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The Politics of the "New North": Putting History and Geography at Stake in Arctic Futures

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The politics of the “New North”: putting history and geography at stake in Arctic futures

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References to a “New North” have snowballed across popular media in the past 10 years. By invoking the phrase, scientists, policy analysts, journalists and others draw attention to the collision of global warming and global investment in the Arctic today and project a variety of futures for the region and the planet. While changes are apparent, the trope of a “New North” is not new. Discourses that appraised unfamiliar situations at the top of the world have recurred throughout the twentieth century. They have also accompanied attempts to cajole, conquer, civilize, consume, conserve and capitalize upon the far north. This article examines these politics of the “New North” by critically reading “New North” texts from the North American Arctic between 1910 and 2010. In each case, appeals to novelty drew from evaluations of the historical record and assessments of the Arctic’s shifting position in global affairs. “New North” authors pinpointed the ways science, state power, capital and technology transformed northern landscapes at different moments in time. They also licensed political and corporate influence in the region by delimiting the colonial legacies already apparent there. Given these tendencies, scholars need to approach the most recent iteration of the “New North” carefully without concealing or repeating the most troubling aspects of the Arctic’s past.

Keywords: Arctic regions; New North; Yukon Territory; Northwest Territories; Alaska; history; geography; science; frontier

The riches of the world’s last virgin territory have spurred the reawakening of old geopolitical rivalries. The USA, Canada, Russia, Norway and the Danish territory of Greenland all control areas around the Arctic Ocean. We face a new era of oil rigs and drill ships, of tankers taking shortcuts from Yokohama to Rotterdam, as well as a potential fight over the Arctic’s treasures.

(Jacket description of research biologist Alun Anderson’s, *After the Ice: Life, Death, and Geopolitics in the New Arctic*, 2012.)

If the north of the future does in fact turn into anything like I have suggested, how will it look? ... Scattered communities – some a thousand or two in population, others ten or fifteen thousand – grown up around mines of all kinds. They will be linked to the south or to seaboard by road or rail in most cases, but some will probably depend on large and efficient aircraft.

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(Commissioner of the Northwest Territories Gordon Robertson, “The Future of the North” speech, given as part of the “New North” lecture series at Carleton University, 1957.)

Narrative succeeds to the extent that it hides the discontinuities, ellipses and contradictory experiences that would undermine the intended meaning of its story.

(Historian William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” 1992.¹)

Introduction: a New North?

References to a “New North” have snowballed across popular media in the past 10 years. Independent journalists Gwynne Dyer, Bob Reiss and McKenzie Funk; policy analyst and risk-assessment expert Charles Emmerson; geographer Laurence C. Smith; and research biologist Alun Anderson – to name a few – have cited vulnerabilities in Arctic landscapes and communities, strains on international relations, and booms in global mineral and energy markets to declare an unprecedented moment in the circumpolar region.² Blending evaluations of current conditions with war-game scenario planning, these authors sensationalize the collision of global warming and global investment at the top of the world in order to project a variety of futures for the Arctic and the planet.

While changes are apparent, the New North is not new. Since the early 1900s, discourses and practices that appraised unfamiliar situations in the Arctic have accompanied attempts to cajole, conquer, civilize, consume, conserve and capitalize upon the far north. Robertson’s vision for the Canadian Arctic, for example, coincided with his efforts as Commissioner of the Northwest Territories under Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s “Road to Resources” programme to expand resource development schemes, social welfare programmes and defence structures across the north in the late 1950s.³ This is not merely a coincidence, but part of the nature of the New North itself.

¹Alun Anderson, *After the Ice: Life, Death, and Geopolitics in the New Arctic* (HarperCollins, 2009). Description available from <http://www.amazon.com/After-Ice-Geopolitics-Arctic-ebook/dp/B002WKSZNZU> (accessed December 14, 2012); R.G. Robertson, “The Future of the North,” a speech given before Carleton University, 1957, “Northern Development” folder, Dick Hill Collection, Inuvik Centennial Library, Inuvik, Northwest Territories; William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *Journal of American History*, (March, 1992), 1349–50.

