

"Native children enter and exit village schools with serious educational handicaps and their education is worse than mediocre," the report says.

Rural students tend to have standardized test scores far below the national average; and they are far more likely to drop out, figures show.

Ironically, they leave school to compete for work against non-natives who tend to be far-better educated than the national average. Whites in Alaska are five times likelier than natives to have college degrees.

Statistics cited in the report demonstrate that most of the health and social problems facing the native community revolve around alcohol abuse. A good example is suicide, which for natives is four times the U.S. rate; and for male natives between 20 and 24 the suicide rate is 14 times the U.S. rate.

Autopsy reports show that three out of every four natives who committed suicide had been drinking beforehand. For homicides, sexual assaults, other crimes and accidental deaths, the link to alcohol also is clear.

"But you can't look at alcoholism in the villages without looking at the economies," Leask said.

The report's introduction states that despite millions of dollars in federal and state investment in rural Alaska over the past 20 years, "the investment has not established an economic base sufficient to enable Natives living in rural villages to build an economically self-sustaining future or to prevent the accelerated disintegration of traditional cultures."

With the best of intentions, the federal and state governments have built houses, water and sewer systems, airstrips, electrical systems, and other infrastructure, to stimulate growth.

Unfortunately, the report concludes, "the government's strategy assumed that rural Alaska possessed widespread, untapped and marketable resources sufficient to support village and regional economies."

With some exceptions — like the Red Dog mine, near Kotzebue, or the North Slope oil fields, or the Bristol Bay fisheries — that assumption has not proven true, the report states.

Meanwhile, these subsistence communities increasingly have grown dependent on heating oil, electricity, and the benefits that cost money. Since most villages don't have viable cash economies, that has left many natives dependent on government handouts.

Leask said she hoped the report would help lead to a cooperative effort between the native community and the state and federal governments to develop new policies to address all these inter-related problems.

"We can't afford not to do anything," she said.

alaska federation of natives, inc.

411 W. 4th Avenue, Suite 301 • Anchorage, Alaska 99501 • Phone (907) 274-3611

January 25, 1988

Representative H.A. "Red" Boucher
Box V
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Representative Boucher,

Enclosed is a copy of "The AFN Report on the Status of Alaska Natives: A Call for Action." The report was produced by AFN with assistance from the Institute of Social and Economic Research.

This is the first major status report that has been written on Alaska Natives in more than ten years. A review of the data shows that despite substantial improvements in health, educational opportunity, standard of living and access to government services, an increasing number of Alaska Natives face grave risks and declining economic opportunities. The rates of health and social disorders among Alaska Natives are abnormally high and, in some instances, are accelerating. Certain groups of Alaska Natives, such as rural residents and young male adults, are at even greater risk.

The report is intended not only for state and federal policy makers, but for the Native community as well. When we look at the statistics compiled in the report and reflect on outlook for improvement, we are gravely concerned. Unless fundamental changes are made, we are not confident that Native people can look forward to a secure economic and cultural base for the future.

AFN is committed to working with both federal and state officials to address the findings of this report. We ask for your help as we deliberate on these important issues.

Sincerely,

Janie Leask
President

The AFN Report on the Status of Alaska Natives: A Call for Action

The AFN Report on the Status of Alaska Natives: A Call for Action

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes health, social and economic data that describe the current status of Alaska Natives. The data indicate that, despite improvements in health, educational opportunity, standards of living and access to government services, an increasing number of Natives face grave risks and declining economic opportunities. The report documents a social, cultural and economic crisis in Native villages, analyzes its causes and suggests new policies and governmental priorities.

In many Native villages the rates of health and social problems, particularly those engendered by alcohol abuse, are abnormally high, and many are accelerating. The segments of the Native population least capable of protecting themselves, notably children and young adults, are most at risk.

The data are stark. Absent timely and dramatic action, they indicate that the prognosis for positive change is poor. Time is running out.

Over the past two decades, the federal and state governments have invested millions of dollars in rural Alaska. Although important improvements have been made (e.g., public works and improved delivery of government services) the investment has not established an economic base sufficient to enable Natives living in rural villages to build an economically self-sustaining future or to prevent the accelerated disintegration of traditional cultures. Indeed, in recent years, the pace of economic, social and cultural change in Native villages has been

so rapid and the change so profound that many Natives have been overwhelmed by a world not of their making - a world of conflicting values and increasingly limited economic opportunity. For many Natives, the sense of personal, familial and cultural identity that is a prerequisite to healthy and productive life is being lost in a haze of alcohol-induced despair that not infrequently results in violence perpetrated upon self and family.

But in acknowledging that grim reality, the data in this report summarize the status of Alaska Natives in the aggregate and should not be confused with the personal status of all 75,000 Alaska Natives. Most Native people, whether they live in village or city, are coping with change, maintaining their families and cultures and trying to help others do the same. Indeed, Native people have a long history of active involvement in efforts to improve life in their own communities. Non-profit Native regional corporations, village governments and other Native institutions have been organized to provide technical and other resources to assist in that endeavor.

Government in its many forms has been a valuable partner in the effort. However, despite the fact that government programs have brought needed services and improvements, they have been provided at high cost: a loss of Native control over community, family and self that frequently exacerbates the very problems the programs are intended to eliminate.

Government and Alaska Natives need to forge a new partnership while there is still time to do so. But in seeking innovative solutions to problems of social and economic change, the new partnership must acknowledge and respect the fact that Alaska Natives are a people of the land and that maintaining traditional relationships to land they have historically used and occupied is essential to the physical, emotional and cultural well-being of all Alaska Natives, whether they live in the village or one of Alaska's urban areas.

The stakes are high and the challenges immense. But if Alaska Natives and the federal and state governments jointly commit themselves to developing and implementing new policies to address today's problems, progress is possible. To that end, this report is a call to action.

NATIVE HEALTH: A PLAGUE OF ALCOHOL ABUSE VIOLENCE AND SELF-DESTRUCTION

> Across the state more and more Alaska Natives are killing themselves and damaging their loved ones, deciding that life's no longer worth cherishing. Almost always, alcohol is their final companion.
>
> Anchorage Daily News
> January 1988

Since 1907 when Congress first committed the resources of the federal government to improving Native health (see appendix), the Indian Health Service (IHS), the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and Native regional health corporations have made significant progress in eradicating infectious diseases.

Tuberculosis, for example, was once a major cause of Native mortality. Between 1926 and 1930 the disease accounted for 35.5 percent of all Native deaths, as compared to 4.7 percent of white deaths. Of 2,010 Eskimos examined during the same period by the Bureau of Education physician stationed at Nome, 16 percent were diagnosed as having tuberculosis in some form. In 1936 the Bureau of Indian Affairs estimated the Native death rate from tuberculosis at 655 per 100,000 as compared to 56 per 100,000 for whites. As recently as 1946 tuberculosis accounted for 43 percent of all Native deaths. Treatment required quarantine for long periods of time, frequently in hospitals distant from a patient's home village, a medical intervention that saved lives but disrupted Native family life.

In addition to tuberculosis, other infectious diseases, all introduced by whites, periodically rolled like waves thrcugh Native villages. As early as 1819, a smallpox epidemic killed 68 Natives living near the Russian American Company trading posts at Sitka and Kodiak. In 1837 a second smallpox epidemic swept through Native villages from the Alaska Panhandle to the Arctic Ocean. In 1919 an influenza epidemic killed 1,500 Natives living on the Seward Peninsula. According to Territorial Governor Thomas Riggs, "Whole villages of Eskimos lost their entire adult population. Many infants were frozen in their dead mothers' arms." In 1940, diphtheria decimated villages throughout rural Alaska. In 1945 an influenza epidemic killed 9 Natives at Barrow, the northernmost community in the United States, before moving village to village along the coast of the Arctic Ocean. In the 1950s came polio.

However, in recent years, many of the most virulent infectious diseases that have historically afflicted Native people have been arrested. Only 13 Alaskans died of tuberculosis between 1981 and 1988. In the 1940s average life expectancy in rural Alaska was 35 years. It is now 67 years, although life expectancy for Native males is still 10 years less than that for white males. In 1950 the rate of Native infant mortality was more than 100 per 1,000 live births, one of the highest rates in the world. By contrast, by 1988 the Native infant mortality rate had fallen to 22 per 1,000 live births.

Although Alaska Natives have never been more free from communicable disease, a new epidemic has emerged. In a 1988 speech to the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, Dr. John Middaugh, the State Epidemiologist, characterized the present status of Alaska Natives as a "health crisis," and a "modern plague of our young." The plague has a name: alcohol abuse.

More insidious than tuberculosis or influenza, alcohol abuse is a common plight of cultures in transition. Although its causes are complicated, the pathology of alcohol abuse includes a cycle of despair which breeds hopelessness and violence and too frequently ends in suicide and death.

In January 1988 the Anchorage Daily News published a series of investigative articles entitled "A People in Peril." The articles documented the heartbreaking epidemic of suicide and violent death among Alaska Natives. Although the series may have been shocking in the cities, the story was old news in the bush, where virtually every Native family has been affected by alcohol abuse and senseless death.

Even more tragic, much of the violence is perpetrated by family members upon other family members, particularly children. Once inflicted, alcohol-induced child abuse bequeaths the legacy of despair and violence to the next generation.

The details of the Alaska Native health crisis are presented in the following pages by five categories of data: suicide, homocide, accidental death and injury, crime and incarceration and children in peril.

SUICIDE

> (Alakanuk, Alaska) In March 1985, a young man walked out onto the tundra behind this Yukon River village and carefully, neatly shot himself in the heart . . . The sound of the shot rolled across the flat delta land through the suppertime darkness of a cold spring day. It breached the walls and windows of the wooden houses, marking the moment as a beginning, for Louie Edmund had begun a 16-month suicide epidemic that ended the life of eight young villagers . . . In a community of 550 people, eight suicides is the equivalent of more than 3,000 in Anchorage. It is an unimaginable tragedy.
>
> Alakanuk's Suicide Epidemic
>
> Anchorage Daily News
> January 1988

In 1950 there were six reported Native suicides in Alaska, a rate below the national average; but by the 1970s the Native suicide rate had exploded. Between 1980 and 1985, suicide moved up the ladder from the eighth to the fourth leading cause of Native mortality. Despite enormous advances in health care and the delivery of social services to villages, the Native suicide rate has continued to accelerate, a trend that most experts agree shows no signs of abating.

For all ages, the Native suicide rate is almost four times the national average (Table 1).

Alaska Native Mortality and Morbidity
Selected Comparisons to U.S. Conditions

Cause of Death or Disease	Multiple of U.S. Incidence
Suicide	4 times the U.S. rate
Homicide	4 times the U.S. rate
Death due to injury (accidents)	5 times the U.S. rate
Postneonatal mortality	Over 2 times the U.S. rate
SIDS	At least 2 times the U.S. rate
tuberculosis mortality	23 times the U.S. rate •
respiratory disease mortality	Over 2 times the U.S. rate •
- infants only	10 to 14 times the U.S. rate •
FAS (fetal alcohol syndrome)	Over 2 times the U.S. rate
haemophilus influenzae B	3 to 5 times the U.S. rate •
- under age five only	4 to 6 times the U.S. rate •
infant pneumococcal meningitis	36 to 37 times the U.S. rate •

• Western Alaska Yup'ik populations only.

Table 1. Alaska Native Mortality and Morbidity

Figure 1 compares the average Native suicide rate, both male and female, with the average national suicide rate during the years 1982-84. It shows that Native males between 20 and 24 years of age are killing themselves at a rate 14 times the national average. Native women in the same age group are killing themselves at a rate five times the national average.

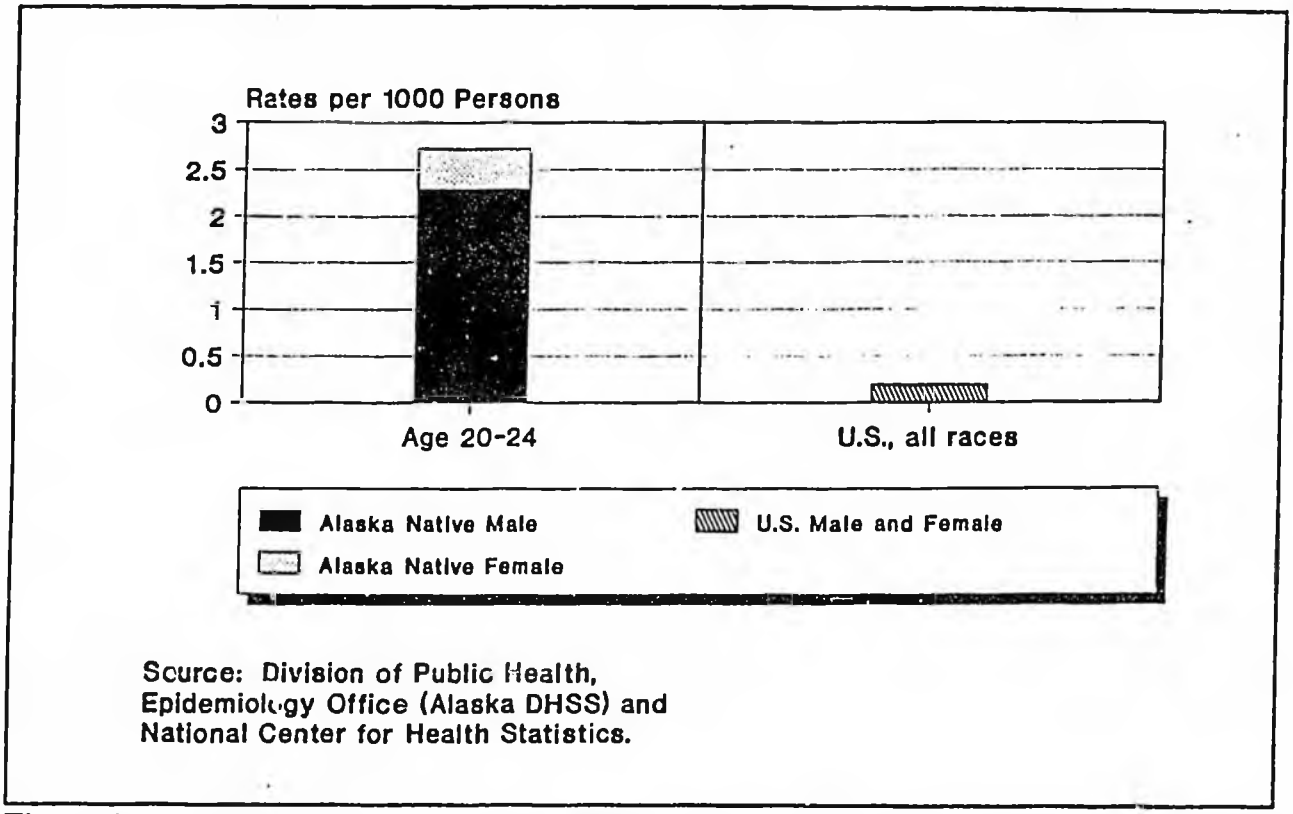


Figure 1. **Average Suicide Rates (1982-1984), Alaska Natives in the High-Risk Group (Age 20-24), Compared to the U.S. Rate**

Although individual causes of suicide are frequently difficult to determine, most Native suicides share the common denominator of alcohol abuse. More than three-fourths of the autopsy reports on Native suicides record measurable blood alcohol levels at the time of death.

The clear consensus among health professionals is that the increase in Native suicide will not be arrested, absent aggressive countermeasures. In particular, intervention should be focused on Natives between 10 and 29 years of age - those who are in, or about to enter, the highest-risk age group. However, since age groups with historically high suicide rates tend to retain high rates in later years, the adult population should also be closely monitored.

HOMICIDE

> (Pilot Point, Alaska) It was nothing really. A fight over a girl on an afternoon of whiskey and cocaine. But something in Chris Connors snapped. He got a gun and when he finished using it, three were dead and four injured.
>
> A Youth's Despair Erupts
>
> Anchorage Daily News
> January 1988

For the past decade, homicide has ranked as the sixth or seventh most common cause of death among Alaska Natives, a murder rate four times the national average.

Figure 2 compares the average Native homicide rate with the national average between the years 1982-84. Native male homicide victims outnumber Native women victims by about three to one.

Nevertheless, Native women face a higher risk of death by homicide than women elsewhere in the United States.

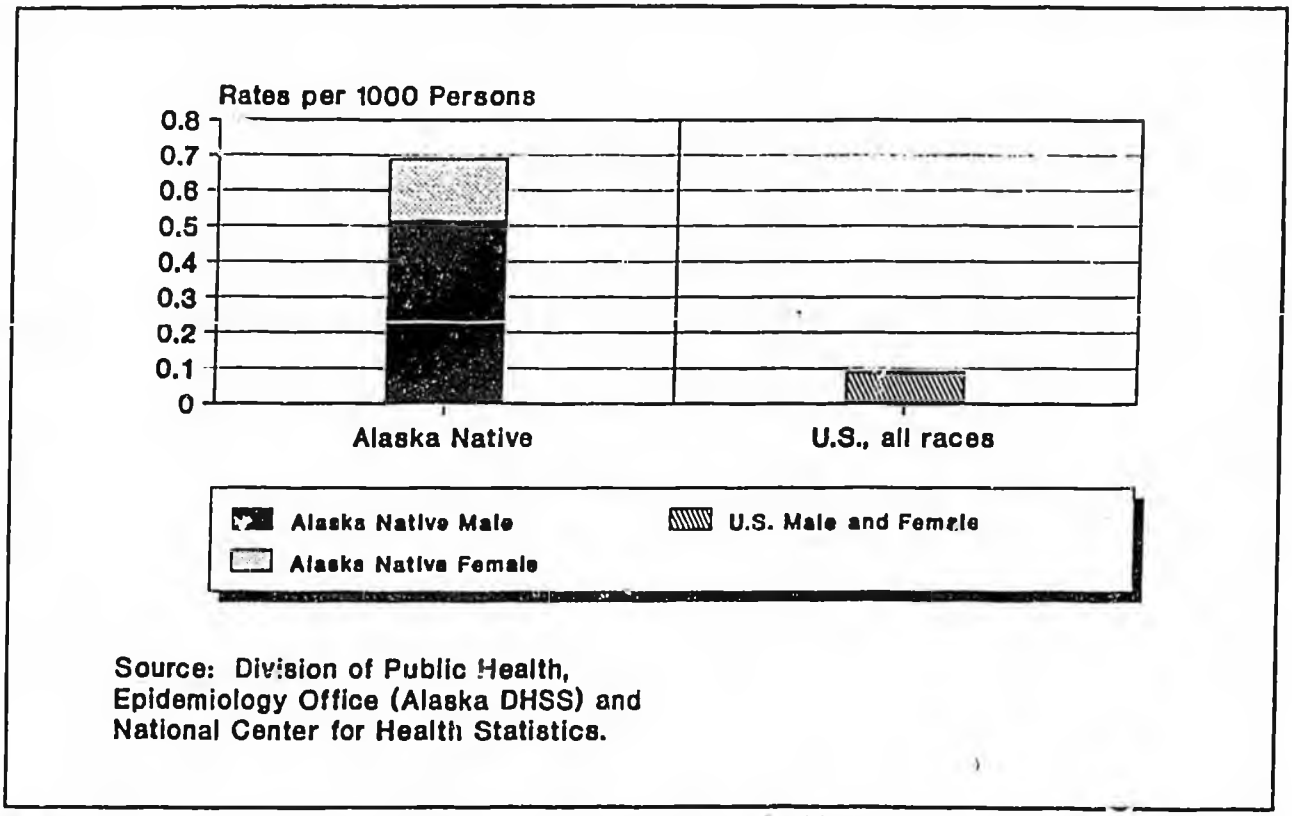


Figure 2. Average Homicide Rates, 1982-1984, Alaska Natives Compared to Overall U.S. Rate

ACCIDENTAL DEATH AND INJURY

Accidents are the leading cause of Native mortality. They are more than 50 percent higher than the second and third leading causes of Native deaths, cancer and heart disease. The Native accident mortality rate is more than three times the national average. Throughout the 1980s, accidents and injuries have been the first and second-ranked causes of hospitalization among Alaska Natives. Figure 3 compares average accidental death rates of Alaska Natives with the national average between the years 1982-84.

