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Yankee Yukon: Alaska and the Problems of Territorial Integration, 1867-1895

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Comparative history is, by its nature, a delicate undertaking. Due to the considerable disparity in the historical context, technological development, and geographic constraints, the selection of case studies is of particular importance. If the cases are restricted to a single state over time, the findings are inapplicable beyond that one state. Conversely, comparing states over a vast gulf of time (for example, comparing the Mongol Empire of the thirteenth century and the French Empire of the twentieth) introduces so many variable factors as to render the exercise without useful conclusions. The cases must, therefore, share enough characteristics to make a comparative study meaningful, lest the project quickly devolve into the realm of apples and oranges. However, they also must retain enough distinctiveness from one another to afford a useful study of their different approaches to similar challenges.

In this respect, the early settlement of the American territory of Alaska provides a vital window into the problem of frontier incorporation into national territory. Both the United States and Canada share numerous characteristics; yet while both faced the same challenges while settling their frontier regions, the two countries adopted strikingly different methods and policies. Explaining how two very similar states chose opposing strategies to address the same challenge affords scholars an opportunity to study the effects of historical development on political and administrative decision-making. Examining this process through Douglass North's lens of path

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dependence allows historians to explore not only the historical development of these states, but also how that development affected both the institutions of those states and the perception of the authorities toward their outlying territories.

Economist Douglass North developed his theory of institutional path dependence to explain the persistence of inefficient or counterproductive institutions despite the availability of more efficient or effective alternatives. Although originally developed for a study of economic institutions, his theory is suitable for an analysis of political and cultural institutions, as it takes both institutional history and cultural influences into account.[1] North theorised that states create agents to govern economic and political activity based upon the needs of the state at a discrete point in history. Eventually, however, institutions that have become inefficient or ill-suited to changing conditions or imperatives are retained because the transactional cost of change, be it financial, political, or cultural, is deemed less desirable than existing inefficiency.[2] Thus, over time, the adoption of certain institutions and organizations – those bodies that define the 'rules of the game' – will expand or limit the perceived options of that state.[3]

It is in describing this *perception* of options that path dependence becomes useful for understanding the process of policy formation. As indicated previously, policy makers do not operate with a clear, universal view of all available data, but rather with a series of perceptions; the reports of conditions in the periphery, the interpretation of peripheral populations, and the judgment of which courses of action are acceptable and which ones are not. Frequently, as North describes, it is the limitations of outmoded institutions (or institutions created for a defunct purpose) that circumscribe the actions of the state.[4]

None of this is to imply that path dependence is without its limitations. As a method of analysis, it places a heavy emphasis upon rational choice as the preferred form of decision

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making. North himself admits that institutions are necessary because actors frequently have incomplete information, which would undercut the emphasis on rational choice, which assumes complete possession of data.[5] Further, there is an element of subjectivity, as the scholar must make a judgment on which particular point in history is the crucial one that sets the path dependency in motion. These limitations, however, remain largely incidental to the role path dependency plays in contextualising the formation of institutions and defining the psychological boundaries of historical decision-makers. Path dependence thus explains why certain states are predisposed to certain strategies, creating a form of instinctive response established by bureaucratic traditions and the political culture of the state, a sort of "institutional heritage" that becomes a default mode of operation for organs of state government.

The United States and Canada, while two distinct societies, have much in common. Both countries carry a shared British historical origin, a common English language, and British-derived state institutions.[6] Geographically, the North American nations share numerous climactic and geographic conditions, both along the 49th parallel and in the far northwest, home to the Alaska and Yukon territories. The two states also share not only large populations of indigenous peoples, but large linguistic and religious minorities within their borders. On first glance, it would be easy to presume that these two nations would pursue similar methods of integrating their frontier regions into the state. In the United States of the nineteenth century, local administration had been established as operating independently of, and frequently possessing superior legitimacy than, the federal government as a consequence of the political break from Great Britain. With its burgeoning population and a tradition of decentralised government, the American government preferred a policy of subsidising, rather than directing, settlement of new territories. Typically, the military was dispatched to secure the region, a process that involved

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formally claiming territory and relocating native peoples either through negotiation or by force. Once the land was catalogued, it would be sold at subsidised prices to potential settlers, who would then populate the region and dictate the pace and tone of integration.

The settlement of the American West, and by extension, Alaska, was characterised by an unplanned, organic process to which the federal government more often reacted than actively directed. Territorial functions were parcelled out across multiple agencies (particularly the Treasury, Interior and War Departments), a characteristic that contributed to the relative acquiescence of Washington to events on the frontier. The territorial governors, who on paper had virtually dictatorial authority, frequently found themselves without adequate funding or political support to contradict the will of territorial interest groups.[7]

From its inception, the American process of territorial integration was more a political tradition than a specific legal procedure. The cornerstone of territorial policy was laid down with the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, itself a revision of an earlier ordinance crafted by Thomas Jefferson. Although the precise mechanisms and requirements for admission to the Union would be revised, three core principles emerged from the Ordinance that would drive all subsequent territorial policy. First, any settlement was predicated on the removal of Indians to lands further west or concentrated on small reservations; the territories were to be expressly settled by migrants from the national core.[8] Next, land would be allotted to those core settlers, ensuring a replication of the dominant economic and cultural norms that held sway further east. Finally, new territories would have to be accepted by the existing states before being allowed to become full and equal members of the state.[9]

