

Among the Missionaries of Douglas, Alaska: An Examination of Charles Replogle's *Among the Indians of Alaska*

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Overview of Excerpt

In the bottom box in blue text, Charles Replogle, the author of the memoir – *Among the Indians of Alaska* – is describing this abstract idea of the “native man.” He does not rely on any physical description, but only discusses how the “native man” comes to logical conclusions, a marker of intelligence according to Replogle.

This section comes from Replogle's time on Douglas Island, Alaska, a Friends mission during the 1890s. **Central thesis:** This excerpt captures the ways in which the white missionaries attempted to, and did, alienate the Alaska Native peoples across Alaska. After this alienation, a process of dehumanization manifested itself in different ways. From the alienation and dehumanization came the notion of Western supremacy, all linguistically.

The Douglas, Alaska Friends Mission

- The city of Douglas currently resides on Douglas Island, which is “across [the] Gastineau Channel from Juneau” (“Historic Preservation in Juneau”). One of the Alaska Native groups that reside there, and have continued to reside there for generations, are the Tlingit people.
- The Douglas Island mission first began in 1887 through the Comity Agreement (Williams 158)
- Was a primarily Friends mission (Williams 158).
- A lot of the work that was done concerned itself more with education, but there was a slow and steady expansion of various industries, including: cooperative stores, sawmills, and appliance factories (Ducker).
- Replogle was one of the individuals appointed to oversee the build-up of such industries and was also appointed to oversee what happened educationally (Ducker)
- Life was not very good for the Tlingit people on Douglas Island because of this colonization, especially those in the school system. Just to give an example as to why, one of the main punishments inflicted on students was when Replogle and his constituents would soak a sponge with myrrh and capsicum, and put it in the mouths of those who continued to “talk Indian” (Replogle 1071), in a move to dehumanize them.

Linguistic Analysis

Deixis as a means to dehumanize

- Linguistically, the alienation of the Tlingit people, specifically the men, that takes place in this passage is through the way that Charles Replogle utilizes personal deixis
- Personal deixis can be boiled down to a linguistic relationship between “*speaker, addressee, and other*” (Brenner 235).
- In this excerpt, the speaker is Replogle, the addressee is the reader (and Replogle himself), and the other is Replogle's abstract notion of Tlingit men that he labels as “the native” (1543)
- Replogle, in referring to himself and the reader as “we,” and the Tlingit man as “he,” is asserting that there is a stark contrast between the two, with the “he” being isolated for their different thought processes. This, by definition, is alienation. According to Lajos Brons, alienation through language is an attempt to “dehumanize the other” (72)
- In all, the dehumanization through alienation that takes place is done by way of the personal deixis that Replogle uses

“Back-handed compliments” as an assertion of supremacy

- Replogle also implements what is more slangily known as back-handed compliments.
 - Backhanded compliments are “insults ‘masquerading as a compliment’” (Archer section 4.5 “Back-handed compliments para. 2).
 - Though it may seem that what Replogle is stating does not appear to be too damaging, the notion that the Tlingit men reason “behind” or “round-about” (1543) toward a logical conclusion implies a (falsely constructed) racially and culturally-based cognitive difference, as this indirection means that it is slower and less efficient compared to the way the white missionaries reason “directly” (1543).

Language Ideology as an assertion of supremacy

- Language ideology is defined as the “historically and culturally grounded relationships between language(s) and larger social structures” (Stone 126).
- Since most individuals reason primarily through language, it would not be a stretch to say that in the description of how Tlingit men reason, Replogle is claiming English is superior in reasoning, since those who speak it fluently reason “directly” (1543)

We shall now come back to the condition of the native. He is a shrewd man, highly intellectual, and a careful reasoner. He does not reason about things and come to conclusions in the same way that we do. However, he will obtain the same conclusions though he reasons in a round-about method. We reason directly at it, he, rather, as though reasoning behind it, and coming finally to the same conclusion.

- Charles Replogle, Page 1543



“Friends Mission Douglas Island, AK, 1887,” ASL-PCA-169, Alaska State Library, public domain

Missionaries in Alaska

- Alaska was purchased as a territory in 1867 (Barnhardt 9), giving more power to missionaries to increase educational standards and increase Alaska's power as a government
- The Comity Agreement (also called the Mission Plan) was developed in 1874 in a meeting between leaders of various Christian denominations (Williams 152).
 - “The purpose of the meeting was to openly discuss their evangelical plan for territories in the United States so that the missionaries would present a more effective front and not bicker over certain groups or regions” (152). – much of what was discussed involved Alaska.
- Education in Alaska was characterized massively by an “English-only” policy during this time (Barnhardt 11).
- Alaskan colonists gained a bit more power by way of the federal government because of the Organic Act passing in 1884 (11).
 - Specifically gave more power to educators

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