²Gwynne Dyer, *Climate Wars: The Fight for Survival as the World Overheats* (Oneworld), 2011; Bob Reiss, *The Eskimo and the OilMan: The Battle at the Top of the World for America’s Future* (Business Plus, 2012); McKenzie Funk, “Cold Rush: The Coming Fight for the Melting North,” *Harper’s Magazine*, (September, 2007), 45–55; Charles Emmerson, *The Future History of the Arctic* (Public Affairs, 2010); Laurence C. Smith, *The New North: The World in 2050* (Profile Books, 2011); Anderson, *After the Ice*.

³Matthew Farish, “Frontier Engineering: From the Globe to the Body in the Cold War Arctic,” *The Canadian Geographer* 50, no. 2 (2006), 177–96; See Matthew Farish and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “High Modernism in the Arctic: Planning Frobisher Bay and Inuvik,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 35 (2009), 517–44; Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–1963* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994).

The phrase, like the larger arguments in which it is enrolled, packs its rhetorical punch not simply by compiling the facts of contemporary Arctic matters, but by arranging them in relation to the historical record. In Anderson's formation, geopolitical rivalries among northern nations are "old" because they echo the scramble to claim the North Pole and any remaining Polar islands in the first three decades of the twentieth century. A gesture to a "new era of oil rigs and drill ships" renders existing incarnations of the petroleum industry in the Arctic irrelevant or invisible (recall, for example, the oil strikes at Prudhoe Bay in 1968, or the crossing of the Northwest Passage by the S.S. *Manhattan* in 1969). Moreover, the word being modified – North – is as important as the modifier. Statements about change in Arctic were never absolute, but relative: the circumpolar region was different because its interrelations with other places had been restructured. The New North is thus both less and more than it seems: on one hand, a regular feature in colonialism's Arctic history and, on the other, a means of reinterpreting that history to make truth-claims about the world.

In this essay, I propose to re-frame New North stories as a historical genre of Arctic writing so scholars can situate the jarring changes unfolding in the Arctic today – and the avalanche of print responding to them – in a broader perspective of change over the twentieth century. A review of a series of New North texts from 1910 to 2010 demonstrates both the recurring discourse and its persistent elements. Looking closely at the circulation of literature relevant to the region I know best – the Western Arctic of Alaska, Yukon Territory and the Northwest Territories – we see how capital, statecraft, science and technology shaped northern life and ideas about it.⁴ While my survey is limited, it nevertheless reveals an important point: proclamations about the north and associated evaluations of history and geography often licensed political and corporate influence while delimiting the colonial legacies already apparent in the north.⁵ Given these tendencies, scholars need to approach melting sea ice, thawing permafrost and unpredictable weather patterns carefully, identifying clearly what it is "new" about the human responses to these changes without covering over (or repeating) the most troubling aspects of northern history.

Before moving forward, I should note two caveats. First, I do not intend to suggest that modern-day New North stories are part of some vicious neocolonial power-play. I do want to argue, as William Cronon has, that these stories have been and continue to be mechanisms for structuring the human relationship with the Arctic.⁶ Ultimately, it behoves scholars to take seriously both the overt and covert exercises of power inherent in continually imagining the shape of Arctic futures by reading its past. Second, while scholars have not directly treated the New North formation, they have made possible this investigation through scholarship on the concept of the "north", the "frontier" more broadly, and the bonds between history

⁴This region forms the center of my broader dissertation project, a history of science and environmental change in the Arctic. As part of this research, I spent 10 months living in Inuvik, Northwest Territories. I also have traveled throughout northern Alaska and northwestern Canada and spent another 10 months living in Inuvik prior to beginning my PhD work.

⁵Michael Bravo makes a similar claim: that by portraying Inuit as an "at-risk community" scientists authorized themselves as stewards of lands and resources that did not belong to them. See Michael Bravo, "Voices from the sea ice: the reception of climate impact narratives," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 35 (2009), 256–78.