Conversely, the state took a far more active role in directing settlement in Canada. Through its primary institution of integration, the Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP), the

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Canadian government sought not only to establish a state presence in advance of settlement, but also to prepare local conditions in a way that would populate the frontier in accordance with the wishes of the national core.[10] In this manner, the Canadian policy represents the inversion of its variant in the United States; the central government possessed initiative agency, while the settlers were left primarily reacting to state policy. Nineteenth-century Canada possessed a strong tradition of political centralisation that emphasised the legal and political supremacy of the national government, by virtue of remaining a colonial state until achieving autonomy in 1867. As such, policy makers in Ottawa were conditioned to favour state-directed settlement with an emphasis on creating a strong civic framework for the maintenance of public order.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the American and Canadian views is the role of environment in the two cultures. Within the historiographical debate on either side of the Turner thesis in the United States, the environment represents a set of conditions that are manipulated to suit human habitation.[11] Among Canadian scholars, however, the environment takes on a far more immutable image, owing in no small part to its severity in the northern plains of North America. As Royden Loewen put it, "the very harshness of Canada's climate seemed to indicate that there was little to say historically about the human manipulation of the environment."[12] Thus, the climate and geography of the Canadian frontier was less adapted for human settlement as human settlement was adapted to the environment.

The harsh environment combined with a heavy reliance on state infrastructure limited migration to the pace at which state services could be established.[13] Therefore, no mass migration of independent-minded citizenry could have issued forth from the East to grapple with the frontier, at least not in Turner's sense. Those that did move ahead of the state, such as Métis peoples or religious dissidents, did so not to serve as settlers of the state but rather as those

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seeking to escape the state's influence, and even then in relatively tame numbers compared to their southern brethren. In the words of Marvin Mikesell, "the Canadian west was never 'wild' in the American sense of the word."[14]

One of the most influential theories of Canadian frontier historiography was Harold Innis, who pioneered what became known as the Staples thesis. His theory is predicated on a dominant core/subsidiary periphery model of economic interaction, which has survived in various refinements in the majority of analyses of state/frontier relations. Other historians, such as George Brintwell and Vernon Fowke, have expanded upon the Staples thesis. Fowke imported Innis' theory to the Canadian Prairies, arguing that the reliance upon wheat to settle the region formed the basis of Canada's "political and economic empire."[15] While critics of the Staples thesis point out that economies based upon extractive industries seldom achieve stability, let alone prosperity, supporters contend that the economic boost granted by staple exploitation allowed Canadian society to develop a broader economy that enabled it to transition to a more robust commercial base. William Morton used the Staples thesis to put forward a Canadian interpretation of the 'plundered province' theory in his study of Prairie politics.[16]

Innis' theory spun off a related theory of development centered on the St. Lawrence River and its subsidiary waterways. Advocated by Donald Creighton in his Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence, the Laurentian school posits that the St. Lawrence River functioned as the main artery of communication and transportation for early Canada.[17] Thus, all subsequent economic efforts were oriented toward the use of the St. Lawrence, even after it proved to be less cost-effective than later railroads in an early demonstration of path dependence. Thus, Canada developed not as a single entity, but as a conglomeration of regions and frontiers, with a Laurentian core dominating the others in proportion to their distance from the St. Lawrence. The

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Laurentian school put forward a view of Canadian development as a loose alliance of vastly differing regions, referred to by Mason Wade as "intense regionalism."[18]

When examining the Alaskan frontier, two characteristics tend to dominate the analysis. In the first place, American historians include Alaska in discussions of the West only reluctantly; many maintain it is a realm apart from the continental frontiers of the plains and southwest.[19] Within historiography, Alaska possessed American social, economic, and political systems while remaining climatically situated within the Canadian experience. Its history as a far-flung Russian province which never quite entered the cultural orbit of St. Petersburg further isolates Alaska from the other American frontiers. Alaska remains, both in scholarship and in geography, cut off from the rest of the United States.

The second characteristic is that most scholarship on Alaska is gathered secondarily, as part of other studies of American or Russian history. The contributions of Nikolai Bolkhovitinov, who provided much political context on mid-nineteenth century Alaska, did so as part of a larger work on American-Russian relations during the century.[20] Similarly, Ronald Jensen's work on the sale of Alaska, as well as Mary Wheeler's on the institutions of the Russian-American Company, came as part of a larger international relations body of research.[21]

Unlike in American or Canadian historiography, however, there is little debate among theories of frontier development in Alaska. The colonial school advocated by DeVoto dominates the literature of Alaskan development, to the point where Jensen himself commented that there was really little debate in the historiographical field.[22] In particular, Clause Naske argued the colonial status of Alaska in his History of Alaska Statehood. While focusing much more on the prominent individuals associated with the push for statehood, Naske heavily researches the views

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of Alaskan residents over time, concluding that a clear majority felt themselves second-class citizens to an unelected government in Washington.[23]

Russian scholar E. V. Alekseeva, in her book Russian America: American Russia?, reinterpreted environmental determinism, arguing that the forging of a distinct Alaskan (non-Russian) identity was the result of distance from Russia and the climate that forced settlers to adapt native Alaskan methods of survival.[24] Her portrait of isolated Europeans and native Alaskans, inching toward a hybrid culture, has found warm reception with the new emphasis on ethnic histories. Paul Holbo challenged the prevailing view in American historiography, asserting that the drive to annex Alaska was not rooted in economic imperatives, but simple imperial expansionism – a Manifest Destiny for the Arctic.[25] As in the settlement of Alaska itself, the relative paucity of historiographical work belies the region's vague status. Both frontier and state, neither part of the American frontier experience nor independent of it, Alaska has remained, with few exceptions, in either the realm of Russian history before 1867, or of purely local history following the Gold Rush of 1894.