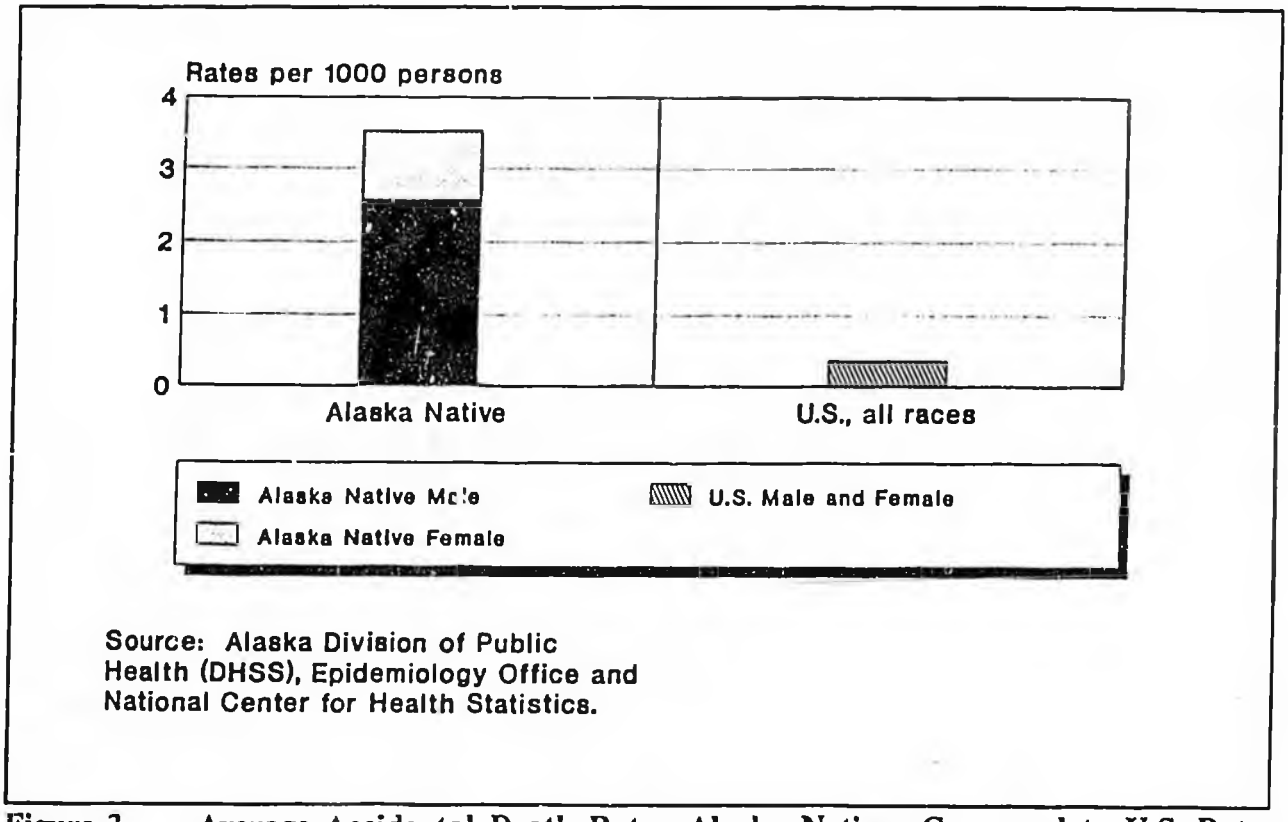


Figure 3. **Average Accidental Death Rates, Alaska Natives Compared to U.S. Rate, 1982-1984**

On the surface the high accident mortality rate appears to be a natural consequence of living in a harsh physical environment. But as in suicide and homicide, alcohol-related violence accounts for a significant percentage of Native deaths due to accident. Indian Health Service records for inpatient services at the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage indicate that from 1978 to 1987 between one-quarter and more than one-half of all injuries were intentional, i.e., either self-inflicted or inflicted by a second party.

CRIME AND INCARCERATION

In addition to the high Native death rates, alcohol abuse accounts for a substantial percentage of Native crime. In the past decade Alaska Natives have comprised between 14 and 16 percent of the statewide population. But approximately 25 percent of all persons arrested, 25 percent of all persons convicted of felonies and 34 percent of all persons incarcerated were Native. Fifty-nine percent of inmates incarcerated for violent crimes and 38 percent of those convicted of sex-related offenses were Native. In 1987 sexual assault in the first degree was the leading cause of incarceration among Natives. Available evidence indicates that between 80 and 100 percent of Native-perpetrated violent crime is alcohol-related.

Because any legacy of alcohol abuse and violence is passed from generation to generation, the emotional stability and social adaptation of young adults entering parenthood inevitably impacts the children they will have. Young Native adults are a generation in peril, and, unless timely steps are taken, the next generation will be even more so.

CHILDREN IN PERIL

When pregnant mothers drink, their babies can be born deformed or retarded -- doomed to a life of misery. No group in the United States has a higher rate of alcohol-caused infant deformities than Alaska Natives.

A Curse Upon the Unborn

Anchorage Daily News
January 1988

In significant measure, infant health depends on maternal health and stability. Although Natives comprise 14 percent of Alaska's population, 30 percent of Alaska's teenage mothers are Native. These young women desire the best for their babies, but they frequently lack the maturity, parenting skills, family support and money needed to raise children. Native teenage mothers are a particularly high-risk group.

Figure 4 compares the proportion of Natives in the statewide population to the proportion of births by Native teenage mothers between the years 1975-85.

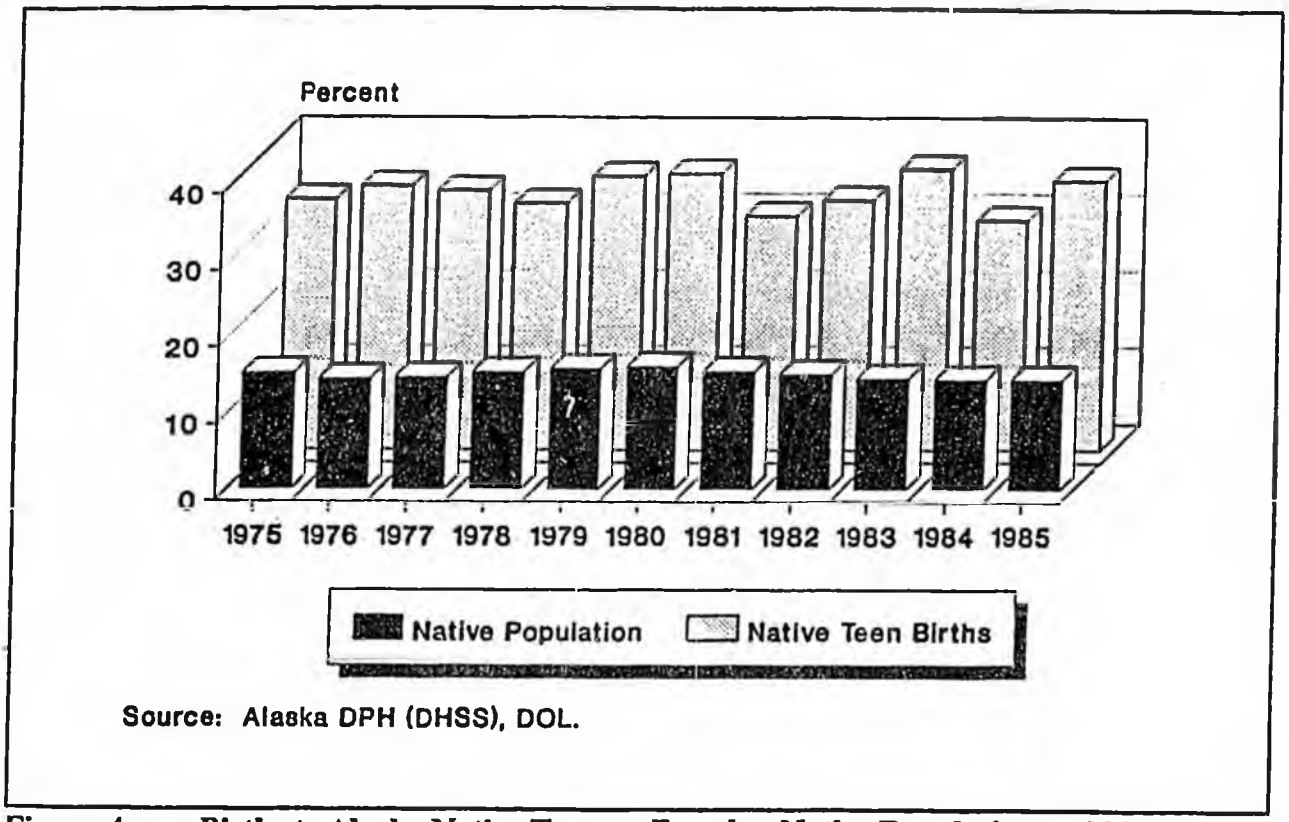


Figure 4. Births to Alaska Native Teenage Females, Native Population and Native Teen Births as Percentages of State Totals

At birth, the health status of Native infants is good. Most Native mothers have access to IHS or other hospital care. Consequently, the Native neonatal mortality rate (i.e., death between birth and 28 days) is not a pressing problem.

The risks arise after birth. The Native infant mortality rate (i.e., death between 28 days and one year) consistently exceeds the national average. Although the causes of this disparity are poorly understood, they are probably environmental, since once an infant returns home, the risk of death increases. Figure 5 compares the average Native and national infant mortality rates between the years 1982-84, and identifies the leading causes of death for Native infants.

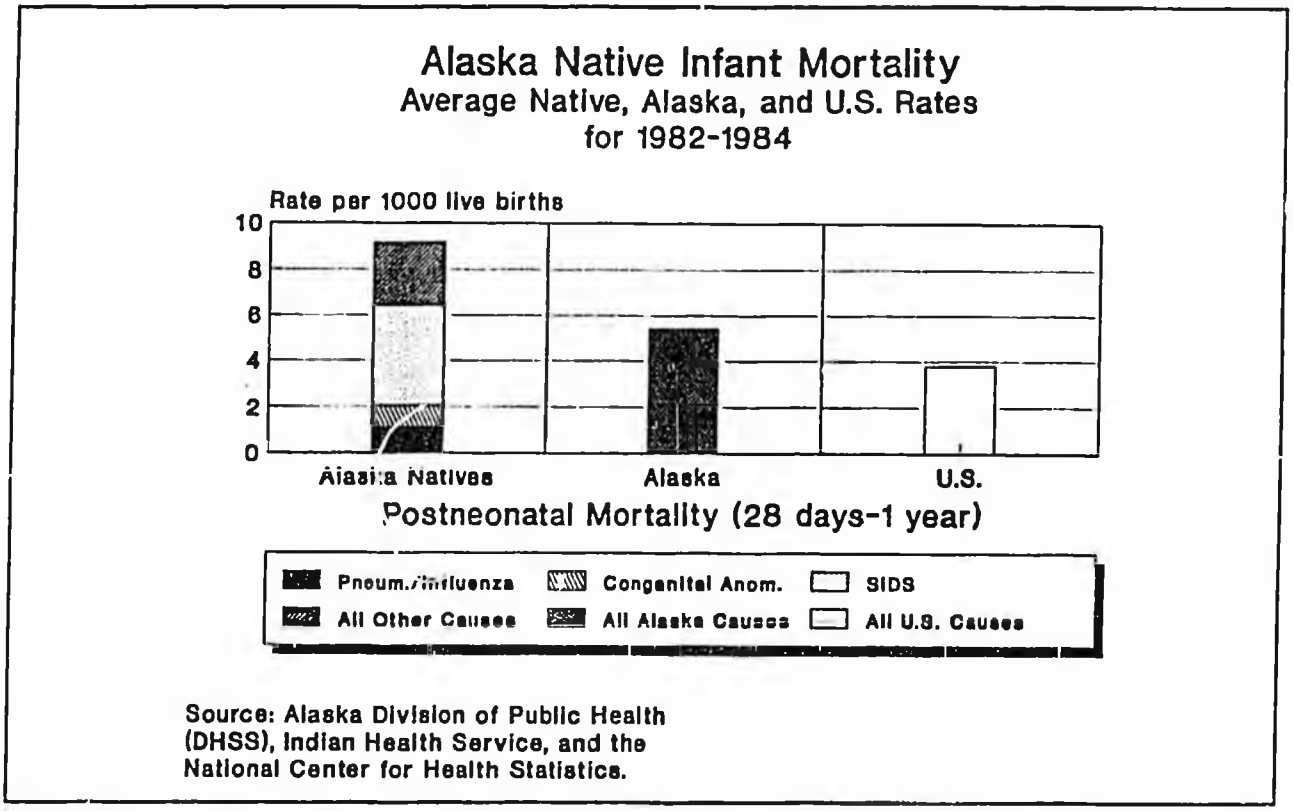


Figure 5. Alaska Native Infant Mortality, Average Native and U.S. Rates, 1982-1984

The Native mortality rate for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) exceeds the total national rate for all infant deaths. The Native rates for congenital anomalies (birth defects), influenza and pneumonia, when added together, are about half the total national infant death rate. Although more than 90 percent of Native infant deaths are autopsied, no clear cause of death can be determined for SIDS infants. Most experts agree that Native SIDS results from a combination of factors that include respiratory infections, low-level nutritional deficiencies and similar factors linked to inappropriate or inadequate parental care or to an infant's physical environment, e.g., overly cold or warm living conditions.

Native birth defects and infant pneumonia/influenza mortality rates warrant special attention.

Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), a condition engendered by maternal alcohol use during pregnancy (and, to an unknown extent, by fathers prior to conception) is a leading cause of Native birth defects. The Native FAS rate is more than twice the national average. FAS is also a leading cause of mental retardation among Alaska Natives. Since its cause is exclusively behavioral, FAS is preventable.

The high infant pneumonia/influenza mortality rate is a legacy of the Native community's low natural immunity to viruses historically introduced by whites. However, environmental factors that relate to the behavior of adults, including hygiene and nutrition, play an important role in the persistence of infectious disease.

Native children are also vulnerable to other infectious diseases that periodically appear in particular geographical areas. In some areas populated primarily by Eskimos, the incidence of hemophilus influenza B (HIB), a virulent infection with catastrophic potential to disable children, is higher than anywhere else in the world. In Alaska, HIB accounts for 68 percent of Eskimo meningitis cases, and the bacterial meningitis rate among Eskimos is ten times the rate elsewhere in the United States. In turn, meningitis is a leading cause of neurological deficiencies among young Natives, including deafness and paraplegia. Since neurological deficiencies

frequently require lifetime care, the long-term consequences are costly in both social and financial terms.

In addition to disease and birth defects, child abuse and sexual assault pose their own risks. Since 1980, when 185 cases were reported, the incidence of sexual assault has dramatically increased. In 1986, more than 1,400 Native children were reported victims of sexual assault. The number of Native children receiving protection services from the State of Alaska has also increased, from 2,035 cases in 1984 to 3,109 cases in 1988.

The statistics set forth above document the alcohol-driven plague of violence and death that is shredding the fabric of family and community life in Native villages throughout Alaska. This epidemic has inflicted intolerable emotional and physical damage on Native people. The cycle of alcohol abuse, violence and death must be broken.

NATIVE DEMOGRAPHICS: A GROWING "AT RISK" POPULATION

> Despite substantial growth of the Alaska Native population, Natives constitute a smaller minority group in 1980 than in 1970 . . . The Alaska Native birth rate is likely to remain high . . . Although the Native population is becoming increasingly urban, most Alaska Natives will continue to live in small communities.
>
> Changes in the Well-Being of Alaska Natives Since ANCSA
>
> Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska
> November 1984

In 1880 there were 33,426 Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts living in Alaska, 98.7 percent of the total population of the Territory. However, since 1940 the rate of non-Native in-migration has far outpaced the Native birth rate. Today, there are 75,000 Alaska Natives, but only 14 percent of the 540,000 persons living in Alaska are Native.

The preceding section documented the Native social and health crisis. The following demographic data outline the future dimensions of the crisis. The data indicate that young Native adults, the age group most at risk, compose the largest segment of the Native population. Between now and the year 2000 the numbers of young adults will increase. The Native birth rate, already high, will also increase. Although an increasing number of Natives are moving to urban areas, most Natives will continue to live in rural villages.

The implication of these projections is ominous. During the next two decades young Native adults, many of whom have been

brutalized by alcohol abuse, despair, violence and death in their homes and villages, will be having their own children. Unless the cycle can be broken, the projected high birth rate for young Native adults will create a new generation at risk in rural Alaska, far more numerous than the present one.

The demographic statistics that follow are presented by three categories: population growth, birth rates and geographic distribution.

POPULATION GROWTH

Figure 6 charts Native and non-Native population growth in Alaska from 1900 to 1980.