⁶Cronon, 1345–50.

and the future. Sherrill Grace and Janice Cavell have cogently argued that the idea of the “North” in Canada reflected or projected the region’s relations to metropolitan centres below the Arctic Circle.⁷ Sverker Sorlin has spoken recently about the place of the future in Arctic history from a Scandinavian perspective.⁸ In 2004, Joseph E. Taylor III analysed an emergent “New West” literature, deeming the trope “loaded and simplistic” and challenging historians to see change as global, colonial and historical (neither new nor western in nature).⁹ More than 20 years ago, Jan Nederveen Pieterse observed the interpretations of history that act as “panoramas of power” in development discourse.¹⁰ I draw from all of these scholars’ logic and approaches to examine the politics of the New North.

Five New Norths, 1910–1971

Table 1 presents a list of books and articles containing “New North” or other similar phrases in their titles. There are six different iterations of the New North between 1910 and 2010 and all of these touch the Western Arctic in some way. Surveying these items helps to elucidate a set of persistent elements at work in shaping Arctic life and the way we think about it. State power, technology, capitalism and science have held leading roles in the first five New Norths and, as we will see in the conclusion, they appear in the most recent iteration. Moreover, the concepts underpinning the two words in “New North” – time and space, or history and geography – were always enrolled to make sense of environmental and social change in the Arctic.

The first New North began as the Old West closed.¹¹ Just as US and Canadian governments and capitalists had finished tying the continent together with railroad, the North seemed to open as a frontier for markets and the pioneering spirit. Agnes Deans Cameron’s *The New North* recounts the tale of the first white woman to travel overland to the Arctic Ocean.¹² Sponsored by the Western Canada Immigration Association, the British Columbia social-reformer-turned-booster journalist detailed the prospects awaiting eager settlers in the lands bordering the Mackenzie River from Fort Smith to Fort McPherson, and beyond.¹³ From the beginning, New North authors stressed how technology transformed northern

⁷Sherrill E. Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press), 2001. Janice Cavell, “The Second Frontier: The North in English-Canadian Historical Writing,” *The Canadian Historical Review*, 83, no. 3 (September, 2002), 364–89.

⁸Centre for Environmental History, “Recording of Sverker Sorlin’s lecture, ‘Global Change, History, and Planetary Futures: Stories from Sweden’s far northern edge’” <http://www.ceh.environmentalhistory-au-nz.org/2012/06/recording-of-sverker-sorlins-lecture/> (accessed November 10, 2012).

⁹Joseph E. Taylor, III, “The Many Lives of the New West,” *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 35, no. 2 (Summer, 2004), 141–65.

¹⁰Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Dilemmas of Development Discourse: The Crisis of Developmentalism and the Comparative Method,” *Development and Change*, 22 (1991), 5–29.

¹¹Aron Senkpiel, “From the Wild West to the Far North – Literary Representations of North America’s Last Frontier,” in Eric Heyne, ed. *Desert, Garden, Margin, Range: Literature on the American Frontier*, (Twayne Publishers), 1992, 135–42.

¹²Agnes Deans Cameron, *The New North: An Account of a Woman’s 1908 Journey through Canada to the Arctic*, edited by David Richeson (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1986).

¹³Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, “Cameron, Agnes Deans,” http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=7262 (accessed November 20, 2012).

Table 1. “New North” titles from 1910 to 2010. I compiled this list through my research on histories of science in the Western Arctic (Alaska, Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories) and through a query of the Library of Congress database. It is not definitive but intended to be illustrative of the politics inherent in imagining a “New North”.

Source	Author	Date
<i>The New North: Being Some Account of a Woman's Journey Through Canada to the Arctic</i>	Agnes Deans Cameron	1910
<i>The Northward Course of Empire</i>	Vilhjalmur Stefansson	1922
“The New North,” <i>Canadian Affairs</i> , 1, no. 3	Trevor Lloyd	1944
“The New North,” Lecture Series at Carleton University	Many	1957
“The Future: Man in the North,” Arctic Institute of North America Conference	Many	1971
<i>The New North: Our World in 2050</i>	Laurence C. Smith	2010

opportunities and experiences. Over the turn of the twentieth century, the technologies were railroads, steamers and gas-powered schooners; the opportunities appeared unlimited; and the experiences were settlement. “As Canadians, looking at this Western Canada which has arrived and thinking of the lands of Canada’s fertile Northland far beyond,” Cameron wrote, “for the future we are full of optimism, and of the present we are *glad*”.¹⁴