There is little indication that when policymakers in Washington purchased Alaska from the Russian empire that any of them saw its actual governance as a major concern. The system of settlement and territorial government that had extended American control across the continent had successfully created states over a diverse array of climates and regions.[26] Secretary of State Seward himself expressed confidence that Alaska would swiftly become the latest in a long line of self-governing American territories during a visit in 1869.[27] So solid were the assumptions of timely settlement and integration that Congress spent much early debate attempting to limit the extension of local government for fear that fishing revenue would remain in Alaska instead of returning to Washington.[28]

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One of the first decisions made regarding the governance of Alaska provides an example of how entrenched the 'continental' model of settlement was in American policymaking. Following the pattern of expansion, the Army was given control over the new territory in the absence of civil authority, giving General Jefferson C. Davis absolute power over the governance of the Alaskan settlements.[29] The assumption, based upon previous experience, was that the Army would provide security for new settlers until the population rose high enough to establish civil government. "It is presumed," wrote the commander of the Department of the Pacific, H. W. Halleck, "that the transfer of the country will be followed by an organized territorial civil government with the extension over it of the general laws of the United States."[30]

The fact that the Army was given jurisdiction over a network of islands and isolated settlements in an archipelago, all reachable only by sea, shows how unaware the American government was of how different Alaska was from its continental territories. From the beginning, the Army was forced to either ask the Navy to transport them to their outposts or charter private vessels.[31] After arriving, these troops found travel even among the islands of the Alexander Archipelago difficult at best; inadequate charting of the passages and inexperience caused the first detachment to Fort Kenay to wreck their boat in the Cook Inlet, delaying their arrival for months. When the Army was withdrawn in 1877 to fight Chief Joseph in the continental West, General O. O. Howard publicly suggested that the Navy was far better suited to exercise military rule in Alaska.[32]

Relying on transportation outside the command of the Army led to critical supply failures. Shortages of meat and fresh vegetables took their toll on the health of both soldiers and civilians, which only exacerbated the "totally insufficient" state of medical supplies.[33] Despite being surrounded by islands with abundant timber, the need for firewood was so acute that

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soldiers had to cannibalise boats waiting to be repaired for fuel.[34] To remedy these shortages on short notice, the Army had little recourse but to procure supplies from the Alaska Commercial Company at government expense.[35]

In the absence of civil government, however, the Army was able to establish some basic state functions in Alaska in relatively short order. Facilities left behind by the Russian government were universally decrepit; reports from outposts at Kenay, Sitka, and Fort Wrangell all told of buildings and docks "terribly run down", "unserviceable", and "not worth keeping."[36] To compensate, the Army undertook a modest program of public works aimed at constructing new public buildings and establishing some municipal infrastructure.[37] Without a judicial system, it fell to the Army to both prosecute criminals and jail them, a practice that sat badly with both military personnel and civilians. Soldiers and their commanders were not trained as criminal investigators or judicial officers, and found themselves struggling to perform duties they had not trained for; the civilian population found the army's interpretation of justice heavy-handed at best.[38] Less than a year after the Alaska Purchase, the residents of Sitka sent a memorial to Congress seeking the establishment of civil government, stating that the colony "[had] only military authority to govern them, not meant for loyal and law-loving men…"[39]

Not content with simply requesting a territorial government, the citizens of Sitka went a step further, declaring that they were "compelled, in the absence of lawful civil rules and any orders of Congress, to meet in mass and adopt a charter for municipal government."[40] The response of General Davis to this direct challenge to military authority reveals how uncomfortable the Army was with its new role in territorial affairs. In a letter to the citizens of Sitka dated three months before the memorial was read to Congress, Davis asserts that as long as the people of the town were willing to pay for their own services, he would "welcome" civil

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government.[41] Taken in the context of the other correspondence from the region, it is clear that the military officers in charge of governing Alaska and their civilian charges were deeply uncomfortable living under martial law.

Alaska's low population, however, was the chief barrier to the creation of an Organic Act that would have conferred territorial status. Even if Congress had believed the grossly inflated population estimate of 1500 citizens provided by the hopeful residents of Sitka, it fell well short of the 5000 resident threshold commonly required for an Organic Act.[42] Immigration was retarded by the difficulties in getting to the territory, both in terms of expense and physical travel. Once there, the prospective settler was confronted with a land ill-suited to pastoral agriculture, no regular mail service or navigational support (such as maps or lighthouses) to facilitate contact with the continent, and a complete lack of either a legal code or a judicial system to enforce it.