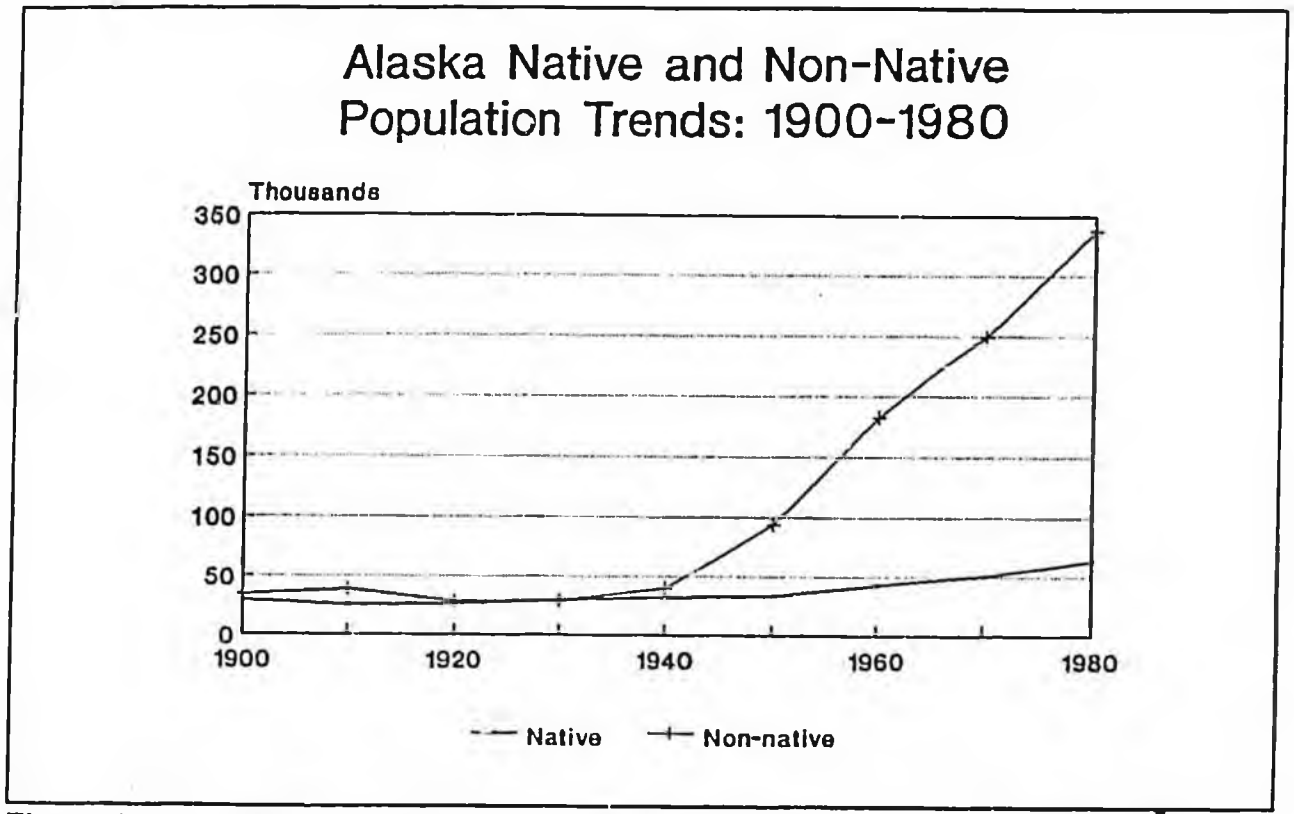


Figure 6. Alaska Native and Non-Native Population Trends: 1900 to 1980

Although the absolute number of Alaska Natives has increased, the Native percentage of the total population has steadily declined because of non-Native in-migration, mostly to Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau, since 1941. However, in rural Alaska, the majority of the population is, and will continue to be, Native.

Census data indicate that in 1980 there were 64,357 Natives living in Alaska. Another 22,500 Natives were estimated to be living outside the State. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of Natives living in Alaska increased by approximately 14,000 persons, and the number of Natives living outside increased by 4,500 persons. Thus, between 1970 and 1980, the Native population increased at an average annual rate of 2.4 percent, twice the national average. However, as the result of in-migration fueled by construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline and oil production at Prudhoe Bay, the non-Native population grew even faster during the same period, averaging 3 percent growth per year. As a result, despite their absolute increase, Natives as a percentage of the total population shrank from 16.7 percent to 16 percent.

Figure 7 documents the change in the number of Alaska Natives in different age categories between 1970 and 19 . The horizontal bars illustrate how each age group advanced or receded over the ten years between census counts. For example, by 1980 the Native males who were members of the 10-19 age group in 1970 had grown into the 20-29 age group, doubling the size of the latter group.

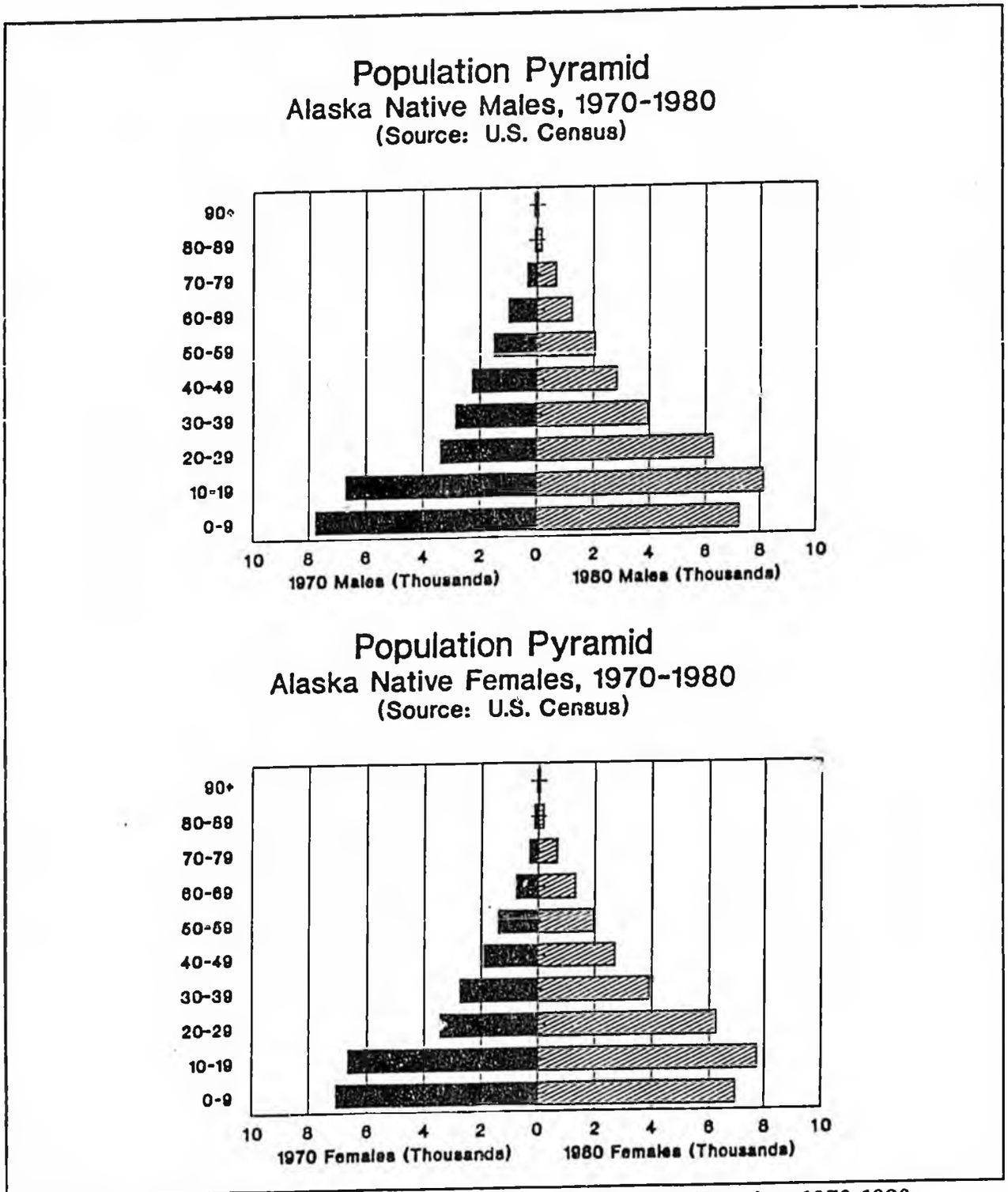


Figure 7. Population Pyramid, Alaska Native Males and Females, 1970-1980

As described in the preceding section, young Native adults are the generation most at risk, a generation that, due to the high Native birth rate, is continually expanding in size.

BIRTH RATES

Between 1970 and 1980 the average number of children born to Native women between 25 and 34 years of age dropped from 3.8 to 2.5. However, a large increase in the number of Native women who entered their child-bearing years during that decade more than offset the declining fertility rate. In 1970 10 percent of the Native population were women between 20 and 34 years of age. By 1980 the number of Native women in that age group had expanded to 14 percent of the population. As a result, despite the decline in the average number of children born per Native woman, between 1970 and 1980 the Native birth rate slightly increased. In 1980 the Native birth rate was more than twice the national average and 53 percent higher than the birth rate for non-Natives living in Alaska.

The high birth rate and the increasing number of women who are entering their child-bearing years have altered the Native age profile in a significant respect: an unusually large number of Alaska Natives are children. In 1980 23 percent of all Alaska Natives were under 10 years of age.

Because of the large number of female children who are under child-bearing age, the Native birth rate will likely remain high, particularly in rural villages.

Figure 8 illustrates the sharp rise in the Native birth rate in rural Alaska. It will soon overtake the rate of increase in Native births statewide.

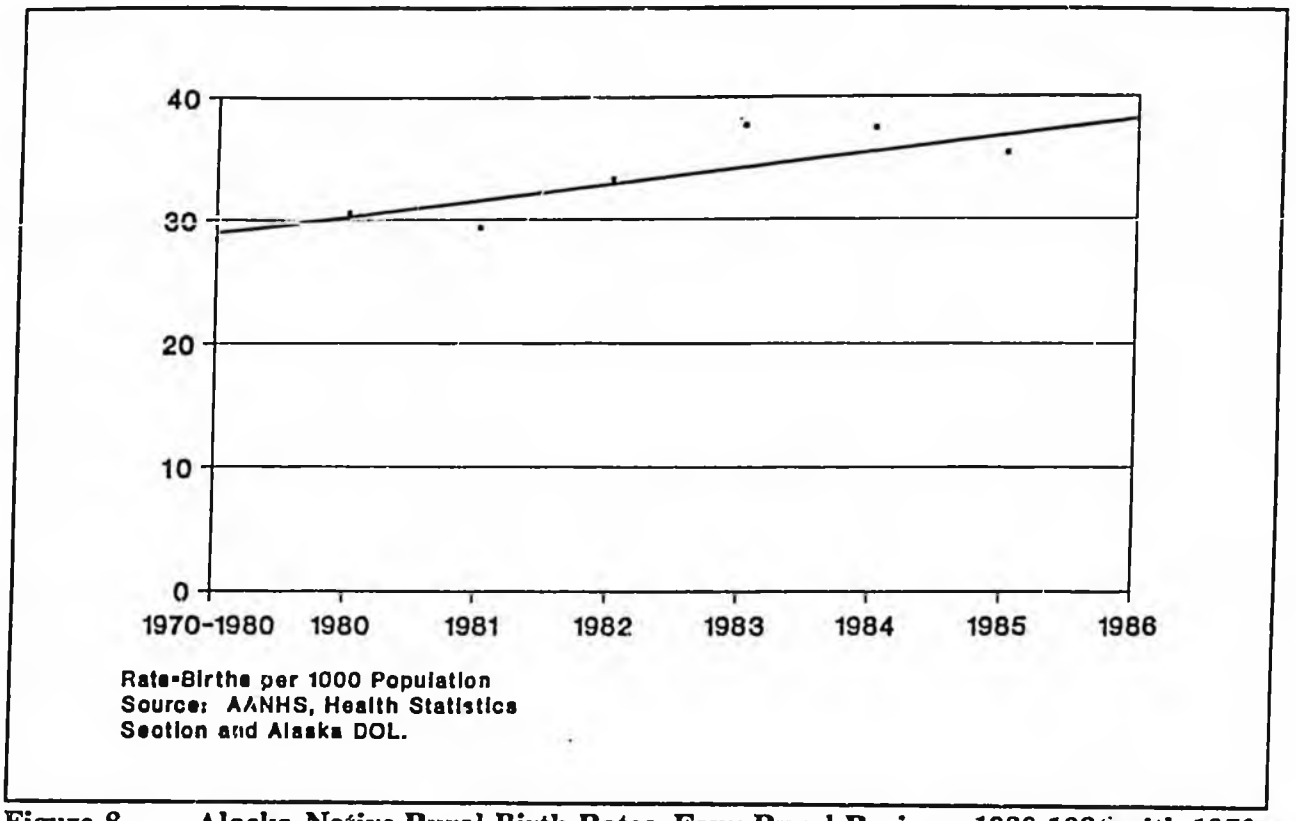


Figure 8. Alaska Native Rural Birth Rates, Four Rural Regions, 1980-1986 with 1970-1980 Comparison

Based on observed and projected birth rates, between 1980 and 1990 the number of Native children between 0 and 9 years of age living in rural Alaska will increase by 40 percent. This large population increase will place even greater strain on the limited natural and economic resources available to Native families and villages.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Between 1970 and 1980 the percentage of the Native population living in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Alaska's other urban areas increased from 17 percent to 31 percent. In some measure the increase resulted from a reclassification of certain rural locations from rural to urban between the 1970 and 1980 censuses. Consequently, analyzing the distribution of Native population by size of place in 1970 and 1980 presents a more accurate picture of geographic distribution.

Although the percentage of the Native population living in or close to Anchorage, Fairbanks and Alaska's other urban areas increased from 27 to 32 percent, in both 1970 and 1980 more than half of the Natives living in Alaska lived in communities with populations of less than 1,000 persons.

The increase in the number of Natives living in urban areas has not come at the expense of villages. Although the urban Native population is the fastest-growing segment of the statewide Native population, the number of Natives living in villages has been growing at an annual rate of 2.2 percent, a rate almost as high as that for total Native population growth (i.e., 2.4 percent).

Over 60 percent of Alaska Natives live in rural Alaska, a demographic reality that can be expected to continue despite the fact that Native population growth in the Anchorage and Fairbanks areas has been more than double the rate of growth in the statewide Native population. Assuming present trends

continue, by the year 2000 more than 29 percent of the Native population will live in the Anchorage and Fairbanks areas, but more than half the Native population will still live in rural Alaska.

As Figure 9 depicts, the village population is young, Natives between 0 and 9 years of age and between 10 and 19 years of age being the two largest age groups. At its current rate of increase, the Alaska Native population will double in 26 years.

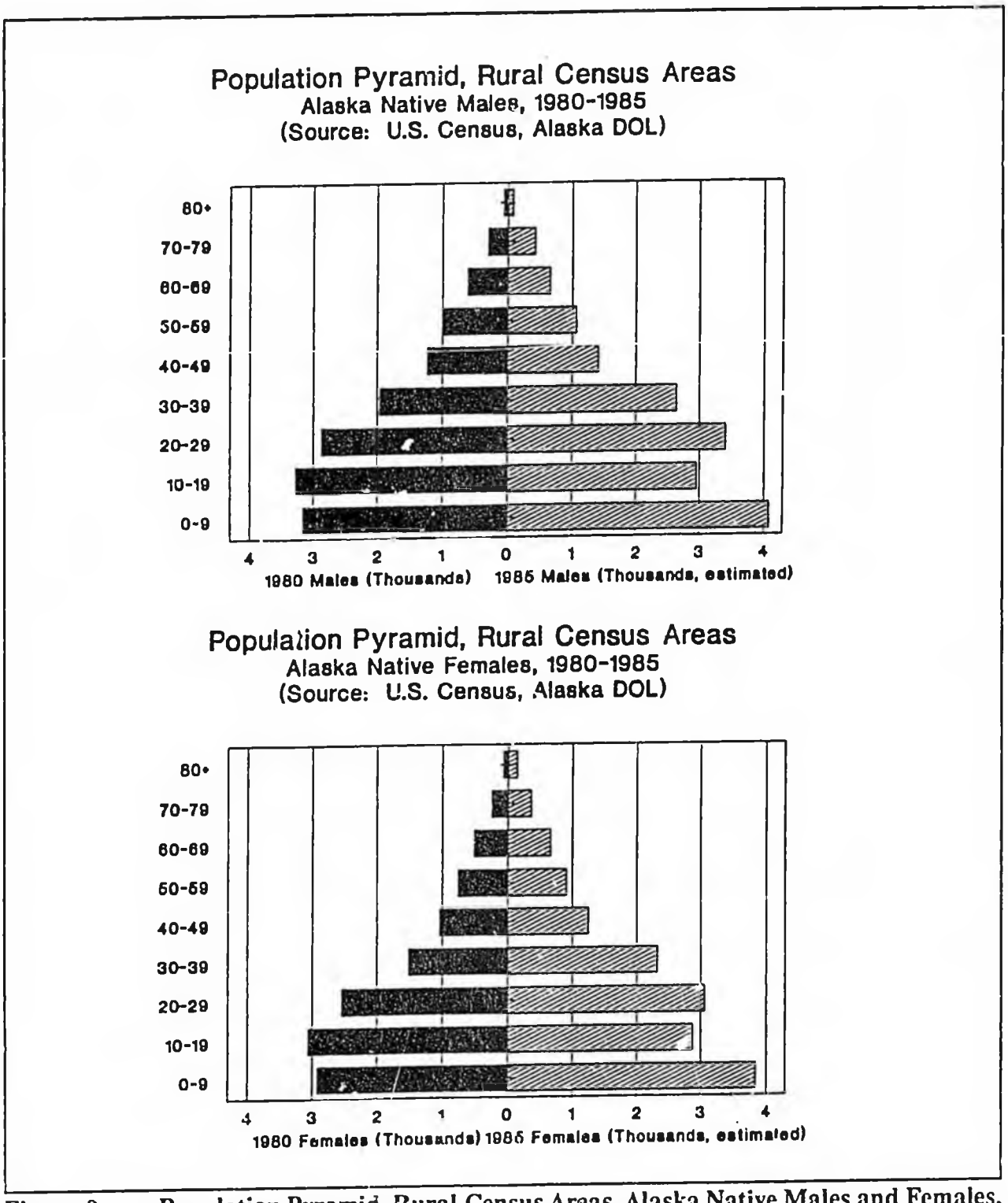


Figure 9. Population Pyramid, Rural Census Areas, Alaska Native Males and Females, 1980-1985

VILLAGE ALASKA: CONSTRAINTS ON ECONOMIC GROWTH

> You tell kids to graduate from high school. Then they graduate and so what? I think the poor kids are batting their heads against the wall. Is that the only choice? To sit in your house and drink and watch TV?
>
> Teacher George Curren
>
> Alakanuk School
> January 1988

In rural Alaska, most villages were originally sites from which Alaska Natives ventured forth to hunt, fish, trap and gather. However, locations that are ideally situated for the traditional subsistence economy, are frequently ill-suited to the non-Native cash economy. Consequently, the absence of jobs in the cash economy is a chronic problem in rural villages where unemployment rates far outstrip the state and national averages.