Cameron, like those who would follow her in New North history, emphasized the economic opportunities of the North American hinterland. She organized her travelogue spatially, according to her journey from Winnipeg, up through Athabasca Landing, to the Mackenzie River, and down to the Arctic Ocean. This vantage point allowed Cameron, and her readers, to note the transition between what she called the “Belt of Wheat”, with its northern limits around the Peace River, to the “Belt of Fur”, which extended clear to the Arctic coast.¹⁵ At Herschel Island in the Beaufort Sea, she found, with amazement, the “coming of commerce”, brought around the horn of Alaska by whalers searching for baleen and whale oil.¹⁶ While on the Mackenzie, Cameron met the President of Northern Transportation Company, JK Cornwall, who likened the Athabasca-Peace river systems and the timber and wheat resources found in its watershed to the Mississippi, St. Lawrence, and Great Lakes regions. Starting a trend that continues today, Cornwall and Cameron promoted this region as a logical site for investment for capitalists, one that would help fuel national development, by relating its landscape features to other places known to be central to the fate of nations. Like the rivers and lakes of the continent’s midsection, the North, Cameron wrote, “would seem to hold within it all the elements that make

¹⁴Cameron, 302. Cameron directly noted the role of technology in empire: “But the day of our great men is not over; Canada still in her great North and West has Pathfinders of Empire. The early voyageurs made their quest in the dugout and the birch bark; and the tools of these are rails of steel and iron horses.” 292.

¹⁵Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, “Cameron, Agnes Deans”.

¹⁶Cameron, 175. Interestingly, she paid scant attention to potential mineral industries, despite her proximity to the Klondike region and the magnetic appeal of gold in drawing southerners northward in the 1890s. On the Klondike Gold Rush and notions of the North, see Grace, 68 and 93–120.

for national greatness: the richest soil in the world, oil, timber, fur, fish, great underlying coal measures, [and] a hinterland which is a very Pandora's box of gifts".¹⁷

In one sense, Cameron might have only repeated what British naval officers and Hudson's Bay Company scouts had done centuries before. But, the early 1900s was not like earlier periods, despite the continued use of the Mackenzie River as an artery for reconnaissance missions. To the young Canadian woman, the North's longest waterway was not a conduit of British Empire, but a monument to its checkered past. Passing through Point Separation – one of the many markers of British attempts to claim northern terrain – Cameron recounted the story of John Richardson, who returned this spot where the Mackenzie River splits to leave a cairn in memory of the lost Franklin expeditions. While at Fort Good Hope, Cameron heard of the story of John Bell, who implored chief factors of the Hudson's Bay Company in London to supply northern fur outposts with the "large white beads" demanded by native traders. When higher-ups did not meet Bell's request, Dene and Inuit refused to sell meat to post operators. Many of these European men and their families subsequently died from starvation.¹⁸ If military and commercial agents failed to conquer the North and the Northwest Passage, this did not mean the Arctic remained outside the orbit of colonial power. Indeed, by the time Cameron arrived, the scientific project that Franklin, Richardson, Mackenzie and Hearne pursued on their journeys, northward – classifying and enumerating the vast unknown – seemed to have been completed, if not *pas*. In exhaustion, she wrote,

You cannot find a flower nowadays that someone has not tacked a Latin name to, and it goes by inverse ratio – the smaller the flower the longer the name. Every bird you hear sing, even though it stop but an hour to rest its tired pinion on its northern migration has an invisible label pinned under its coat.¹⁹

Cameron invoked northern North America's British history as a counterpoint to her imaginary of a New North, one marked by US and Canadian settlement and development. Where geography textbooks and explorer's notebooks had portrayed Inuit as a "short, squat, dirty man who lives on blubber", Cameron described Inuit as friendly, cheerful and honest in business practices. They were citizen-subjects who could play leading roles in twentieth-century northern commerce. Looking for the "Old North" of a hostile Arctic at Herschel Island, just off the coast of the international boundary between Alaska and Yukon Territory, Cameron instead found a hub of trading activity, a welcome sign of an economic frontier.²⁰ She noted the presence of Portuguese, Danish and American whalers; Royal Canadian Mounted Police; European missionaries; and at least four native communities – Gwich'in Indians, Alaskan coastal Inuit, Mackenzie Delta Inuit and Alaskan interior Inuit. Contrary to nineteenth-century explorer-naturalists, the real issue for Cameron was