Despite this, the single largest problem that crippled early settlement in Alaska was the absence of reliable land surveys. Without them, there was no legal basis for land purchase, transfer, or ownership.[43] Plots for farming in the warmer, more fertile panhandle could not be purchased with any confidence, and industries that could have augmented or supplanted the dominant fishing and sealing interests could not be established. Until a minor gold vein was discovered in Gastineau channel in 1880, establishing mineral extraction as the primary economic engine of Alaska, fishing was the only source of profit from the region. When the United States established the Customs District of Alaska in 1868, it specifically protected the fur and fishing interests from outside competition.[44] Without a solid basis for land ownership, the Army was compelled to arrest settlers who had no legal claim to hold land. Secretary Seward

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himself had to warn General Davis that with no legislation passed to create legal land holdings, he would have to use force to drive off 'squatters'.[45]

As a result, Alaska experienced a full cycle of boom and bust in the span of six years. Immediately after the purchase of the territory, there was a brief influx of settlers, including those such as John Kinkead and William Sumner Dodge, who had experience in creating civil society in new territories.[46] Sitka's first newspaper was established within a year of the purchase, and with General Davis' blessing, the city created a municipal government by 1869. Despite these efforts, the economic base remained too fragile to support enough immigration to sustain the community. The *Alaska Times* remarked, "Our merchants have become discouraged, and have been forced to close trading posts which would otherwise have yielded a large trade and good profit on investment."[47] The same year that the *Times* issued its economic postmortem, both Kinkead and Dodge abandoned Alaska for California; by the time the economic panic of 1873 struck, the Army estimated that the non-Indian population of Sitka had fallen to only 314.[48] Four years later, the entire Army garrison was withdrawn from Alaska, leaving only a lone customs officer as the entire federal presence in the region.[49]

When dissecting the failure of the first colonization attempt in Alaska, two primary obstacles are apparent. The most obvious was the iron logic of economics, for the region simply did not turn a profit. After purchasing the territory for $7.2 million, the United States government paid an additional $116,000 for what little state services could be extended during the first decade of settlement; total revenues for the same period barely reached $57,000. The *Alaska Herald* forecast that San Francisco entrepreneurs would control the Alaskan economy for the foreseeable future, stating, "the few firms and individuals who continue it have undergone an apprenticeship which has not cost them lightly…"[50] Some legislators, despairing of ever seeing a

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return on the country's investment, suggested with a heavy dose of graveyard humour that the United States pay another $7.2 million to any "respectable European, Asiatic, or African power" that would be willing to take Alaska off Uncle Sam's hands.[51] Another Congressman suggested that the only useful purpose Alaska could serve would be as a penal colony, a North American version of Siberia.[52]

Frustration in the halls of Congress highlighted the second obstacle to incorporating Alaska. For the first time in America's expansionist experience, the established method of organic settlement was inadequate to the task. Migrating to Alaska was an even more difficult and expensive undertaking than migrating to the equally undeveloped West had been, given the costs of travel and unreliable routes of supply. The first settlers of Alaska, led by Mayor Dodge, had simultaneously decried military rule as "unwarranted and despotic" and demanded further government subsidy of their settlement.[53] By the time the Sitka government collapsed in apathy in 1873, it was clear that if Alaska were to become a territory that the government would have to take a far stronger role than ever before in facilitating settlement. Resistance to this conclusion, the evidence for which was apparent shortly after the first wave of settlers arrived in 1867-68, can be attributed to institutional path dependence within American colonial policy. Rather than take a stronger, state-directed approach toward territorial development, the United States persisted in its organic, settler-driven approach.

In the absence of civic law and administration in the Alaskan interior, the most common form of civil governance was the adoption of miner's codes. As in the continental West, miners would commonly meet and draw up a list of conventions and rules to govern conduct in the absence of formal law. While the bulk of the provisions dealt with the setting of proper claims and mining procedures, these codes strongly encouraged communal action and responsibility, an

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indication of how precarious and isolated these mining settlements were from the influence of the federal government. In the Harris district near modern-day Juneau, water rights were circumscribed so no individual's water use would "conflict with the interest of the river miners."[54] For more serious crimes, such as murder, the miner's laws allowed the death penalty.[55] In remote Alaska, banishment was an acceptable substitute, as the end result was often the same.

An incident in 1879 brought the need for some form of civil government in Alaska into stark relief. Tensions between whites and Indians in Sitka, fuelled by alcohol, erupted in a series of racially motivated assaults during the winter of 1878-79 that caused many settlers to believe that a full Indian attack on the city was imminent.[56] With no U.S. authorities to turn to, the residents of Sitka sought aid from Canada, seeking that "all forms of etiquette between governments" be overlooked in this emergency.[57] The *HMS Osprey* was dispatched to defuse the situation, and remained at anchor outside of Sitka until relieved by the *USS Jamestown* under Captain L. A. Beardslee. Although the Canadians had gained permission from Washington before sending the *Osprey*, the fact that a foreign power had to be called upon to provide security for Americans was deeply embarrassing, so much so that control over Alaska was transferred from the Treasury Department to the Navy. Captain Beardslee, determined to avoid another such incident, issued a full report on the situation in Sitka with his recommendations.