Most jobs in the cash economy are located in the cities, economic marketplaces where many Alaska Natives, far from home and lacking adequate education and work skills, are at a competitive disadvantage. Because most villages have a mixed subsistence and cash economy, subsistence activities periodically draw Natives, particularly males, out of the labor force competing for the few available village jobs.

During the 1970s, the Prudhoe Bay oil discovery, and the massive revenues that oil production generated for State government, radically altered the Alaska economy. But while the number of available jobs rapidly increased, the employment profile for Native men did not change significantly. Most new

jobs were filled by non-Natives who moved to Alaska. On average, between 1970 and 1980, almost half of all Native men 16 years of age and older were outside the wage labor force at any given time.

During the same period, in most Native villages there was little real economic growth. For two decades the federal and state governments invested substantial amounts of money in rural Alaska, building houses, water and sewer systems, airstrips, electrical systems and other infrastructure. Government also made capital investments in village schools intended, in part, to improve the quality of the rural work force. The purpose of the investments was to stimulate self-sustaining economic growth.

Uncritically optimistic, the government's strategy assumed that rural Alaska possessed widespread, untapped and marketable resources sufficient to support village and regional economies. With few exceptions - such as the North Slope oil fields, the Bristol Bay and Bering Sea fisheries, the Red Dog mine in the northwest arctic and the increasing market for southeast timber - that assumption was wrong. Despite investment in infrastructure and education, in most Native villages the increase in self-sustaining economic growth has been minimal.

When Native population growth is factored into the equation, the future is even more disconcerting. Between 1980 and 2000, the Native population will almost double during a time when government spending that has funded most of the few jobs available in rural Alaska will be diminishing.

Data on employment, income and cost of living illustrate the situation.

EMPLOYMENT

Although the rural Alaska economy changed radically after the Second World War, by 1970, most Natives living in rural villages still participated in a material culture that operated outside the mainstream of the cash economy. Hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering dominated village economies. Unsurprisingly, the rural Native population lacked the education and skills that were prerequisites to effective participation in the cash economy centered in the distant urban areas.

Information on federal and state employment in Alaska generated by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Alaska Department of Labor is compiled by census division. Figures 10 through 14 use a sample of four census divisions in western Alaska (Bethel, Nome, Kobuk and Wade Hampton). The four divisions have the largest number of villages and the highest percentage of Native residents of any census divisions in Alaska. In 1980 23,000 Natives lived in the four divisions, 85 percent of the total population.

Figure 10 compares unemployment rates in each of the four census divisions with the statewide unemployment rate. In 1988 the statewide unemployment rate was 8.7 percent. In the four census divisions unemployment rates ranged from 9.8 percent to nearly 17 percent. Even more telling, only 42 percent of working-age Alaska Natives in the study group were members of the

active labor force, as compared to nearly 86 percent of working-age non-Natives. Since no jobs are available in the villages in which they live and lack of education and work skills prevents them from competing for jobs elsewhere, 58 percent of the potential Native work force in the four census divisions simply stopped seeking work.

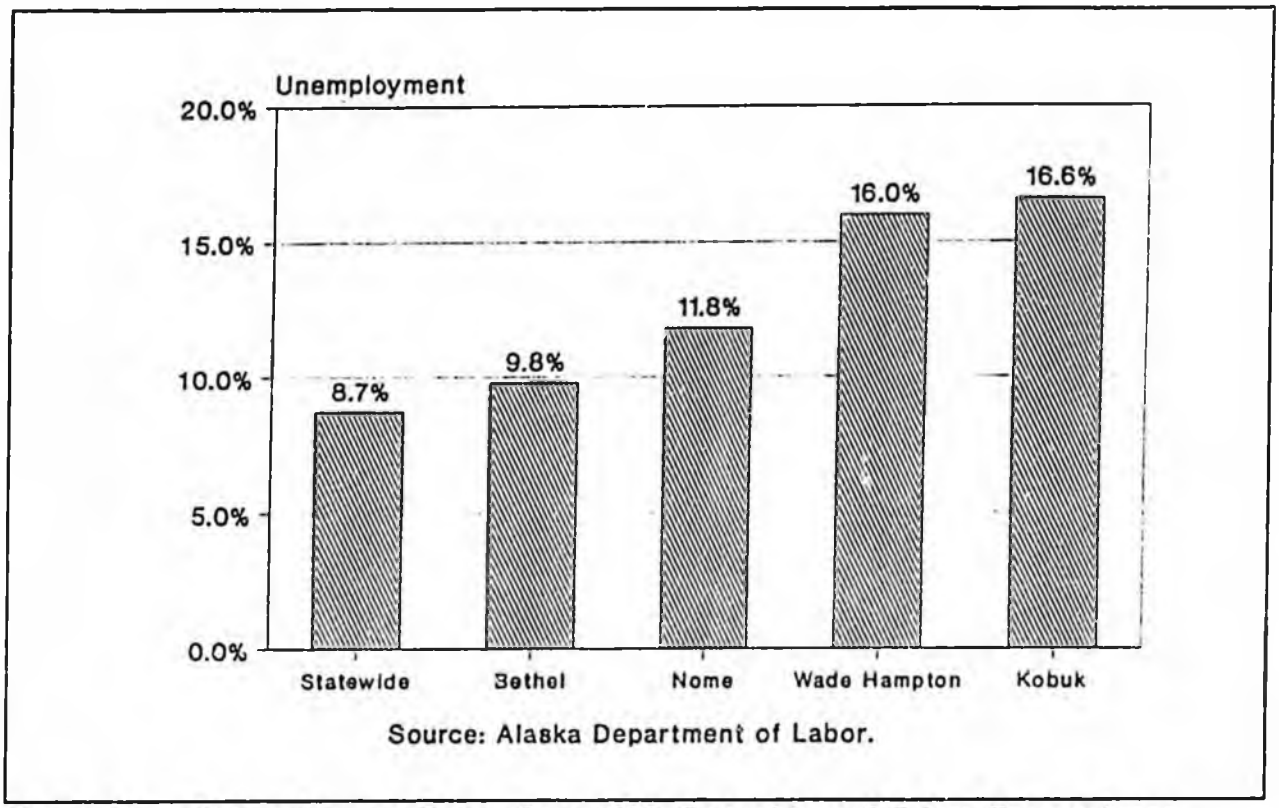


Figure 10. Unemployment Rates, June 1988, Statewide and Select Census Areas

Figure 11 depicts the rapid growth of the working age population of western Alaska between 1970 and 1980 and projects the continued population increase between 1980 and 2000.

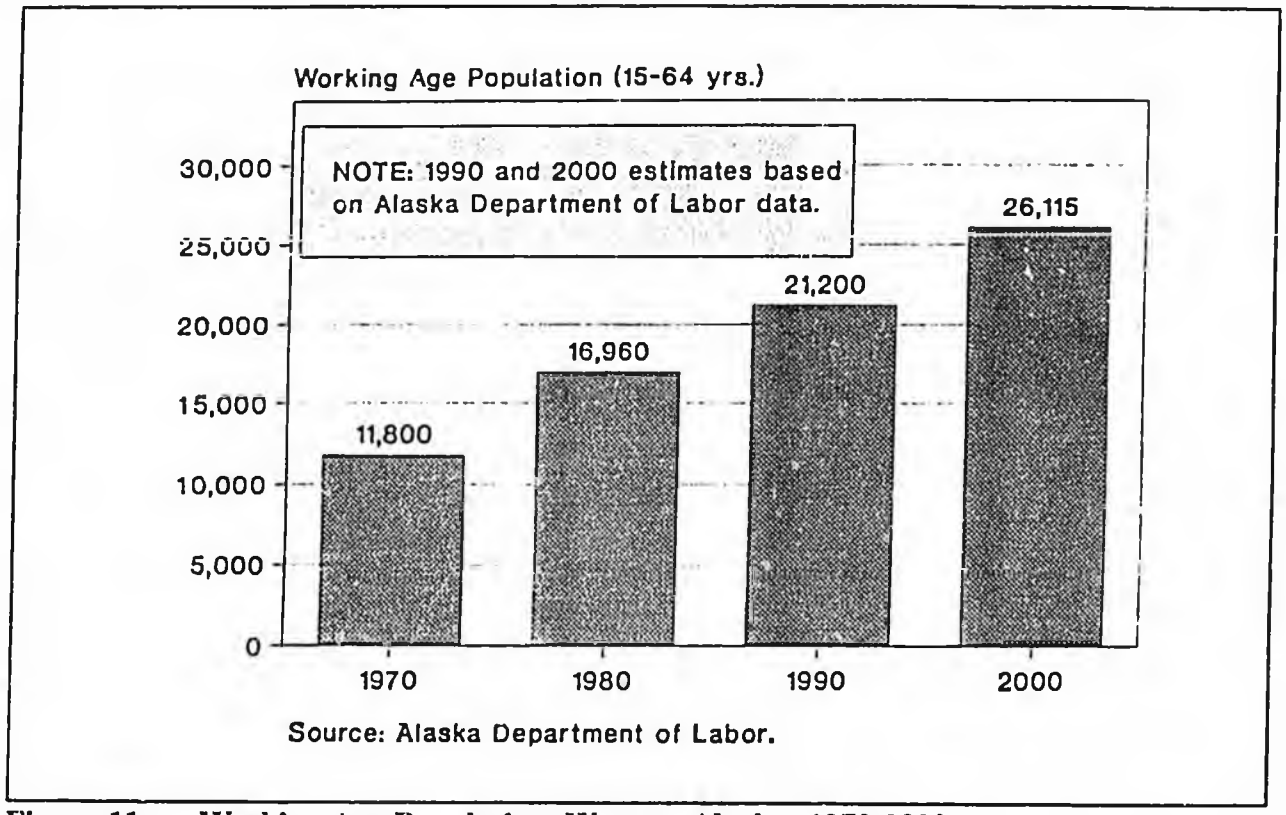


Figure 11. Working-Age Population, Western Alaska, 1970-2000

INCOME AND COST OF LIVING

Since 1970, western Alaska residents have made significant statistical gains in personal income, although to levels far short of the state and national averages. Figure 12 indicates that, despite the growth in government spending, between 1971 and 1986, the per capita income in western Alaska was significantly below the state and national averages. In 1986, the average Alaskan made $17,400 a year, the average American $14,200. But the average Native living in western Alaska made $11,300.

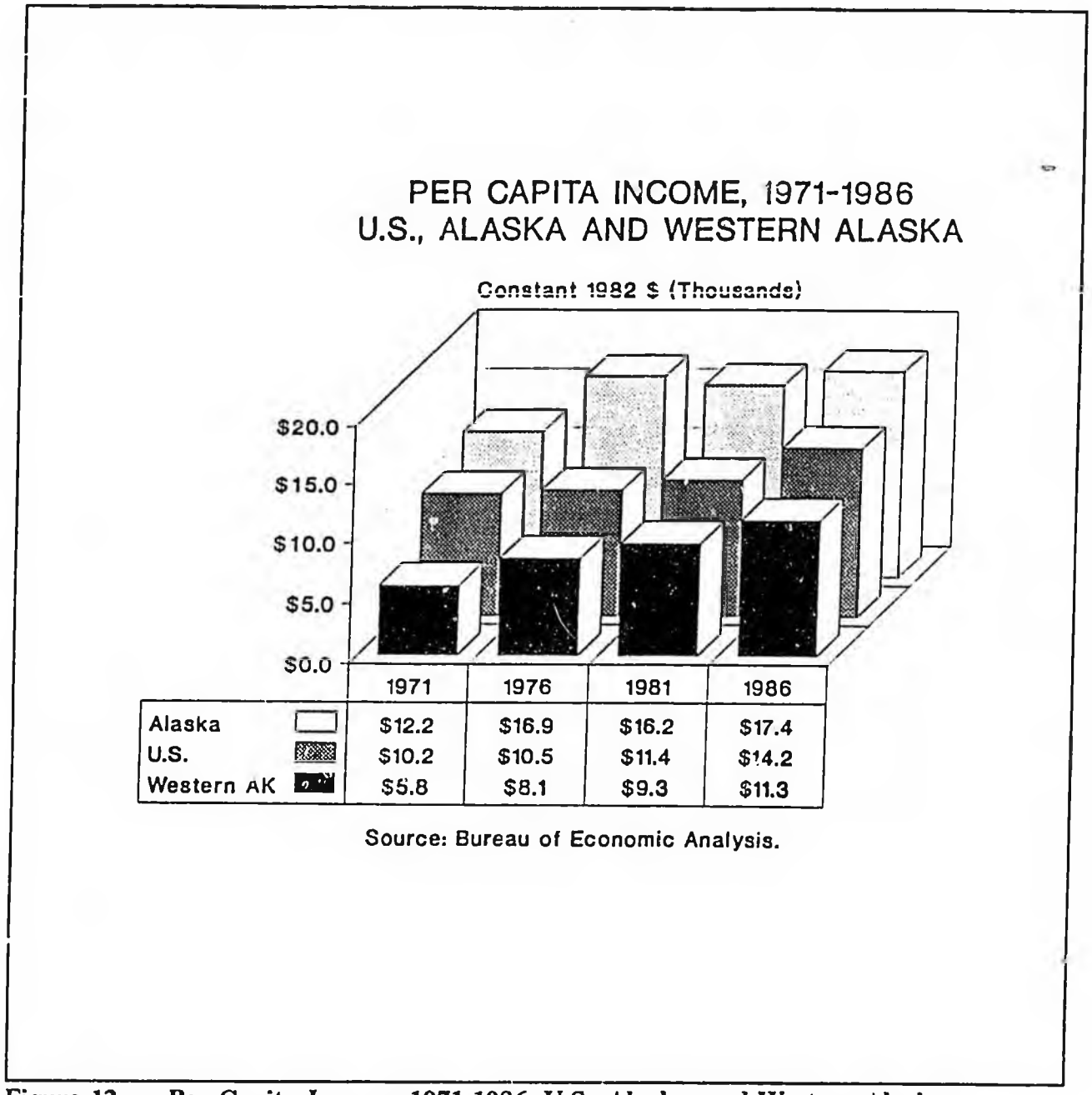


Figure 12. Per Capita Income, 1971-1986, U.S., Alaska, and Western Alaska

Figure 13 compares the ratio of per capita income in western Alaska to per capita income statewide and in the rest of the United States.

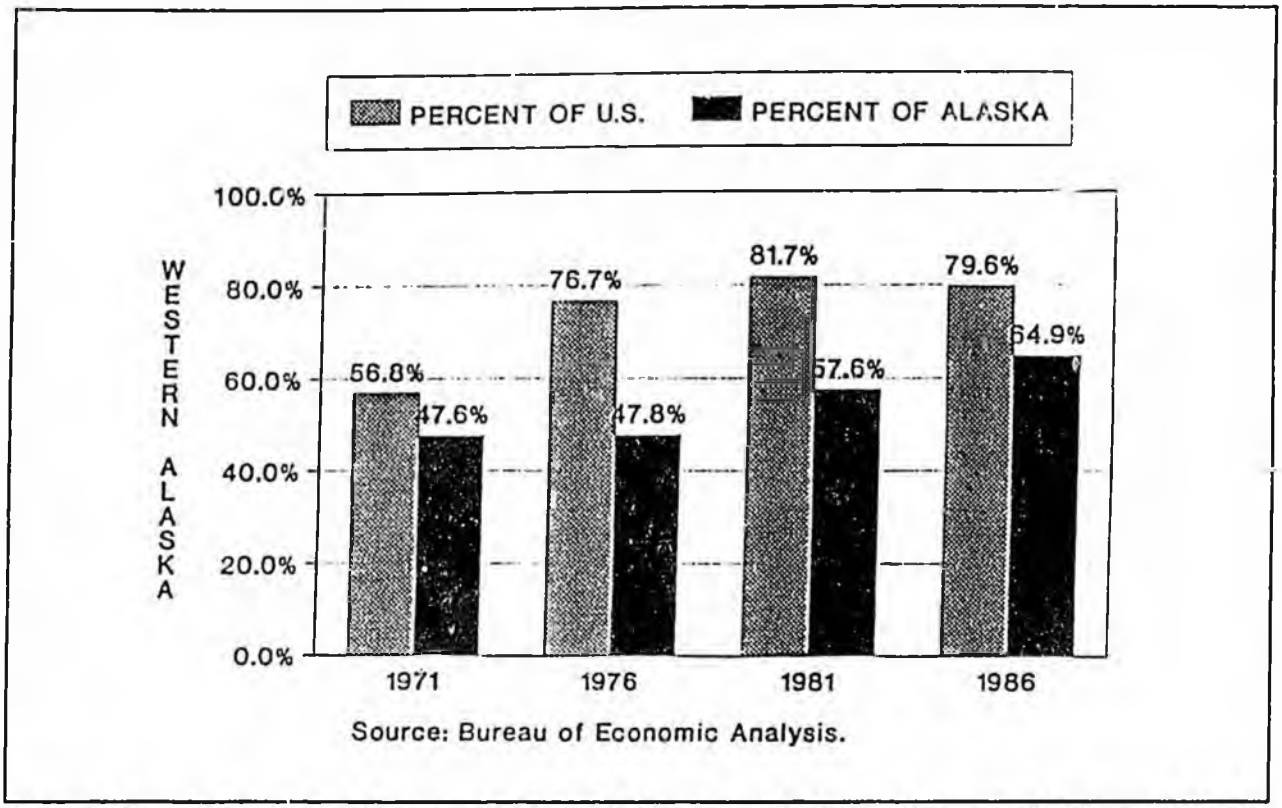


Figure 13. Per Capita Income, 1971-1986, Western Alaska as Percent of U.S. and Alaska

In addition to having less money than Alaskans who live and work in the cities, because of the high cost of living the money Natives living in rural Alaska do have is worth less. Figure 14 indicates that the average Native family of four living in Bethel, Kotzebue or Nome spends 62 percent more per week on food, 165 percent more on electricity and 46 percent more on a barrel of heating oil than does a family of four living in Anchorage.