¹⁷Cameron, 282–3. For an insightful reading of Cameron against the writings of Warburton Pike, see Elizabeth Jonquil Covello, "The Northwest Territories Reconstruction Project: Telling Our Stories," (PhD Diss., University of British Columbia, 2009), especially 112–62. Covello concludes that Cameron's text, while "contributing early knowledge of the indigenous people, [was] instrumental in framing an imaginary north that assumed hegemonic status over the geographical and cultural north that already existed." ii.

¹⁸On Point Separation, see Cameron, 200–2. On John Bell and Fort Good Hope, see Cameron, 237–9.

¹⁹Cameron, 165–78. Quote from 210–1.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 164; 211–6.

not establishing the northern rim as a passageway to Asian markets, or skinning the tundra for London fashionistas, but creating linkages between the Arctic, Ottawa and the US's growing Pacific empire. Both Canadian and British political leaders had feared the "Americanization" of the Provincial and Territorial norths, but Cameron saw foreign interests in the regions as sources for North American power.²¹ The first New North was more globalized than any previous North. Yet despite the changes of industrial capitalism, the period's market-oriented and imperial rhetoric was an adaptation of old interests to evolving commercial and political exchanges.

Historians might be most familiar with the next New North, signalled by Vilhjalmur Stefansson's 1922 book, *The Northward Course of Empire*. Here, the self-proclaimed "Prophet of the North" sought to catalyze the comprehensive development of the Arctic by dispelling once and for all the misguided notion of the North as Frozen Wasteland.²² A Harvard-trained anthropologist, Stefansson could claim some expertise in Arctic matters – he had spent a dozen years in the Western Arctic on three different scientific expeditions in search of a supposed "Polar Continent" off the north slope of Alaska; valuable copper deposits in the Coronation Gulf and Bathurst Inlet regions; traces of so-called "uncontaminated" native peoples (the infamous "Blonde Eskimo") and muskox, that bison of the Arctic.²³ Lost islands, potential mother lodes, never-before-seen peoples and other endangered species were markers of an early twentieth-century zeitgeist, the same period that witnessed the Scramble for Africa and the Race to the Poles. Stefansson saw the tundra as desirable country, which, like the West, could be transformed from desert to garden by pioneering citizens and interested companies who understood it was not perpetually dark and cold. But, he also railed against the ways the whaling industry had corrupted Inuit culture and decimated Arctic caribou populations.²⁴ Pursuing devel-

²¹Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, "Cameron, Agnes Deans." Cameron wrote, "The Americanisation of Canada? During the past seven years over three hundred and fifty thousand people have come to us from the United States. Is this American invasion to be feared politically? Western Canada has no more desirable citizens than those who come to us from the south ... The troubled English brother should remember that when 'American' farmers in Canada pronounce on Canadian matters they do so constitutionally at the polls and as Canadian citizens ... Is Canada Loyal to England?" is a question that sometimes meets us. No, Canada is loyal to the British Empire of which she forms a part. Let England see to it that she, too, is loyal." Cameron, 298–9.

²²On Stefansson as the "Prophet of the North," see David C. Nutt, "Stef at Dartmouth," *Polar Notes: Occasional Publication of the Stefansson Collection*, no. IV (November, 1962), 33.

²³On Stefansson's tenure as an Arctic explorer, and the concerns that propelled it see Trevor H. Levere, *Science and the Canadian Arctic: A Century of Exploration, 1818–1918*, (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1993), 390–417; or any of his biographies: D. LeBourdais, *Stefansson: Ambassador of the North*, (Montreal, 1963); William Hunt, *Stef: A Biography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Canadian Arctic Explorer*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986); Richard Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978); and Gisli Palsson, *Traveling Passions: The Hidden Life of Vilhjalmur Stefansson*, (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2003). Or his own autobiography: Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Discovery: The Autobiography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson*, (New York: McGraw Hill Publishers, 1964).