Beardslee's report was damning. He described Sitka as a "headless community" with "no such thing as public spirit or community of interest in Sitka." Beardslee blamed the tense racial tensions on "drunkenness," while characterising the Indians as "not naturally savages." As for establishing law and order, he reported that "both whites and Indians manifested a disposition to rely on government forces for everything, and look upon me…to supply all of the deficiencies

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incident to the entire absence of any other governing power or code of laws." Beardslee soon found himself in a position of establishing some form of civic administration in those regions where residents were "willing to leave the whole task of governing, as well as all other public business to whoever would assume it."[58] Assuming direct control of civilian affairs, however, was a deeply uncomfortable proposition for an American military officer.

This crisis over the nature of governance, whether civilian or military, represented the Gordian knot of American settlement policy toward Alaska. The United States did not possess (nor, indeed, had it ever needed) institutions to direct settlement into a distant and environmentally hostile territory; indeed, the whole of its administrative apparatus was designed around the concept of organic settlement. Yet developing a new settlement policy (and create its attendant new institutions) was never seriously considered as a viable option.

In contrast, the settlement of the Canadian prairies had been conceived as a state-directed enterprise precisely because policies had been crafted with an emphasis on rapid population of a distant frontier. From the inception of the North West Mounted Police, the civil service duties of the force took on a much more vital role in the day-to-day operations of officers and constables than the actual business of law enforcement.[59] Tasks such as establishing telegraph lines, fighting prairie fires, distributing emergency seed grain, and veterinary services were the top priorities, in order to create a stable social and economic environment for permanent settlement. Even before the force moved to the prairies, Commissioner French pressed the case to the government that the development of infrastructure and other tasks important to the general welfare of the region should be a priority for the Mounted Police.[60]

All these functions shared the characteristic of addressing matters of collective concern to all frontier communities. Communications were vital for both gathering information and calling

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for aid, while prairie fires were both frighteningly common and had the capacity to wipe out entire homesteads or even communities.[61] The distribution of seed grain, begun in the early days of the force's operation, allowed Canadian farmers to survive killing frosts and other natural disasters that would have otherwise destroyed their livelihood. Police surgeons examined herds of cattle and horses for early signs of infectious disease, and if a potential outbreak was detected, moved swiftly to impose a quarantine.[62] These duties, often assumed when the need arose and later institutionalised, provided immediate and often personal assistance to a population whose sustenance was frequently balanced precariously on the whims of nature. This stands in stark relief to American policy, which had been predicated on a suspicion of centralised authority and left community services to whatever local entities could be established by the settlers themselves.

The discovery of gold in Gastineau Channel, while not the sensational event that the later Klondike rush was, created an impetus for settlement that would result in the Organic Act of 1884. News of the gold strike brought a wave of immigration, not just of fortune seekers and gold miners, but for the occupations necessary to support a growing community. Within a decade, the town of Harrisburg possessed hotels, restaurants, multiple stores, lumber mills and blacksmiths, as well as social institutions like saloons, opera houses, and barbershops.[63] The maturation of Juneau from a mining boom town into a stable community was aided by the growth of the salmon canning industry, which provided a separate foundation for the community's economy.[64]

The Organic Act, which finally granted a measure of civil government to Alaska, is testimony to the reluctance of Congress to become directly involved in the development of a frontier territory. While civil government was extended to the vast region, a system of courts and marshals established, and a governor appointed from Washington, the Act was far more limited

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than previous legislation regarding new territories. Most notably, it established Alaska as a District, not a formal Territory; as such, it could not create a legislature, nor send a delegate to Congress. Further, its civil laws were an extension of those in Oregon, yet no counties could be organized within a District.[65] The author of the Act, Indiana Senator (and later President) Benjamin Harrison, himself admitted that the legislation was incomplete at best. "It is a mere shift," he wrote, "it is a mere expedient; it is a mere beginning in what we believe to be the right direction toward giving a civil government to Alaska. I hope the more will follow…"[66]

The paucity of social services, however, remained endemic in Alaska throughout the early period of American governance. Although the Organic Act had granted a degree of territorial government, the extent and influence of that government was incredibly weak. Schools, which until 1890 did not offer education beyond the 8th grade, were also one of the few places Alaskans could receive rudimentary health care or any sort of welfare assistance.[67] Local police frequently charged wounded or ill Alaskans of any race with vagrancy, so aid could be dispensed through the penitentiary system, as no other aid program existed.[68] The *Alaskan*, writing in 1892, castigated Alaska's treatment at the hands of Washington lawmakers as "worse than Gaul…at [the] hands of the Roman Empire."[69] Slow population growth, sluggish immigration, and an economy based largely on resource extraction meant that it would not be until 1912 that Alaska was granted the status of a Territory, and almost another half-century would pass before the region was finally admitted as a full State.

Despite the challenges presented by geography, Washington relied on organic, gradual settlement from the national core to populate the region, despite abundant evidence that more direct state involvement was necessary to accomplish the goal. While the Gastineau Channel gold discovery in 1881 (combined with the Yukon gold rush of 1895-6) did draw more settlers

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into Alaska, the physical infrastructure, economic systems, and social support network was still largely left for local residents to establish. Effectively, Alaska was developed during most of its formative decades to either private enterprise in the form of the Alaska Commercial Company, or to the social reform movement in the form of Protestant missionaries. This is a far cry from the interventionist approach used by the Canadian government in its western frontier, where the development of infrastructure and social services was assumed by the state. Why, then, would the United States not adopt a more state-directed settlement policy in a region where it was clearly both needed and well-suited?