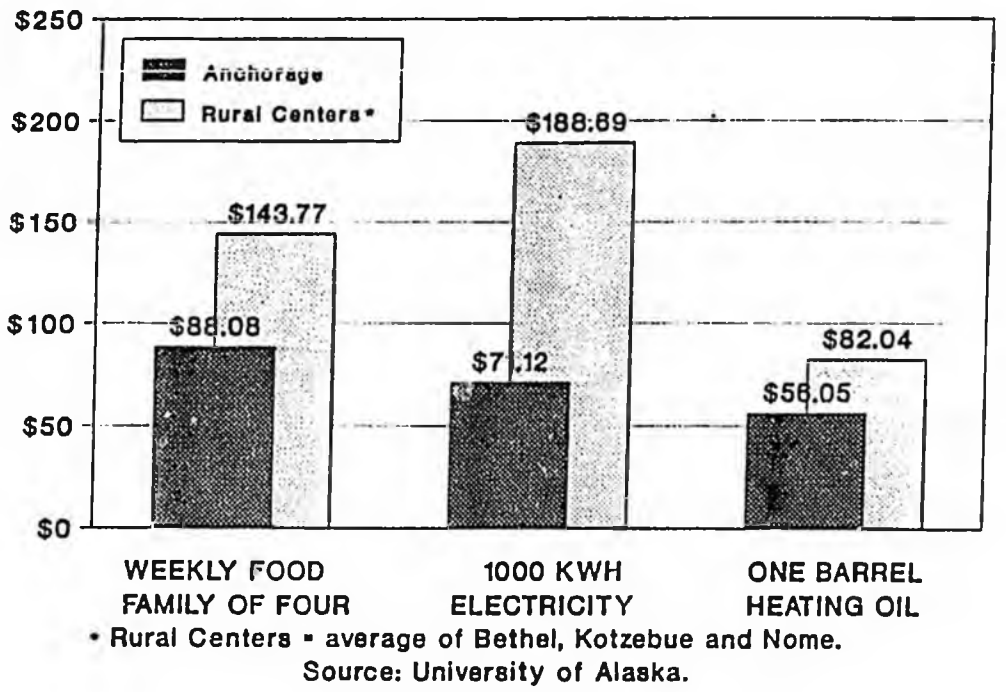


Figure 14. Cost of Select Items, March 1988, Anchorage vs. Three Rural Centers

VILLAGE ALASKA: THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR ECONOMY

Even if the subsistence economy is protected, Natives living in rural villages are dependent, and each year more dependent, on the cash economy. Heating oil, electricity, cotton, wool and fiber-filled clothing, coffee, sugar, televisions and other accoutrements of the American mass culture are omnipresent, non-negotiable elements of contemporary village life. As a result of consumer demand generated through education, television and other media, Native aspirations for access to the non-Native material culture can be expected to increase.

But satisfying consumer demand costs money. In most Native villages money can be acquired in only two ways: it can be earned or it can be given. Most villages do not have a viable cash economies. There are few jobs, and little money can be earned. Consequently, too many Natives living in rural villages meet their material needs through government transfer payments. But government largess is not without cost. Economic dependence engenders low self-esteem that contributes to the cycle of depression, alcohol abuse, violence and death.

Since 1970 Native villages have become increasingly dependent upon non-local public money to support per capita income, wage employment, maintenance of community infrastructure and basic services. Fortuitously blessed with massive oil revenues, in the mid-1970s the Alaska Legislature began spending large amounts of public money in rural Alaska. State spending purchased capital improvements and community services and raised

the level of per capita income in Native villages closer to that of urban residents. But the recent reduction in revenues occasioned by the decline in world oil prices has two potentially controversial implications for the State's effort to manufacture a rural economy.

First, the cost of maintaining and operating the infrastructure built with federal and state money (e.g., water and sewer systems, electrical generating systems, schools, community buildings and roads) is beyond the means of most villages and the Native families who live in them. Eventually, the cost also may be beyond the means of State government - or the Legislature's willingness to continue spending large portions of shrinking revenues in villages that contain a diminishing percentage of the electorate.

Second, while geographic mobility is an historic alternative to death or poverty, the effort to improve the village standard of living through State spending has discouraged out-migration - one of the ways in which non-Native communities have traditionally adjusted when the local economy can no longer sustain the population.

The construction and operation of village high schools has encouraged young Native adults to remain in their home villages. But since jobs are scarce, when they graduate, they are frequently frustrated by the inability to put their education and skills to productive use. Consequently, as the pool of young Native labor has expanded over the last 20 years, the pressure on

the State and federal governments to provide village employment opportunities has intensified.

Having had the money to do so, government attempted to respond. As a result, since 1970 the public sector has dominated the village job market. However, it has not done so by creating proportionately more jobs in rural Alaska than it has in urban areas. Rather, the public sector dominates the rural economy because the private sector is underdeveloped.

To compound the problem, Alaska's version of the federal Davis-Bacon Act requires contractors to pay employees working in rural villages the same wages they pay employees working in the cities, a policy that discourages the use of semi- and unskilled local labor.

Information on the public sector economy of rural Alaska is presented in six categories: federal spending, transfer payments, government payrolls, grants, contracts and in-kind income, ANCSA corporations and impediments to economic development.

FEDERAL SPENDING

In rural Alaska, federal spending reflects the United States government's historic fiduciary commitment to protect the social and economic interests of Alaska Natives. Figure 15 indicates that in 1986 federal expenditures in western Alaska were $ 3,915 per capita, 46 percent higher than the national average of $2,502.

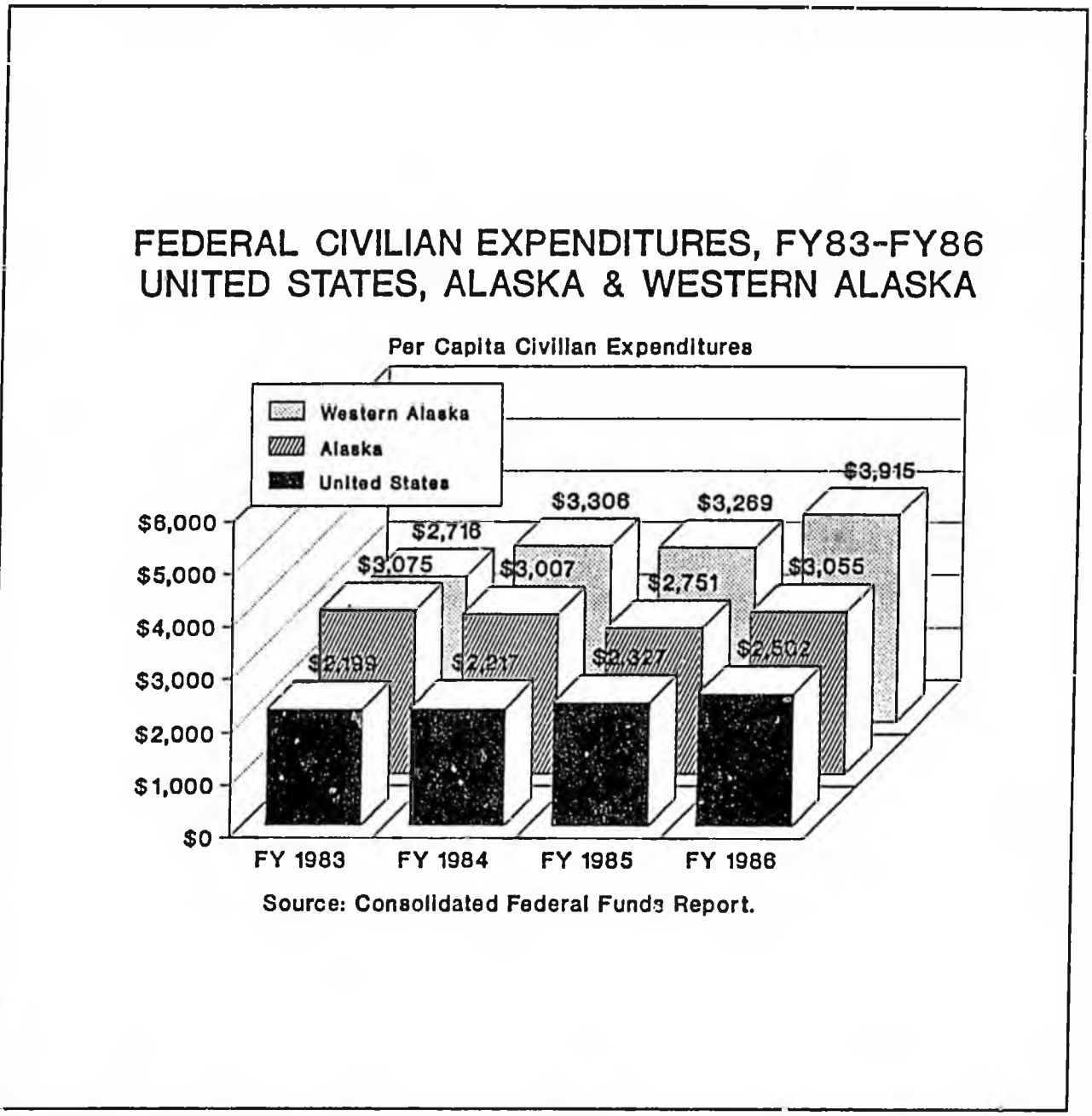


Figure 15. Federal Civilian Expenditures, FY83-FY86, U.S., Alaska, and Western Alaska

Nationally, direct payments to individuals (e.g., retirement and disability payments and income assistance) comprise the bulk of federal civilian expenditures, followed by grants, contracts and employee salaries. In western Alaska, the pattern is reversed. As Figure 16 depicts, in western Alaska between 1983 and 1986, the federal government distributed more than twice as much money through grants and contracts as it did through direct payments and salaries combined. As Figure 17 documents, the State of Alaska has taken the same approach.

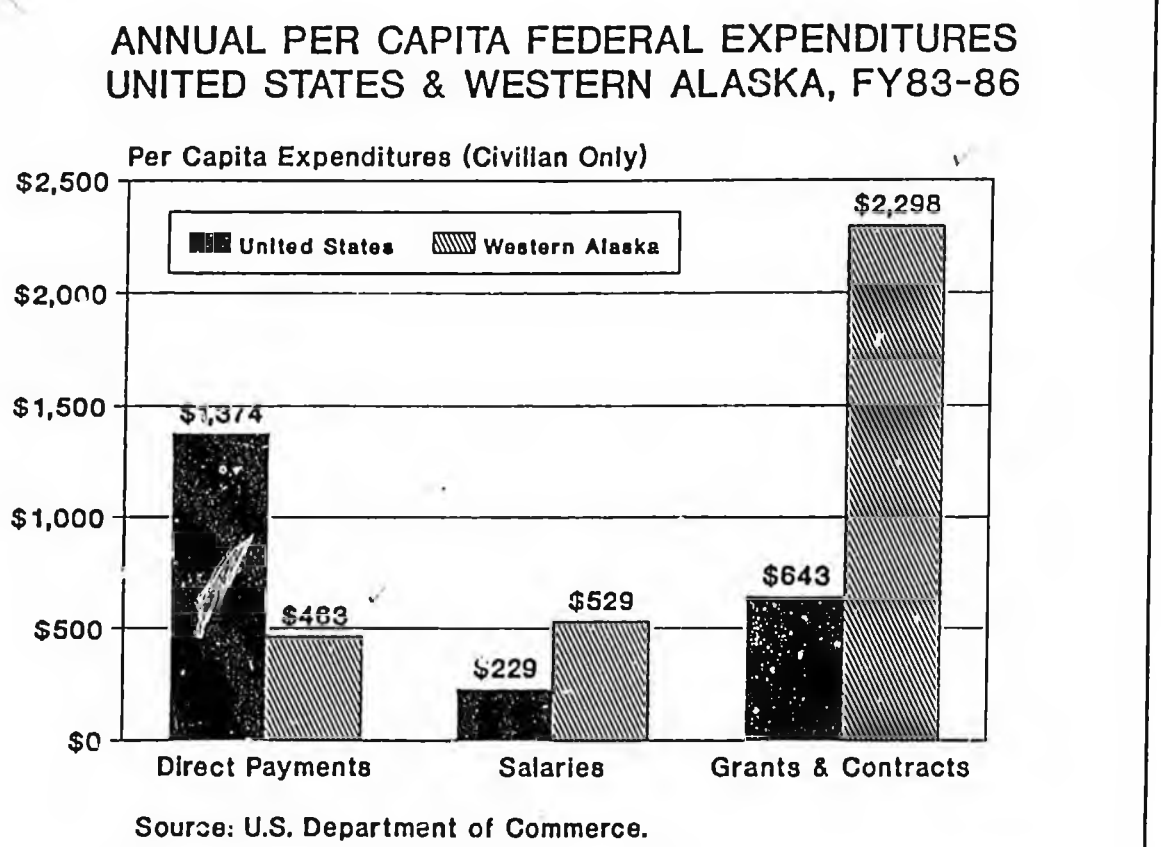


Figure 16. Annual Per Capita Federal Expenditures, U.S. and Western Alaska, FY83-86

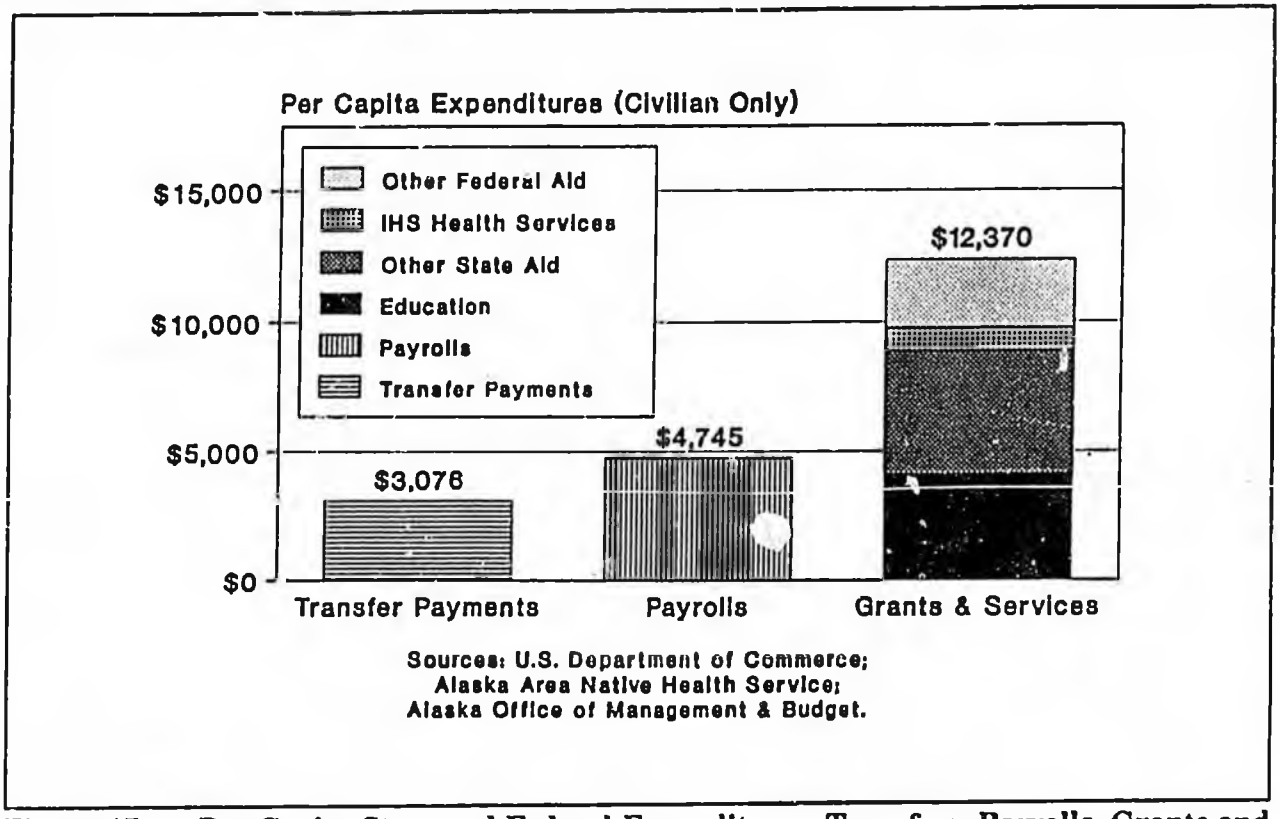


Figure 17. Per Capita State and Federal Expenditures: Transfers, Payrolls, Grants and Services, Western Alaska, FY 1986

In broad measure, the thrust of state and federal spending in western Alaska has favored grants and contracts to support community facilities and service delivery over personal income transfers to individuals.

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

As an income category, "transfer payments" includes a number of types of payments other than income assistance. For example, in 1986 in western Alaska, state-administered income assistance payments (e.g., Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Food Stamps and Medical Assistance) amounted to $594 of the total $3,076 of transfer payments were distributed per capita.

Federal income assistance added slightly to that subtotal. The per capita remainder (approximately $ 2,400) was composed of retirement benefits, State of Alaska permanent fund dividend and longevity bonus payments and similar payments.

Interestingly, despite the poverty of Native families living in rural villages, transfer payments have not been the primary means that the federal and state governments have employed to bolster the rural economy. As Figure 18 demonstrates, although in 1986 the per capita distribution of transfer payments was a greater source of personal income in western Alaska than the state and national averages, earned income of $7,924 per capita significantly exceeded transfer payments.

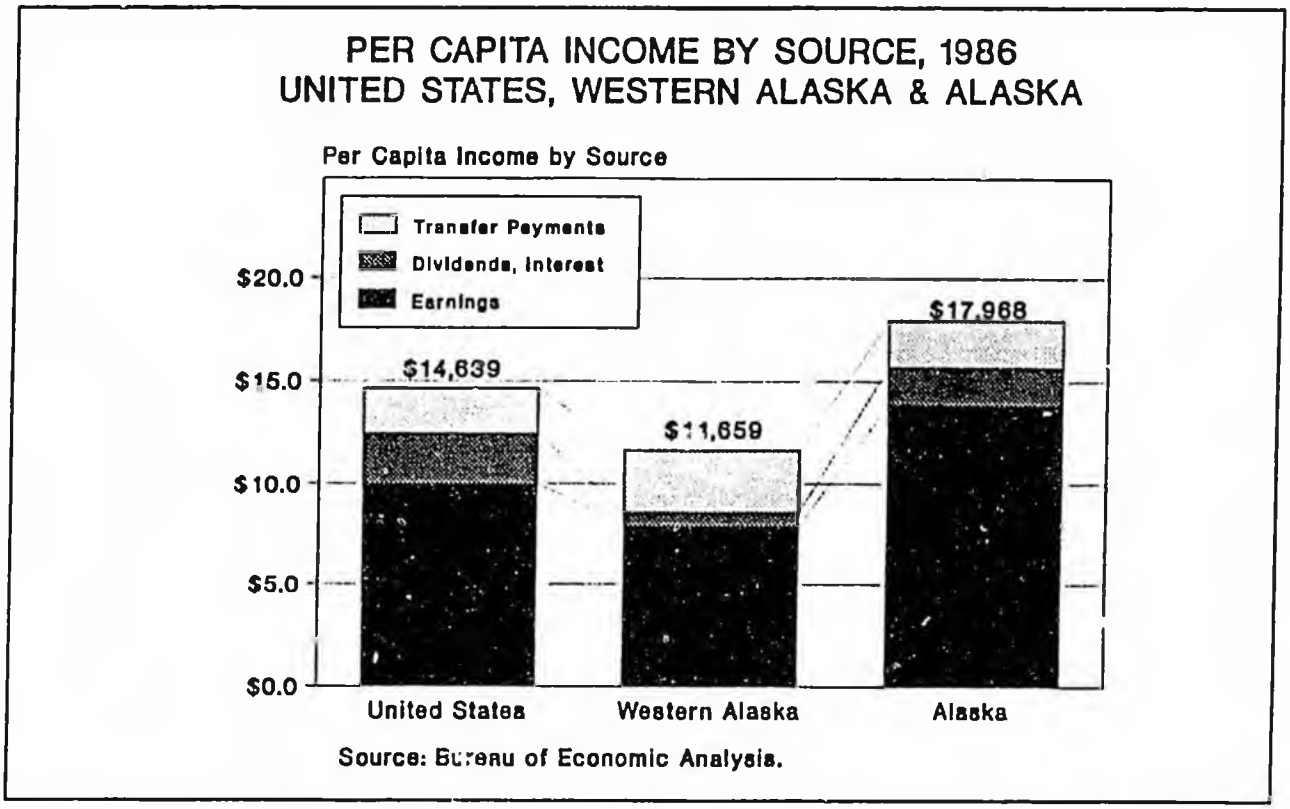


Figure 18. Per Capita Income by Source, 1986, U.S., Western Alaska, and Alaska

In dollar amounts, federal and state transfer payments are the least important type of financial assistance that government provides to Native residents of rural Alaska. Figure 16 illustrates that between 1983 and 1986 federal payments to individuals were approximately a third of the national average and represented less than 15 percent of federal expenditures in western Alaska. Similarly, Figure 17 indicates that in 1986 combined federal and state expenditures for salaries, grants and services substantially exceeded transfer payments.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT

For the most part, Natives who have jobs in rural Alaska work for government, particularly local government. Employment and payroll statistics, as well as the overall allocation of government expenditures, document the pattern.