²⁴Stefansson's ideas about the desirability of northern country and the effects of the whaling industry on Inuit life are found in his books, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *My Life with the Eskimo*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1913), Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Friendly Arctic: The Story of Five Years in Polar Regions* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921); and Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922).

opment and conservation of natural and cultural resources at the same time required technologies both old and new. Domesticated muskox and imported reindeer could convert mosses and lichens into meat products for local and national markets. Caring for these animals also turned Inuit hunters into herders, helping ease a transition to modernity that was sure to come through aeroplanes, submarines and the boom of Arctic mining.²⁵

Stefansson's attempts to redefine the Arctic mediated post-First World War political and cultural concerns about food scarcity and industrialization in North America. As western ranches gave way to settlement, European agricultural fields recovered from the wounds of battle, and urban populations exploded, the North appeared as both a promising economic frontier and a romantic escape from civilization.²⁶ Like Cameron, Stefansson framed the opportunities in the North in the spatial terms of a region. But, rather than pointing to the St. Lawrence or the Mississippi – the channels of New World might – he called on a more historic and perhaps more commanding imaginary: the Arctic was a “Polar Mediterranean”. “Most of us will get a wider view of the commercial, political, and military future of the world”, he charged, “when we realize that the aeroplane, the dirigible, and the submarine are about to turn the polar ocean into a Mediterranean and about to make England and Japan, Norway and Alaska, neighbors across the northern sea”.²⁷

Stefansson's gesture to the Mediterranean was intended as a call to action to his readers in the USA and Canada: which country in North America would build the first Arctic Roman Empire? A tireless promoter Stefansson, lobbied bureaucrats in Ottawa and Washington, the Lomen Corporation of Alaska, and the Hudson's Bay Company to explore, exploit and colonize the Arctic, suggesting to each that sovereign claims to the region were not yet settled.²⁸ Meanwhile, the commercial whaling industry that startled Agnes Deans Cameron had collapsed by this time, leaving its legacy in Inuit populations crushed by disease, a general migration of Alaskan Inupiat into the Mackenzie Delta, and the expansion of the fur trade to the coast and Arctic islands (Victoria and Banks) by surviving Inuvialuit who inherited schooners and the English language from their whaling captain partners.²⁹ While

²⁵Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire*, 42–64.

²⁶On food scarcity issues spawned by the war, see Stefansson, *Northward Course of Empire*, 64 and 135. On the north as an escape from civilization in the inter-war period, see Christina Adcock, “Many tiny traces: Antimodern anxieties and colonial intimacies in the Canadian North,” *Network in Canadian History and Environment*, <http://www.niche-canada.org/node/10088> (accessed October 9, 2012).

²⁷Stefansson, *Northward Course of Empire*, 178.

²⁸*Ibid.* See also Janice Cavell and Jeff Noakes, *Acts of Occupation: Canada and Arctic Sovereignty, 1918–1925* (Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2010).

²⁹These details come from Canadian Museum of Civilization, “Northern People, Northern Knowledge: The Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913–1918, by David Gray,” <http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/exhibitions/hist/cae/indexe.shtml> (accessed December 20, 2011). This website is an incredible resource for scholars interested in the history and impact of the Canadian Arctic Expedition. Gray has performed archival and field research to detail the expedition, consulting published reports, correspondence, and field diaries of many of the members. He has also visited regions of the Western Arctic to interview family members of the Inuit participants of the expedition. See also, Albert Elias and Charles Arnold, “The Schooner Era in Twentieth Century Inuvialuit History,” a Presentation before the 18th Inuit Studies Conference, October 26, 2012.

Stefansson largely ignored the ways Inuit continued to adapt and thrive in the North, his writing animated – and was animated by – particular sensibilities about truth in an era fascinated with satire and debunking myths. Stefansson chafed against efforts to re-romanticize the Arctic as a primitive foil for an over-civilized metropolitan society, calling Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* as real as Santa Claus.³⁰ As scholars Janice Cavell, Jeff Noakes, John Sandlos and Tina Adcock have noted, Stefansson's arguments not only spurred the extension of Canadian state power northward in 1920s and 1930s, they also illuminate the cultural concerns that were driving both anti-modernism and the next New North.³¹