The explanation for this seemingly illogical decision can be found in the institutional heritage of the United States and its history of territorial integration. American organs of territorial administration and its legal machinery had been crafted specifically for the purpose of organic, publicly-driven settlement and incorporation. This is because at the time these frameworks were adopted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the federal government lacked the ability to both coordinate such large-scale migrations over and direct the creation of legal and economic infrastructure.[70] To do so would require the development of railroads and steamboats, which could reliably supply far-flung settlements at reasonable costs, as well as providing a dependable system of communication between the imperial core and its agents in the frontier. It would not be until the middle of the nineteenth century that advances in technology would make state-directed settlement on a continental scale feasible.

Providentially, Canada began crafting its settlement policy at a time during which these technologies were becoming widely available. State-directed settlement, coupled with the expansion of state institutions into frontier regions before wholescale settlement, was therefore a technologically viable option. Canadian immigration institutions, western transportation

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networks, and the North West Mounted Police were all created to support a policy of planned (and delayed) settlement, and the parameters of their operation were defined by the goals set forth by the federal government. A century and a half after their creation, the Mounted Police are still classified as a paramilitary organisation, with much broader powers than most state law enforcement agencies, because of their genesis within the greater national plan of settlement. Due to the same institutional path dependence, American institutions that had functioned well within the framework of *laissez-faire* settlement were far less effective in Alaska, where population, climatic, and geographic conditions were hostile to the traditional American methods of settlement.

Technological capability is only one factor that contributed to the formation of state policy. When deciding how to settle and integrate new territories into the nation, governments base their policies upon the perceived security and needs of the state. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the American government saw little threat to its national security from the Indian tribes west of the Appalachians; the primary security concern was to the North, in British North America.[71] A large military presence to the west, therefore, was not needed to ensure the safety of potential settlers. The relative poverty of the American government reinforced the emphasis on fiscal restraint in the settlement of western territories. It was not until the balances of population and military capability had shifted decisively toward the Americans that a more robust military presence was dispatched to complete the task of Indian removal.[72] Similarly, the preponderance of American political and military strength precluded any realistic threats to Washington's governance of Alaska after 1867, as the entire military presence was withdrawn within a decade.

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For Canada, the situation was reversed. It was precisely due to concerns about maintaining territorial integrity that the Canadian government crafted its integrative policy to be centrally directed and governed by a strong paramilitary force. At the time of independence, the American military dwarfed that of Canada at the same time that prominent American statesmen were preaching the gospel of annexation and expansion.[73] Strong cross-border exchanges of both trade and culture threatened the survival of the Canadian state, while a history of political antagonism with the United States remained fresh in the minds of national leaders. Presented with what appeared to be a tenuous grip on its own territory, the Canadian government directed patterns of settlement, construction, and financial exchange specifically to strengthen linkages between its western regions and the eastern core of the country.

Following the first tenuous decades after independence, the United States faced no serious threat to its territorial security; on the contrary, it would remain the leading threat to the territorial integrity of Canada until the end of the nineteenth century.[74] Relatively secure in its boundaries and facing divided and technologically disadvantaged rivals among the Native Americans, the United States were content to let its populace dictate the pace and manner of incorporation. Canadians, however, viewed their own territorial security more gravely and with a much stronger tradition of state activism. Carrying the legacy of a large minority population with memories of conquest, the newborn Canadian state after 1867 could not afford the luxury of *laissez-faire* incorporation. Canada, lawmakers believed, had to be united through bonds of both culture and commerce, and given the unforgiving nature of the Canadian environment, this could only occur with direct and vigorous direction from the state. Whereas the state followed settlement in the United States, the Canadian state preceded settlement, preparing the prairie for colonisation. The precedent for such activity was set in the inherited institutions of the British

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Empire, from the Royal Irish Constabulary to the Government of India Act, and presented a ready solution to the task of frontier incorporation.[75]

There is an intriguing alternative to path dependence in an economic explanation for American settlement policy. Given the lack of economic productivity (or perceived potential), it can be plausibly argued that the United States lacked any motivation to invest in the region prior to the Gastineau or Klondike Gold Rushes. With the economic base finally in place, organic settlement could (and did) follow, incorporating Alaska in the traditional American method. Thus, in this view, the settlement of Alaska was one dictated by economics and not by institutional preferences.[76]

An economic interpretation, however, bolsters the argument that the United States persisted in pursuing an inefficient method of settlement towards Alaska. A state-directed approach to settlement, in the Canadian mold, would theoretically have encouraged population growth while establishing a strong enough legal presence to deter the kind of outlaw regimes that dominated Skagway in the 1890s.[77] Further, there was much enthusiasm among continental business for expansion into Alaska in the late 1860s. The creation of a robust state infrastructure to regulate trade and facilitate transportation could well have avoided, or at least drastically ameliorated, the early settlement failure of the mid-1870s which had been brought upon by the collapse of the Alaskan trade economy. Yet the United States persisted in using its established, *laissez-faire* approach to settlement despite conditions to which that policy was dramatically ill-suited.