Figure 19 indicates that in 1986 public employment in western Alaska accounted for 55 percent of all earned income, compared to 32 percent in the State of Alaska and 16 percent nationwide. In 1987 public employment in western Alaska accounted for 60 percent of all wage employment.

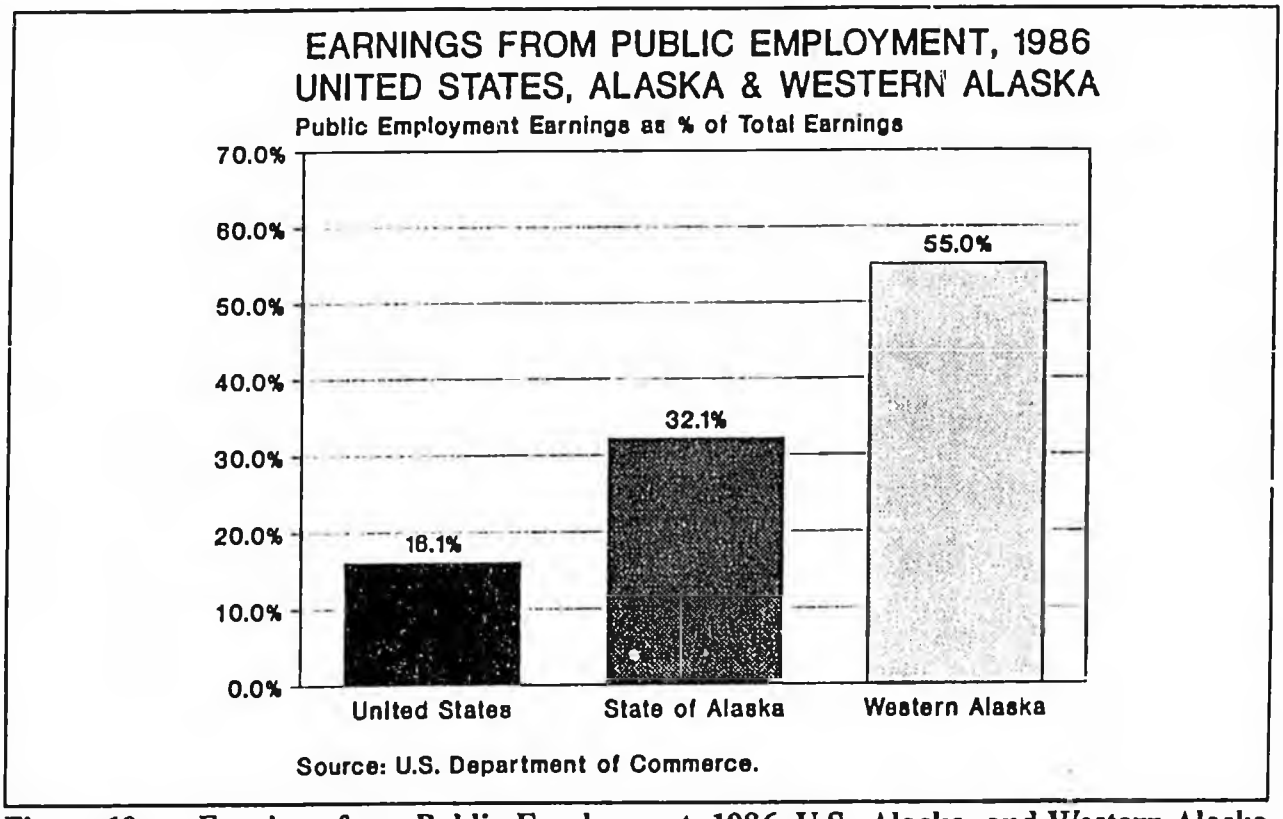


Figure 19. Earnings from Public Employment, 1986, U.S., Alaska, and Western Alaska

In 1987, local government and other public agencies employed approximately 80 percent of the government workforce, the balance being evenly divided between federal and state government. In western Alaska, local taxes and service charges are a minimal percentage of local government revenues, and no Alaska resident pays State income tax. Consequently, most local government employment is financed by the state and federal governments.

GRANTS AND CONTRACTS

As important as the federal and state governments are as sources of transfer payments and public employment in western Alaska, the value of transfer payments and public employment is dwarfed by the value of the employment the federal and state governments distribute through grants, contracts and direct delivery of services.

Figure 17 documents federal and state payments in western Alaska for grants and services in 1986. State and federal expenditures to finance the operation of village schools alone totalled $4,136 per resident, a third more than the total of all transfer payments. IHS expenditures for Native health care added another $877 per Native resident. The State spent $ 4,766 per resident for capital projects, grants, contracts, and services, and other federal expenditures totalled $2,591 per resident. In sum, in western Alaska during 1986 the federal and state governments together spent $12,370 per resident, a year in which per capita income in western Alaska was $11,659.

The types of goods and services that the federal and state governments purchase in rural Alaska vary from locality to locality. Major categories of public spending are schools, health services, subsidized housing programs, public works construction, utilities, transportation facilities, energy subsidies, manpower and social services, recreation programs and a range of municipal services.

The value of public expenditures for education and health care, housing and energy subsidies, capital construction and

similar goods and services is not included in the calculation of per capita income, even though they are a significant percentage of goods and services consumed by local residents and are basic to maintaining the present standard of living in most Native villages. Federal and State spending of this nature is particularly important since, for reasons previously detailed, most Native families living in rural villages do not have sufficient income to support schools or purchase health care or unsubsidized housing or energy. Consequently, if federal or State spending were reduced or eliminated, the present marginal standard of living in Native villages would be reduced to dangerously low levels.

ANCSA CORPORATIONS

In 1971 Congress enacted the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). The Act required Alaska Natives to organize 13 regional and more than 200 village corporations to administer 44 million acres of land and $ 962.5 million that Congress paid to extinguish Native claims to Alaska based on aboriginal use and occupancy. Although many ANCSA corporations have made positive contributions to the political and social status of Alaska Natives in western Alaska, like other private sector business entities, few corporations have overcome the geographic and economic barriers that constrain rural economic development. During the next two decades, there is little likelihood that Native corporations will be able to expand the private sector economy significantly in rural Alaska.

In an area that, with minor exceptions, lacks commercially

exploitable natural resources, the absence of of entrepreneurial opportunity in western Alaska has frustrated the efforts of ANCSA corporations in the area to develop new local industry and commerce. For example, in 1987 Calista Corporation, Bering Straits Native Corporation and NANA Regional Corporation - the three regional corporations in western Alaska - reported operating losses. In that year gross revenues of the financially troubled Calista and Bering Straits Native Corporations were respectively $ 175 and $ 323 per Native shareholder. There is no possibility that ANCSA corporation revenues will ever be large enough to replace the role of federal and state spending in the rural economy.

IMPEDIMENTS TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

For the past two decades federal and state spending has expanded the economy and raised living standards in Native villages but has produced little permanent, self-sustaining economic growth. To date, the private sector component of the rural economy is skeletal.

In western Alaska, as each decade succeeds the last, the idea that private sector economic development is merely a matter of time and capital becomes increasingly implausible. Villages in the region are remote from markets; lack arable land, timber, energy and mineral resources; are saddled with high labor, energy, transportation, and communication costs and must contend with a dearth of local markets and a scarcity of investment capital. To varying degrees, the economic conditions in villages elsewhere in the state are similar.

NATIVE EDUCATION: A DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE OF MEDIOCRITY

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education characterized the United States as "A Nation at Risk." According to the Commission, "if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." Notwithstanding the cherished belief that "all, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance . . . for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost," the Commission argued that "our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them."

Education in Alaska is no exception to the Commission's rule. In particular, the education offered in village grade and high schools must claim a disproportionate share of the nation's educational mediocrity. Educational attainment among Native children falls well below even the norms that the Commission found an unacceptable threat to America's future. In most village schools, Native students test between the 25th and 30th percentiles, a level far below the national norm. As a result, Native children who attend village schools are being denied the Commission's promise that "all children, by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself."

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

As the Commission noted, without gainful employment an individual's ability to manage his or her own life is undermined, and the progress of society is endangered. But to compete successfully in the Alaska labor market against non-Natives, Natives must be on equal educational footing. It is a harsh but real truth that, even where jobs are available, substandard education denies many young Native adults the opportunity to secure gainful employment, just as it denied the same opportunity to many of their parents and grandparents.

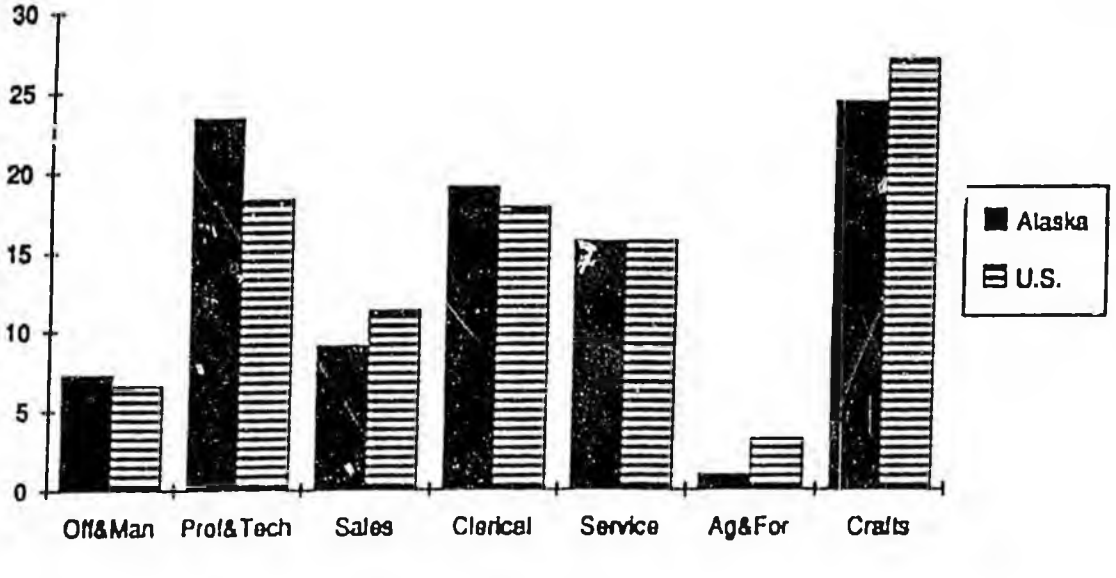
The preceding section documented an omnipresent reality: a majority of Alaska Natives live in remote villages where few jobs are available, far fewer than the number of individuals who want to work. It also described why the potential for increasing the number of jobs in rural villages is extremely limited. Given these grim facts, few village economies will be able to provide jobs for the growing number of young Native adults.

The unavoidable result is that, in the years ahead, most young Native adults who want work will have to move from their villages to locations where jobs exist, and there they will find themselves competing in the labor market with non-Natives. Thus, at a minimum, village grade and high schools should equip Native students with skills adequate to compete with their non-Native counterparts, whether for work or in the pursuit of post-secondary vocational or college education. While such a modest standard of educational attainment does not fully respond to the

Commission's challenge, it will at least enable young Natives to begin their adult lives on an educational par with other Americans.

COMPETING IN THE ALASKA LABOR MARKET

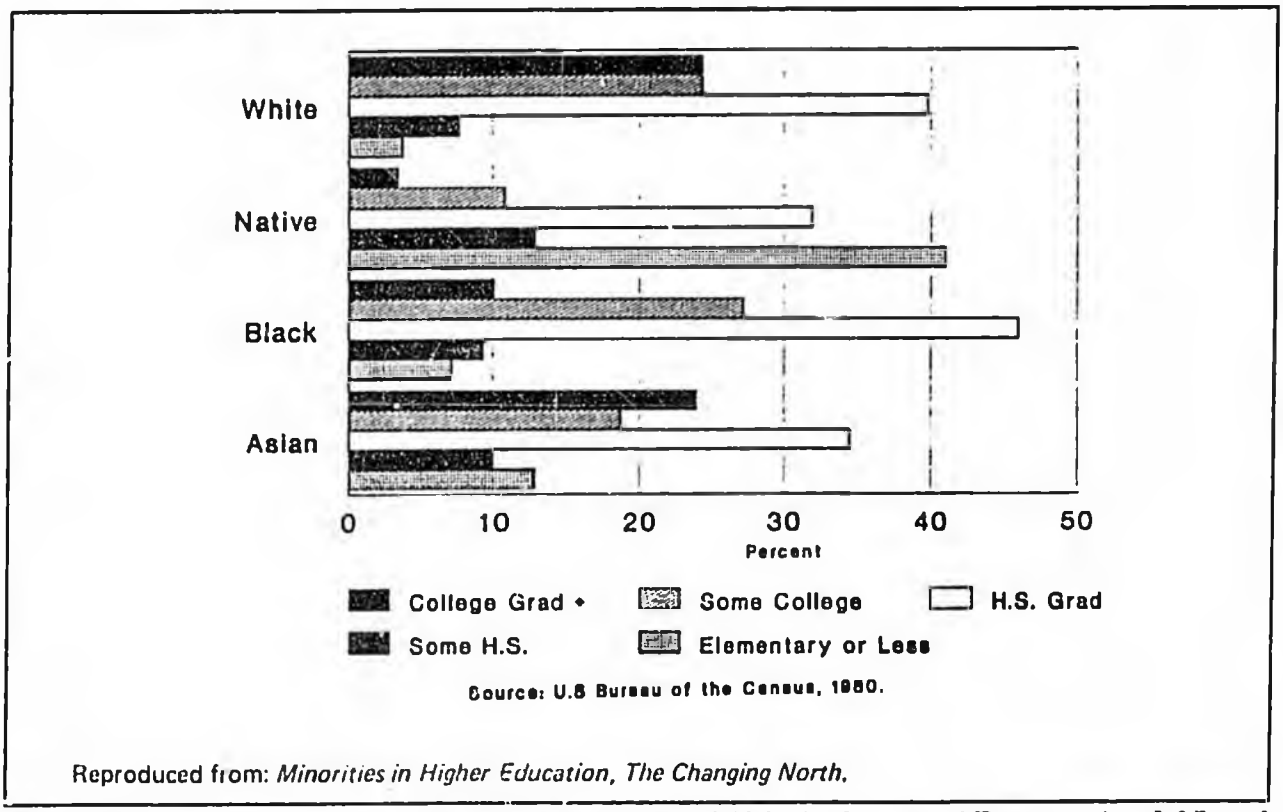
Competing in Alaska's labor market requires more education than competing in labor markets elsewhere in the nation. Figure 20 reveals that the Alaska work force is more professional and technically equipped than the national work force. In 1980 the Bureau of the Census reported that, in Alaska, on average, adults over 25 years of age had 12.8 years of education, compared to the national average of 12.5 years. Similarly, 88 percent of the members of this age group had graduated from high school, compared to the national average of 67 percent.



Reproduced from: *Alaska Industry/Occupation Outlook to 1992.*

Figure 20. Occupational Composition of Civilian Employment Alaska 1987 vs. U.S. 1986

Alaska Natives face serious disadvantage in competing with non-Natives for managerial, professional and technical jobs that require a college education. In 1980, the percentage of the adult non-Native population that had college degrees was five times the percentage of the adult Native population with degrees. Figure 21 illustrates the competitive disadvantage. Slightly less that 25 p :cent of white residents 25 years of age or older had college degrees compared to less than 5 percent of Alaska Natives. Asian adults with college degrees were comparable to whites. Black residents had acquired college degrees at a rate twice that of Natives.



Reproduced from: *Minorities in Higher Education, The Changing North.*

Figure 21. Educational Attainment by Race and Ethnic Group of Persons Aged 25 and Over, 1980: Alaska

Prior to 1970 when the majority of Natives lived in rural villages without high schools, only one in five Native adults had a high school education. Figure 21 illustrates the limited access that Native students in rural villages had to high schools prior to 1970. Over 50 percent of the rural adult population had no high school experience, less than 22 percent had high school diplomas and the median number of years of school completed by rural Natives was 7.5.

VILLAGE HIGH SCHOOLS ARE CLOSING THE GRADUATION GAP

In the 1970s the State of Alaska began building village high schools. As a result, Native access to secondary education significantly improved, as did the percentage of young Native adults with high school diplomas. Figure 22 indicates that by 1984 approximately 73 percent of Natives between 18 and 24 years of age were either attending high school or had graduated, at a time when 88 percent of their non-Native counterparts were either attending high school or had graduated. The 1984 figures are a significant improvement from 1970 when only 37 percent of Natives had graduated from high school, compared to 68 percent of non-Natives.

Of the 73 percent of Natives between 18 and 24 years of age who had graduated or were attending high school in 1980, 14 percent were still attending school, compared to 3 percent of non-Natives the same age, an in-school rate for Natives almost three times that of non-Natives. These data suggest that Native students are either taking longer to complete their studies or starting high school later than their non-Native counterparts.