Stefansson's engagement with the "Old North" went much deeper than Cameron's. As glimpsed in his reference to the Mediterranean, the anthropologist and explorer reached back several centuries to situate the Arctic of the 1920s in the course of history. After connecting dots between Tacitus of Ancient Greece, the Moors of the Middle Ages and the purchase of Alaska by the USA in 1867, Stefansson concluded that "Men at every period of history have been generally of the opinion that the ultimate limit of the northward spread of civilization had then at length been reached".³² Stefansson presented an opportunity for his readers – the "average intelligent person who is not a geographer or meteorologist" – to finally overcome the burden of history and see the Arctic as livable, full of potential and yet to be colonized.³³ By replacing notions of a barren, desolate, or ice-locked wilderness with scientific knowledge of the tundra, its wildlife and its climate, Stefansson sought to prove that there was "no northern boundary beyond which productive enterprise cannot go till North meets North on the opposite shores of the Arctic Ocean as East has met West".³⁴ Indeed, a perspective of the broad sweep of time seemed to call into question the notion that empire had always proceeded westerly from Europe to the New World. The title of his book, *The Northward Course of Empire*, was thus not his promise, but a pattern of the past: "But it is equally indisputable and more significant (because it rests on broader natural causes) that northward the course of civilization has been taking its way ..."³⁵ Stefansson's New North was thus, perhaps ironically, the fulfilment of human history.

Above all, Stefansson was controversial. His writings, and the heated debates they engendered, open a window on the contests of authority latent within every enunciation of a New North. Stefansson scolded scientists like government zoologist Rudolph Anderson – who accompanied him in the Arctic between 1908 and 1916 – for losing the "Scientific spirit" necessary to capitalize upon the north. "What one needs", Stefansson said,

is a scientist of the Darwin type ... whose mind is open to the truth of every sort. The scientist in the civil service ... is likely to have every other attribute that you would

³⁰Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Standardization of Error*, (New York: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, 1928), 52–5.

³¹Cavell and Noakes, *Acts of Occupation*; John Sandlos, *Hunters at the Margin: Native People and Wildlife Conservation in the Northwest Territories*, (University of British Columbia Press), 2007.

³²Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire*, 1.

³³Ibid., 250.

³⁴Ibid., 19.

³⁵Ibid., 1.

expect of a man who arrives at his office at 9:15 in the morning and leaves at 4:55 in the afternoon.³⁶

Anderson fought back. He called Stefansson a “peerless leader” and a sensationalist who distorted the facts to get seats in auditoriums, not to drive at scientific truths. He said the Arctic was “desirable country” only to the extent that people would be “satisfied to huddle in tiny igloos and subsist on a simple diet of meat and blubber”.³⁷ Despite these struggles over what constituted “professional” science – a struggle throughout the early 1900s that transcended these two men – Anderson did not disagree with Stefansson’s description of potential resources in the north. He admitted to relatives that Stefansson’s plan to introduce reindeer showed the “tangible useful results of several years of Arctic travel”.³⁸

What Anderson was more concerned with was the model of development that Stefansson promoted – a mixture of settler colonialism and corporate capitalism. In a letter to his father, Anderson suspected that part of Stefansson’s motivation had more to do with capitalists in Alaska wanting to grow their business.³⁹ Anderson was acutely aware of the ways Inuit in the Mackenzie Delta, many of whom he employed in his scientific work, were developing the fur trade to the Arctic coast and islands, tying their livelihoods even more closely to fluctuations in fox populations and global markets. He wanted government scientists to steer development in the Canadian north, preferring the approach taken by Denmark in Greenland, where colonial officials controlled exploration through a scientific licensing programme and dispatched state agents who held “the utmost rigid moral and physical qualifications”.⁴⁰ All of Stefansson’s New North statements – and those from folks who disagreed with him – shared two familiar traits: they expressed a fascination with modernity and a yearning for social order; and they coupled dispassionate description with place-promotional prescription.