The case of Alaska demonstrates the power of institutional path dependence over logistical or geographic concerns. By any measure, Alaska was well-suited to a more interventionist approach to settlement; yet by the middle of the nineteenth century, the acceptable

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policy options that had become ingrained in the administrative apparatus of the American government precluded state-directed settlement. The case points to a phenomenon of policy "lock-in"; that is, once a particular policy or approach to a problem is adopted, subsequent challenges or difficulties will typically prompt a government to amend, rather than abolish, the original policy. This would imply that most states tend to not respond as much to the most efficient solution to an emerging problem; rather, governments seek to ask how existing policies or institutions can be adapted to deal with emerging problems. This critical difference, between the *actual* range of choices and the *perceived* range of choices, can explain why states undertake policies that can seem to outside observers as either inefficient or counterproductive.

[1] Douglas C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 69.

[2] A frequent analogy to this process is the persistent use of the QWERTY-style keyboard. Originally created to slow the typist's speed in the days of mechanical typewriters, the layout has persisted despite being deliberately

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inefficient. Failure to adopt more efficient keyboard layouts, such as the Dvorak design, is explained by the cost of not only purchasing new keyboards, but requiring everyone to relearn typing skills from square one.

[3] Ibid., 104.

[4] Ibid., 54.

[5] Ibid., 57.

[6] There are deep institutional differences in the form and function of the American Congress and the Canadian Parliament; one is designed to maximise democratic governance while the other is oriented toward limiting its extent and scope. That said, both institutions share a common origin in the supremacy of the commons (specifically, the voting public) over the dictates of a supreme executive. This difference is critical to the formation of settlement policy.

[7] Howard R. Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1966), 309.

[8] Jack Erickson Eblen, *The First and Second United States Empires: Governors and Territorial Government, 1784-1912* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968), 22 and 58.

[9] Walter Nugent, *The Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 2008), 222.

[10] Soren Fanning, "Forging a Frontier: Social Capital and Canada's Mounted Police, *American Review of Canadian Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4 (Dec. 2012), 517-518.

[11] Turner, Webb, Limerick, and DeVoto all based their work in one manner or another on this environmental view. This is not to say that any environment could be altered at whim to suit human desires, as Webb's aridity thesis illustrates. However, the general narrative in these studies is the settlement and 'taming' of the frontier environment.

[12] Royden Loewen, "On the Margin or in the Lead: Canadian Prairie Historiography," *Agricultural History*, vol. 73, no. 1 (Winter 1999), 36-7.

[13] Marvin W. Mikesell, "Comparative Studies in Frontier History," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 50, no. 1 (Mar. 1960), 68.

[14] Ibid., 69.

[15] Vernon C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 192.

[16] William Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1950).

[17] Donald Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1937), ch. 2.

[18] E. R. Adair, "The French Canadian Seigneury," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 35 (Sept. 1954), 187-207.

[19] Paul and Malone, 28.

[20] Nikolai Bolkhovitinov, *Русско-Американские Отношения и Продажда Аляски, г. 1834-1867 (Russian-American Relations and the Sale of Alaska, 1834-1867)*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), in Russian.

[21] Ronald Jensen, *The Alaska Purchase and Russian-American Relations* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975); S. Frederick Starr, ed. *Russia's American Colony* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987).

[22] Ibid., 14.

[23] Claus M. Naske, *A History of Alaska Statehood*. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985).

[24] E. V. Alekseeva, *Русская Америка: американская Россия?* (Russian America: American Russia?) (Ekaterinburg: Rossiskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1998)

[25] Paul Soethe Holbo, *Tarnished Expansion: The Alaska Scandal, the Press, and Congress, 1867-1871* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983).

[26] *Congressional Globe*, 40th Congress, 3rd Session, 13 January 1869, p. 342. One of the fiercest advocates of developing Alaska was none other than Congressman James Ashley of Ohio before his disastrous appointment as Governor of the Montana Territory.

[27] Library of Congress, William H. Seward, Speech at Sitka, Alaska, 12 August 1869 (Washington: J.J. Chapman, 1879) p. 12.

[28] *Congressional Globe*, 40th Congress, 3rd Session, 13 January 1869, p. 341.

[29] No relation to the former President of the Confederate States of America. Letter, Davis to Dodge, 6 December 1867, Letters Sent, Department of Alaska, RG 353 (Army Continental Commands), NARA.

[30] Quoted in Ernest Gruening, *The State of Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1954), 34.

[31] Letter, Tidball to McIntire, 1 May 1869, Letters Sent, Department of Alaska, District of Kenay, RG 353 (Army Continental Commands), NARA.

[32] *New York Times*, 13 April 1877.

[33] Letter, McGilvray to McIntire, 15 May 1870, Register of Letters Received, Fort Kenay, RG 353 (Army Continental Commands), NARA; Letter, Hoff to Davis, 12 December 1867, Letters Sent, Department of Alaska, 1867-70, NARA.

[34] Letter, Thatcher to Halleck, 14 January 1868, Letters Sent, Department of Alaska, 1867-70, Ibid.

[35] Letter, Crawford to Curtis, 7 May 1870, Register of Letters Received, Fort Kenay, Ibid.

[36] Letter, McGilvray to McIntire, 30 September 1869, Register of Letters Received, Fort Kenay, RG 353 (Army Continental Commands), NARA; Letter, Tidball to McIntire, 1 May 1869, Letters Sent, Department of Alaska, District of Kenay, RG 353 (Army Continental Commands), NARA; Letter, Davis to Sherburne, February 1868, Letters Sent, Department of Alaska, RG 353 (Army Continental Commands), NARA.