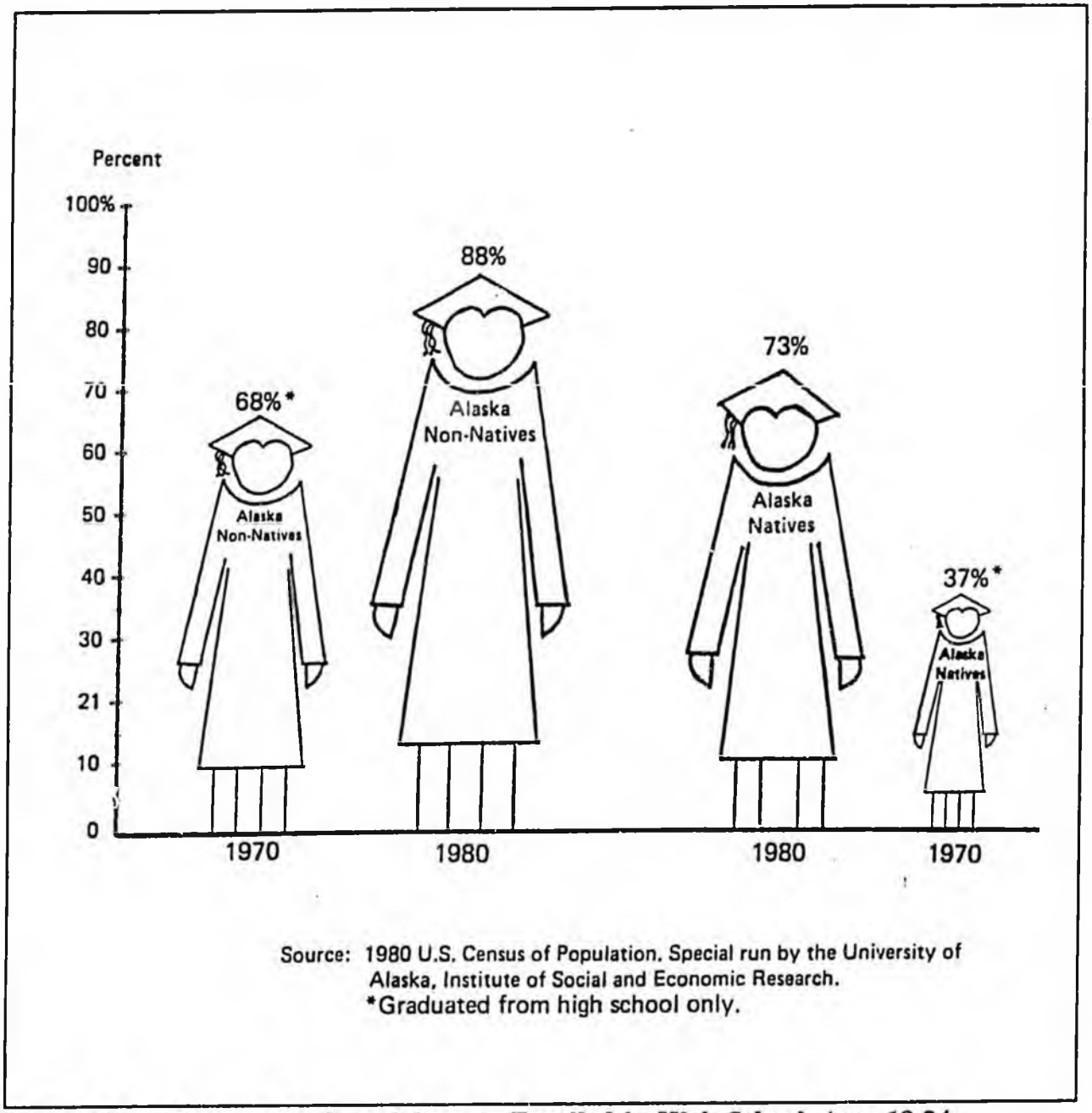


Figure 22. Persons Graduated from or Enrolled in High School, Ages 18-24

Although substantial progress has been made in increasing the Native high school graduation rate, the Native drop-out rate is more than twice the non-Native drop-out rate, 27 percent compared to 12 percent. But the Native drop-out rate may be declining. A 1984 University of Alaska study found that in two-

thirds of small village high schools the reported drop-out rate was less than 10 percent. However, the gain may be partially offset by the continued high Native drop-out rate in urban high schools. Anchorage, Alaska's largest school district, continues to report a 30 percent Native drop-out rate, and high schools in Fairbanks, Juneau and other urban areas also report high Native drop-out rates.

The 1990 Census will likely report that the gap between Natives and non-Natives who complete high school has continued to narrow. But the continued high Native drop-out rate in urban high schools, where a majority of Native students now attend school, suggests that during the 1980s the narrowing has been modest and that a significant gap will persist until the Native drop-out rates in urban high schools are reduced.

SMALL VILLAGE HIGH SCHOOLS

Much of the improvement in closing the high school graduation gap can be directly attributed to the State of Alaska's village high school construction program. The program began in 1976 when the State settled a lawsuit filed on behalf of Native students who had been compelled to attend high school in regional boarding home programs far from home. As part of the settlement, the State agreed to construct and operate a high schools in any village with eight or more high school age students, a commitment that resulted in the construction and operation of 126 schools. Table 2 summarizes the number and size of small high schools, only 36 of which predated settlement of the litigation.

Size of School	Approximate Number of Schools	Proportion of Schools	Approximate Number of Students	Proportion of Students
10 students or fewer *	52	32%	305	8%
11-20 students	36	22	548	15
21-40 students	47	29	1388	38
41-100 students	27	17	1445	39
N =	162	100%	3686	100%

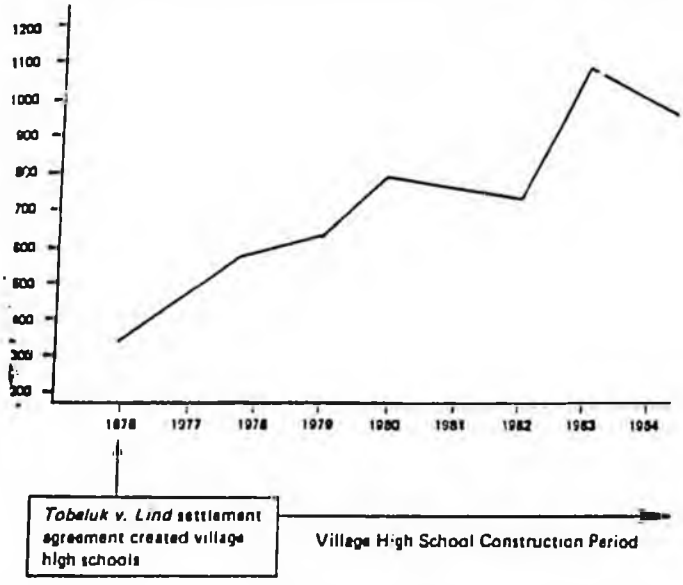
*These very small high schools are unstable in numbers. They increase or decline from year to year depending on the numbers of students in particular grade levels and whether the community and district decide the school should remain open.

Source: ISER Small High School Survey, 1984.

Reproduced from: *Alaska's Small Rural High Schools.*

Table 2. Most Rural High School Students Attend High Schools of 20 to 100 Students

Eight years after the new village high schools began opening, the number of Natives graduating from small village high schools had increased more than three-fold. Indeed, annual increases in the number of Native students attending and graduating from high school corresponded closely with the village high school construction schedule. By 1984 approximately 1,000 students were annually graduating from small village high schools. If the schools had not been built, some students would have graduated from one of the regional high school boarding home programs, but by no means would all have done so.



*This increase results from (1) very low drop-out rates in rural high schools, and (2) increased enrollment in rural high schools, rather than urban boarding programs away from home.

Source: Alaska Department of Education, 1984.

Reproduced from: *Alaska's Small Rural High Schools.*

Figure 23. Village High Schools Have Increased the Number of Rural High School Graduates

NATIVE PROGRESS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Figure 24 illustrates a logical progression from the observations reported in Figure 3. As more Natives graduate from high school, more Natives are attending college.

In 1980 Natives between 20 and 29 years of age were approximately 13 percent of that age-group statewide. Natives comprised 11 percent of Alaska residents between 20 and 29 years of age with associate degrees, 5.4 percent of baccalaureate degrees, 2.2 percent of master's degrees, and no PhD's. These percentages pose a clear challenge to village high school teachers and administrators, since a solid high school education is a prerequisite to academic success in college.

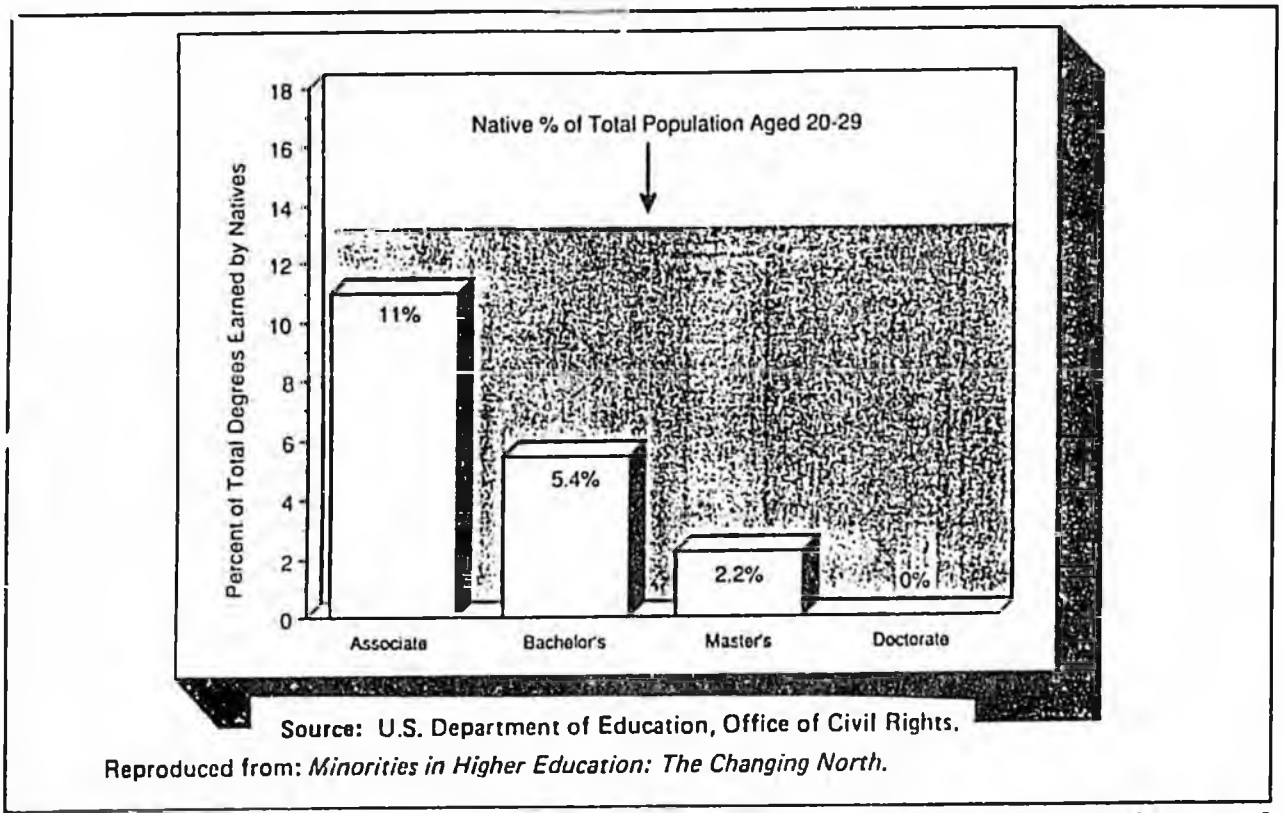


Figure 24. Alaskan Degrees Earned by American Indians and Alaskan Natives Compared with Representation in the Population, 1980: Alaska

After high school, post-secondary education usually proceeds on a dual track, one leading to vocational/associate degrees, the other to baccalaureate degrees. Baccalaureate degree study usually requires more academic preparation. The fact that Natives are significantly under-represented among holders of baccalaureate degrees indicates that many Native high school graduates are not sufficiently prepared to succeed in a four-year program.

LOW ACHIEVEMENT IS PERVASIVE IN RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS

The increasing number of high school diplomas being awarded to Native graduates of small village high schools masks many graduates' abysmally low standardized achievement test scores. Admittedly, standardized test scores are only one measure of a student's, or a school's, academic achievement. Standardized tests are often appropriately criticized for geographical, cultural and other biases, and for lack of relevance to the subject matter actually being taught and learned. Yet, notwithstanding these limitations, standardized test scores are one means of comparing a student's academic ability with that of his peers attending school elsewhere in the nation.

Figure 25 documents the low academic achievement of village high school students. In 1984 44 percent of rural high school classes scored below the 20th percentile, and another 33 percent scored between the 21st and the 40th percentile. The scores indicate that 80 percent of the nation's high school grades scored higher than 44 percent of the grades in rural Alaska high

schools. Only 9 percent of rural high school grades scored above the 61st percentile.

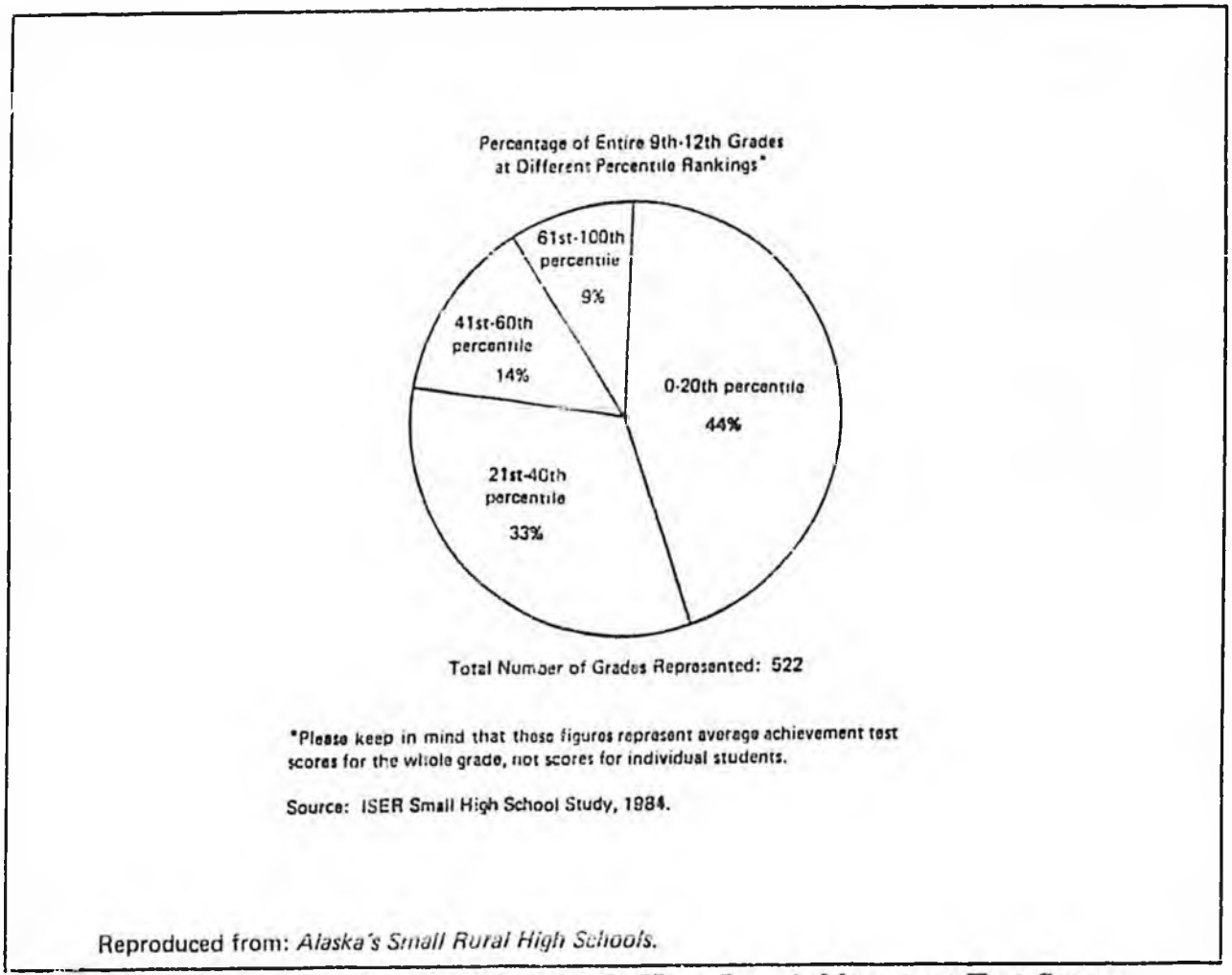


Figure 25. Students in Rural High Schools Have Low Achievement Test Scores

More recent test scores indicate that the pattern of low achievement is persisting. Figure 26 summarizes average achievement scores for four rural school districts in which most high school students are Native. In most of the districts the students scored in the 20 to 30 percentile, and in some districts few students scored at or above the 50th percentile.

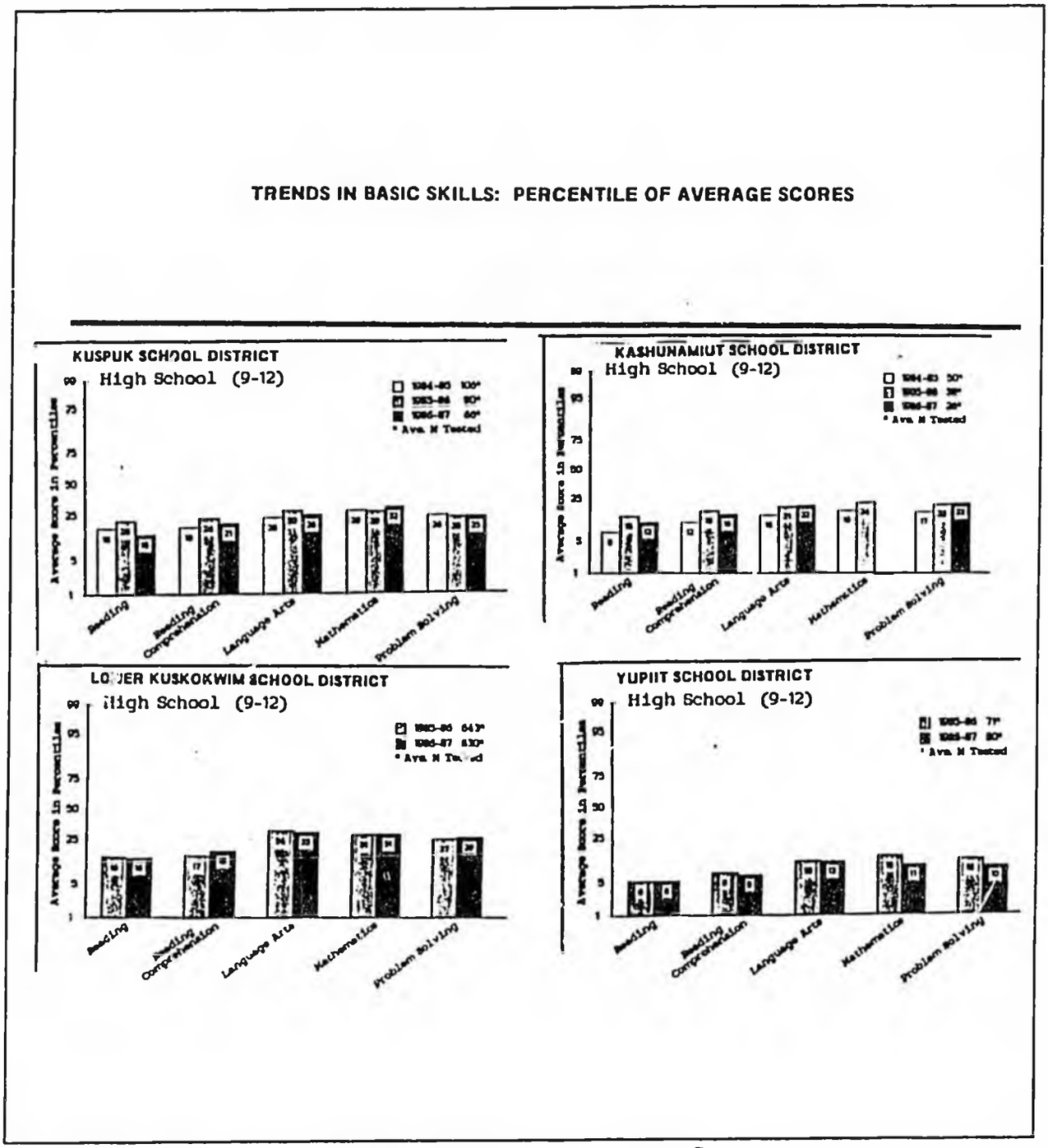


Figure 26. Trends in Basic Skills: Percentile of Average Scores

Native students attending high schools in Anchorage scored considerably higher than Native students attending village high schools. The Anchorage School District reported that its Native students scored at or slightly above the national average, and that Native test scores more or less paralleled the national distribution. For example, 18 percent of Native students scored in the nation's top 25 percent, and 24 percent were among the nation's lowest 25 percent.

In comparing the high Anchorage test scores with the low village scores, the high Native drop-out rate in Anchorage and the low drop-out rate in village schools may be important variables. Assuming that, if tested, the estimated 30 percent of Native students who dropped out would have been low academic achievers, their absence could bias the test results. If the Native drop-out rate in the Anchorage School District were the same as the drop-out rate in village high schools, overall test scores in the Anchorage School District would likely be lower than the scores reported.

On a positive note, Native students who attended school in Anchorage for five or more years had an average composite standardized test score of 53 percent. In contrast, Native students who had attended school in the district for less than five years scored considerably lower. Thus, the length of time a Native student had attended school in the community correlated with higher test scores. While there are undoubtedly many other contributing factors, higher test scores imply higher academic achievement.

It is extremely important to note that the innate potential of Native students is no different from that of non-Natives. Consequently, if Native students are to be afforded an opportunity to realize their academic potential, the education they are now receiving must be significantly improved. Although recommendations as to how Native education can be improved are numerous, the lack of commitment to improving Native education appears to be as pervasive as the lack of commitment to the nationwide educational improvements recommended by the Commission on Excellence in Education.

The Alaska Department of Education's recent report entitled "Basic Skills Performance of Alaska's Students" presents a particularly distressing observation. In rural districts in which most of the students attending school are Native, children in the early elementary grades scored in the same 25 to 35 percentile range as students in the higher grades. Thus, as students progressed from grade to grade, their academic performance did not improve. While there is no evidence that racial or ethnic groups attending school in Anchorage significantly improved their percentile standing as they progressed through the district's program, the fact is that too many children in Native villages begin their formal education seriously disadvantaged and never surmount the original handicap.

The situation for Native students who attend school in Anchorage is significantly better, since Native students in the early elementary grades in Anchorage score near the 50th percentile. However, while higher than those of their peers in

village grade schools, their scores are still 20 percent below their white classmates.

A number of Native villages participate in the Head Start program, in many respects a model program for pre-school children. But Headstart reaches less than a quarter of the children who, based on eligibility guidelines, are eligible to participate. In addition to expanding Headstart into more villages, a program to remedy the educational deficits of Native children must include increased pre- and postnatal infant care and parent education. Unless learning deficits that become apparent by ages 5 or 6 can be remedied in timely fashion, Native children beginning school with learning deficits may well be permanently barred from realizing their potential.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding analysis of the status of Alaska Natives stands in sharp contradiction to the improved physical health of Alaska Natives that has occurred in recent decades. The analysis documents alarmingly high rates of self-destructive behavior and demonstrates that the major victims of such behavior -- Native infants, children, and young adults -- are increasing in number. Most Alaska Natives are living in communities in which the local economies cannot provide a life-sustaining standard of living without substantial, on-going public subsidies. The analysis suggests that, more often than not, public policies and interventions intended to assist Native individuals, families and communities have created and perpetuated dependence, rather than self-sufficiency. It also indicates that in Native villages government has largely failed to discharge its most important obligation - the obligation to provide children an adequate education.

Social scientists convened by the National Science Foundation have identified the fundamental issue confronting Alaska Natives as "the struggle of previously self-sufficient individuals and family units to adjust to rapid social change largely imposed from outside." In their view, the struggle to adjust to political and economic systems over which Natives living in rural villages have little real control generates feelings of helplessness and frustration and results in

destructive behavior, generally directed internally or toward family and friends. If the situation is to be improved, federal Native policy must be premised on facilitating self-help and on assisting individuals, families and communities to cope with social and economic change. Applying this principle, the following findings suggest a framework for redesigning existing Native programs and developing new initiatives.

The findings purposely do not include detailed recommendations. Rather, it is the intent of this report to open a broad debate among Native leaders, government officials and other interested parties on the causes of, and solutions to, the Native crisis.

Finding 1: A plague of alcohol abuse, violence and self-destruction is afflicting Alaska Natives. Alcohol abuse, pervasive throughout the Native community, is undermining the ability of Alaska Natives to control their lives. It is the fuel that fires the cycle of violence and self-destruction. It takes its greatest toll on young Native adults, particularly men, infants not yet born, and abused children.

Policies and programs must encourage, build and reinforce the self-help efforts of individuals, families and communities to combat alcoholism, intervene in and prevent mental health crises, protect Native children from abuse and neglect and take individual responsibility for individual behavior.

Finding 2. Alaska Natives are more vulnerable to serious injury, infectious diseases and death than non-Natives. The rising Native birth rate will engender rapid population growth and significantly increase the segments of the Native population most at risk, i.e., infants, children and young Native adults. Between 1980 and 1990 the demand for children's services will have grown by 40 percent.

Unless the health care system expands to accommodate the increasing need, improvements in Native health status may quickly deteriorate. At a minimum, the current quantity and quality of health care must be maintained. To respond adequately to behavioral problems engendered by alcohol abuse, additional monetary and human resources are needed, particularly resources to address maternal and infant care and education.

Finding 3: Alaska Natives have a growing "at risk" population. In ten years Native population growth will double the number of young Native adults, the segment of the Native population most at risk. Although the Native population is becoming increasingly urban, a majority of Natives will continue to live in rural villages. Because the capacity of village economies to absorb anticipated population growth is limited, increasing population growth poses serious physical, environmental, social, and economic challenges.

The decision to stay or leave the village is influenced by cultural and family ties, the degree to which needed public services are available and the extent to which village residents

have incentives to stay or leave. Policies are needed that both foster sustainable village economic self-sufficiency and enlarge the opportunity for Natives so inclined to work outside their home villages.

Finding 4: The village economy cannot meet the needs of the growing Native population. In rural Alaska, most new jobs have been provided, either directly or indirectly, by increased federal and state expenditures. But despite government spending, large numbers of Natives who want to work in their home villages or region have no possibility of doing so. In most Native villages, the prospects for private sector economic development are limited, and due to declining oil revenues, state spending is projected to steadily decline throughout the 1990s. The projected decline in economic activity in rural Alaska coincides with the steadily increasing number of young Native adults who will be seeking to enter the work force. Every effort to take advantage of limited opportunities for private economic development should be encouraged, and Native access to employment opportunities expanded, including providing necessary training and support, including financial support to relocate, if necessary to secure permanent employment.

Finding 5: Villages are precariously dependent upon the public sector spending and the cost of living in villages is exorbitant. The expansion of the public sector economy, combined with the absence of self-sustaining economic growth, has contributed to village population growth and fostered increased

dependency on public assistance. Public sector emphasis on capital improvements have saddled Native villages with operation and maintenance costs the communities, and the Native families who live in them, cannot sustain. Policies and initiatives that target economically realistic improvements in the physical quality of village life and do not undermine options for residents who want to pursue economic opportunities away from their home villages are needed.

Finding 6: Native children enter and exit village schools with serious educational handicaps and their education is worse than mediocre. The educational achievement of Native children, particularly children who attend village schools, is far below national norms. As a result, Native students are being denied the opportunity to realize their potentials and to become full participants in society by grade and high school educations that are condemning an entire generation to an underclass status and a life of limited choices.

To afford Native students attending village schools the opportunity to obtain an education equivalent to their non-Native peers, they must be afforded the opportunity to begin their formal education on a par with their non-Native peers. Expanded Headstart, infant learning and early childhood education programs, combined with parent education, are essential if educational handicaps are to be overcome.

APPENDIX: A BRIEF HISTORY OF FEDERAL NATIVE POLICY

On October 18, 1867, General Jefferson Davis ordered the stars and stripes run up the flagpole in front of the Russian Governor's house at Sitka, thus beginning the American administration of Alaska. At the time, more than 99 percent of Alaska's population were Tlingit, Haida and Athabascan Indians, Yup'ik, Chugach and Inupiat Eskimos, Aleuts and Creoles, i.e., mixed bloods. As late as 1880, the United States Census estimated that of a total population of 33,426, only 430 whites lived in the Territory.

The 1867 Treaty of Cession with Russia consummated the Alaska purchase. In Article III of the Treaty, the United States government assumed the same fiduciary responsibility to provide for the educational, health, safety, social and economic needs of Alaska Natives resident in its new domain that it had assumed with respect to other Native Americans.

In the first exercise of that responsibility, in 1868 Congress enacted the Alaska Customs Act, which inter alia authorized the President to prohibit the importation and sale of alcohol, a commodity, first distributed by American and English fur traders and American whalers as a trade good, that was damaging Native health and shredding the fabric of traditional village life.

In 1884 Congress enacted the Alaska Organic Act. At the behest of Sheldon Jackson, the chief Presbyterian missionary operating in the Territory, the Organic Act authorized the

Secretary of the Interior to establish a school system. Although Congress instructed the Secretary to provide for the education of school age children "without reference to race," 99 percent of the Territory's school age children were Native. Again at Jackson's behest, in 1885 Secretary of the Interior Henry Teller assigned the Bureau of Education, rather than the Bureau of Indian Affairs, responsibility for Alaska education. The assignment was not inadvertent. Sheldon Jackson and the group of Indian rights advocates of which he was a member believed that the paternalistic policies the Bureau of Indian Affairs was then pursuing on Indian reservations had failed, and that the Bureau of Education would afford Alaska Natives more self-determination. But if asked, Jackson and J.D.C. Atkins, then Commissioner of Indian Affairs, would have agreed that the Department of the Interior had responsibility to implement the commitment the United States government had made in the Treaty of Cession to provide for the educational, health, safety, social and economic needs of Alaska Natives.

By 1895 the Bureau of Education was operating 19 grade schools between Metlakatla, an Indian village on the southern end of the Alaska Panhandle to Gambell, a remote Eskimo village on St. Lawrence Island at the mouth of Bering Strait. By 1909 the Bureau was operating 69 schools, and by 1930 94 schools.

The Bureau of Education also operated a Native health care system. Initially, army, and later revenue service, physicians provided sporadic medical services to Alaska Natives. However,

in 1885 A.P. Swineford, the Territorial Governor, urged the Secretary of the Interior to construct a Native hospital. As he told the Secretary in 1886, "a hospital for the care and treatment of Natives is not only very much needed, but absolutely indispensable."

In response to pneumonia, measle, influenza, whooping cough and diphtheria epidemics that periodically swept through Native villages, in 1907 Congress made its first appropriation to the Bureau of Education earmarked for medical services. By 1915 the Bureau was operating hospitals at Nushagak, a Yup'ik Eskimo village at Bristol Bay, Nulato, an Athabascan Indian village on the Yukon River, and Kotzebue, an Inupiat Eskimo trading center on the coast of the Arctic Ocean. Bureau doctors were also stationed at Nome, Russian Mission, Seward, Juneau and Sitka. Nurses were stationed at St. Michael, Koggiung and Hydaburg, and an itinerant nurse traveled to Tlingit and Haida Indian villages in southeast Alaska. Each Bureau of Education school was equipped with a medicine chest.

By 1930 the Bureau was operating 6 hospitals, a health care system far below the need of an indigenous population being decimated by infectious diseases contracted from whites. A 1930 report on the subject estimated that "It is highly probable that Native hospitals are not p[illegible] o care for more than 5 percent of the Natives who should be hospitalized in order to insure their recovery or to prevent the spread of acute infectious diseases among the rest of the Native population."

In addition to addressing the educational and health needs of Alaska Natives, the Bureau of Education also administered Native economic development programs. Through the fur trade, and later the whaling economy, Alaska Natives had had limited access to the non-Native material culture since the Eighteenth Century. By 1867, iron knives and kettles, firearms, cotton and wool clothing and similar items were available in many Native villages. However, the subsistence economy predominated, and most Natives followed the cycle of the seasons, migrating between summer fish camps, fall hunting camps and more than 200 winter villages. But by the Twentieth Century, the construction of churches and schools at village sites and wage work in the salmon canning industry and the mines had begun to alter traditional subsistence patterns. And in many villages sugar, flour, gillnet twine, wool and cotton clothing, firearms and similar items, once luxuries, had become necessities.

But the schools and the white culture of which they were part having created the consumer demand, with the exception of fur trapping, commercial fishing during the summer months and occasional wage work far from home in the mines or at whaling stations and lumber camps, in most rural villages Alaska Natives had few opportunities to participate in the non-Native economy.

Consequently, the Bureau of Education created and administered several village economic development programs. The Bureau managed reindeer herds in the northwest arctic and on the Yukon-Kuskokwim River delta, and, when it deemed necessary,

distributed general assistance to enable village residents to purchase food, clothing and other essentials.

In 1931 Secretary of the Interior Ray Lyman Wilbur reversed the policy the Department of the Interior had followed since 1885 by transferring responsibility for administration of Native programs from the Bureau of Education to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The transfer had two practical effects. First, henceforth the Snyder Act, enacted by Congress in 1921 to authorize the Bureau of Indian Affairs to spend federal money "for the benefit, care and assistance of the Indians throughout the United States," governed appropriations for Native programs. As a matter of law, Alaska Natives were deemed "Indians of the United States" whose entitlement to participate in federal Indian programs was no different from that of any other Indians. Second, drawing on the agency's experience in the lower 48 states, during the 1940s the Bureau of Indian Affairs tried to protect Native land rights and advance Native economic development by establishing reservations around Native villages whose boundaries encompassed land Natives had traditionally used and occupied and natural resources (e.g., salmon, timber and fur-bearing animals) needed to sustain village economies. Controversial from the outset, the reservation policy was abandoned in 1950.

In 1955 Congress transferred administration of the Indian Health Service (IHS), both in Alaska and elsewhere, from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the Public Health Service. Today the

IHS Alaska Area Native Health Service administers a Native health care system that includes the 170 bed Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage, smaller hospitals in Sitka, Dillingham, Bethel, Fairbanks, Nome, Kotzebue and Barrow, seven health stations and 142 village clinics. IHS also administers a safe water program that designs and constructs water and sewer systems for remote villages.

In 1959 Alaska was admitted into the federal union as the 49th State. Although it continues to pay a substantial portion of the cost of Native education, in 1985, the Bureau of Indian Affairs completed the transfer, first begun in 1936, of Bureau schools to the State of Alaska. Today, 22 rural school districts now operate grade schools, many of which are former Bureau schools, and high schools in 177 rural communities, most of which are Native villages.

In addition to funding Native education, pursuant to such statutes as the Indian Self-Determination Act, the Bureau of Indian Affairs also supports the operation of village governments and provides technical assistance to ANCSA village corporations.

Enacted in 1971, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act extinguished all Native claims to Alaska based on aboriginal use and occupancy. In exchange, Alaska Natives received $ 962.5 million and the right to select and be conveyed 44 million acres of land, most of which surrounds Native villages.

Individual Natives received little of the money and even less of the land. Congress divided Alaska into 12 geographic regions, and required Natives living in each region to organize a

regional corporation. Natives living in each of more than 200 villages were required to organize village corporations. Each Native alive on December 21, 1971 was then issued 100 shares of stock in the regional corporation and 100 shares of stock in the village corporation in which he or she was enrolled. Natives who did not live in villages only received regional corporation stock.

The money and land was then distributed to the regional and village corporations, although Congress required regional corporations to distribute some of the money and required village corporations to convey a small amount of land to their shareholders.

In the 122 years since the United States assumed control of Alaska the Native population has more than doubled to 75,000 persons. But as it has increased in absolute number, because of non-Native in-migration, the Native population has decreased as a percentage of the Alaska population, from more than 99 percent in 1867 to 14 percent in 1989. But as they did a century ago, a majority of Natives living in Alaska continue to live in one of more than 200 rural villages.

Over the past century, and particularly over the past two decades, the health status and standard of living of Alaska Natives has improved. But as this report describes, as old problems have been solved, new problems, most of which have been exacerbated by an intensifying firestorm of alcohol abuse, have taken their place. Today, many Alaska Natives face a social, health and economic crisis of potentially disastrous proportion.

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Inside:

AFN NEWSLETTER

WINTER ISSUE

Volume VIII, Number One ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES, INC. January 23, 1989

Report on Status of Alaska Natives Calls For Action

A report issued by the Alaska Federation of Natives on Jan. 20 provides an analysis of the health and social crisis occurring in rural Alaska and calls for action by Native leaders and state and federal officials.

"While there are many reports that have been written to document various aspects of problems existing in rural Alaska Natives: A Call For Action" synthesizes existing data on Native health; demographics; the constraints on economic growth in rural Alaska; the role of the public sector economy in villages and the quality of Native education (see related story p. 3).

It shows that despite improvements in health, educational opportunity, stan-

plex that it is not reasonable to expect, for example, that effective solutions for health problems can be found without understanding their relationship to other events occurring within the villages," Leask said.

The report has been submitted to Native leaders throughout the state, Alaska's Congressional Delegation, the

of hearings this spring in both Washington, D.C. and Alaska. The D.C. hearing has been set for March 10th.

"This is the first major status report that has been written on Alaska Natives in more than ten years," said Leask. "The data are sufficiently stark that it is no exaggeration to state that absent timely