[37] Letter, McGilvray to McIntire, 2 October 1869, Register of Letters Received, Fort Kenay, RG 353 (Army Continental Commands), NARA.

[38] Letter, Davis to Dodge, 6 December 1867, Letters Sent, Department of Alaska, RG 353 (Army Continental Commands), NARA.

[39] 40th Congress, 2nd Session, 17 February 1868, RG 46, Senate Territorial Papers Related to the Alaska Territory, NARA.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Letter, Davis to Citizens of Sitka, 16 November 1867, Senate Territorial Papers Related to the Alaska Territory, NARA. The 5000 resident figure is the most commonly accepted threshold, although it is not a steadfast rule.

[42] Ted C. Hinckley, "'We Are More Truly Heathen Than The Natives': John G. Brady and the Assimilation of Alaska's Tlingit Indians," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 1 (January 1980), 37-55. 41. Organic Acts are Acts of Congress that establish both a formal dependent territory of the United States as well as the agencies or legal institutions that govern them. Once an Organic Act is passed, the new Territory is entitled to send delegations to Congress, elect its own officials, and is accorded the benefits of the civil laws of the United States.

[43] Letter, Ball to Schurz, 20 April 1880, RG 48, Department of the Interior, M-430, Roll 1, NARA.

[44] Ronald Lautaret, *Alaskan Historical Documents Since 1867* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1989), 18. Congress also extended the outright sealing monopoly to the Alaska Commercial Company based on the company's claim that any competition would erase any profits the trade brought in.

[45] Letter, Seward to Davis, 28 October 1867, Letters Sent, Department of Alaska, RG 353 (Army Continental Commands), NARA.

[46] Both men would play important roles in the early history of Alaskan governance. Kinkead had been a leading figure in the push to admit Nevada as a state before it had reached the requisite population limit, and would serve as

the first governor of the District of Alaska. Dodge, who had established a career as a treasury agent, would be the first mayor of the *de facto* capital of Sitka.

[47] *Alaska Times*, 17 September 1870.

[48] Hinckley, 59. A silver lining for Sitka's upper crust, had they remained, was that the city's prostitute population had also dropped by almost 50%.

[49] Ibid.

[50] *Alaska Herald*, 27 December 1873.

[51] *Congressional Globe*, 40th Congress, 3rd Session, 13 January 1869, p. 342.

[52] Ibid., 343.

[53] Hinckley, 54.

[54] Lautaret, 25.

[55] Henry Clark, *History of Alaska (*New York: Macmillan, 1930), 97.

[56] Hinckley, 131.

[57] Stephen Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 184.

[58] U.S. Government Printing Office, 47th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Executive Document Number 71, 1882, 13-18.

[59] Carl Betke, "Pioneers and Police on the Canadian Prairies, 1885-1914", in *The Mounted Police and Prairie Society*, William M. Baker, ed. (Regina: University of Regina Press, 1998), 212.

[60] National Archives of Canada, RG-18, A-1, vol. 1, #6. Letter, French to Minister of Justice, 14 November 1873.

[61] Ibid., RG-18, A-1, vol. 96, #470. Letter, J.H.Price to Howe, 4 September 1894.

[62] Betke, 119. Responsibility for veterinary care in many western communities would reside with the Mounted Police until 1896, when it was transferred to the Department of Agriculture.

[63] U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Eleventh Census of the United States*, economics section (Washington, DC., 1891), 238. Harrisburg was named after Richard Harris, who along with Joe Juneau discovered gold in Gastineau Channel.

[64] Hinckley, 126.

[65] *Organic Act of 1884*, section 1, as reproduced in Lautaret, 39. Not only was Alaska the only of the fifty states to be organized as a district, the language in the Act itself speaks of uncertainty as to the region's future; Sitka is formally listed as the 'temporary capital' of Alaska.

[66] *Congressional Record*, 48th Congress, 1st Session, 564.

[67] Letter, Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 29 May 1911, Department of the Interior, Office of the Territories, Classified Files, RG 126, Box 201, NARA.

[68] Letter, Superintendent of Prisons LaDow to Chief Clerk, Interior Department, 10 January 1912, Department of the Interior, Office of the Territories, Classified Files, RG 126, Box 201, NARA. When the practice was discovered, the Justice department curtly informed Interior that this practice would no longer be allowed, so any allowance for social aid should be sought through Congress.

[69] *The Alaskan*, 10 September 1892.

[70] Daniel R. Headrick, *Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 35.

[71] Earl Pomeroy, *The Territories and the United States, 1861-1890: Studies in Colonial Administration* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1947), 44.

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[72] Eblen, 83.

[73] Robin Winks, *The Civil War Years: Canada and the United States* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 68.

[74] Not that the threat of military invasion from the USA was unthinkable; that very possibility had come to fruition in 1775 and 1812, and loomed ominously during the American Civil War as relations between Great Britain and the United States deteriorated.

[75] R. C. Macleod, *The North West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement, 1873-1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 47.

[76] See Robert Campbell, *In Darkest Alaska: Travel and Empire Along the Inside Passage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)

[77] *Collier's Weekly,* 9 November 1911.

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