In contrast, the third New North was ushered in by technological and geopolitical developments that required little self-promotion. By the mid-1940s, the demands of the Second World War had laid bare the vulnerability of the northwestern corner of the continent and laid the foundation for its rapid industrialization. Observers again argued that such changes signalled another New North. Canadian geographer Trevor Lloyd’s “New North” treatise flowed from renewed commitments to continental security in the sub-Arctic, particularly in the swath of country between Fairbanks, Whitehorse and Norman Wells. Canadian and US military agencies – along

³⁶This quotation comes from an interview Stefansson gave to the *Christian Science Monitor* in May of 1919. A clipping from this publication can be found in Rudolph Martin Anderson fonds, MG30 40 10, File 10: CAE: Misc Memoranda, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada (Hereafter as “LAC”).

³⁷For the “peerless leader” comment, see Letter from RM Anderson to J.J. O’Neill, December 12, 1928, J.J. O’Neill fonds, MG 30 B 171, 5, File 5. Quotation from an interview RM Anderson gave to “a representative of the press,” the contents of which can be found in Rudolph Martin Anderson fonds, MG30 40 10, File 12, LAC.

³⁸Letter from Anderson to J.H. Brownlee, 1919 (no month or day), MG30 40, 3, File: Correspondence, 1919, LAC.

³⁹Letter from Anderson to J.E. Anderson, November 14, 1919, MG30 40, 3, File: Correspondence, 1919, LAC.

⁴⁰This quotation is from the *Ottawa Citizen*, “Denmark Conducting Unique Experiment,” May 3, 1924, found in Rudolph Martin Anderson Fonds, MG 30 B 40, 26, File 3: Clippings, 1921–1923.

with the private joint venture Bechtel-Price-Callahan and Standard Oil's subsidiary, Imperial Oil – erected a series of infrastructure projects on the frozen earth in less than two years. The Canadian Oil (CANOL) pipeline and road, the Alaskan Highway, a string of airfields alongside them (the Northwest Staging Route), and a constellation of weather stations rendered the New North a marker of an emerging world order.⁴¹ As Lloyd surmised for readers of the journal *International Affairs* in 1944, “Now there are no longer any remote lands, soon there will no longer be unfamiliar peoples ... Internationalism is no longer something that one favours or dislikes. It has happened”.⁴²

Where Cameron and Stefansson had suggested the North was over-studied and misunderstood, Lloyd contended the North was unknown. “What do we know about Northern Canada?”, he asked, “Remarkably little!”⁴³ Such a position highlights how expectations for knowledge production had shifted from the Linnean impulse of classification in the mid-1800s, to debates between professional and amateurs in the early 1900s, and to the demands placed on scientists and engineers during the Second World War. Military officials required information on permafrost, the frozen-yet-fragile land upon which transportation projects had to be built, and about the climatic and environmental conditions that might impede the mobility and capabilities of ground forces. Defence, which had always been a “natural” feature of the notoriously foreboding region, was now a scientific problem.

Responding to these needs, New North authors from the 1940s began to lament that the Canadian and Alaskan hinterlands had been previously neglected, by scientists and by the state. Lloyd was an instigator in the creation of the Arctic Institute of North America, a bi-national agency that worked through nascent governmental laboratories – like the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory outside of Barrow, Alaska – and through contracts with university scholars to generate research on a range of biological, physiological, geological and ecological questions about the North.⁴⁴ But for many, there was no amount of data collection that could turn back time. Looking forward in the New North meant coming to terms with the shocking collision of a primitive people and modern society. Lloyd summed it up in a statement worth quoting at length:

Into this rather backward, and in many ways primitive society, war came with particular force. Accustomed to neglect, the people of the north, especially the northwest, suddenly found themselves among crowds of contractors' laborers, thousands of troops and more elaborate mechanical equipment than they had dreamed could exist. They had been without adequate trails. Now they found themselves supplied with a military

⁴¹See Kenneth S. Coates and William R. Morrison, “Soldier-Workers: The US Army Corps of Engineers and the Northwest Defense Projects, 1942–1946,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 62, no. 3 (August, 1993), 273–304.

⁴²Trevor Lloyd, “The New North,” *Canadian Affairs*, 1, no. 3 (February 15, 194), 4.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁴John C. Reed and Andreas G. Ronhovde, *Arctic Laboratory: A History (1947–1966) of the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory at Point Barrow, Alaska*, prepared under Office of Naval Research contract N00014-70-A-0219-0001, published by the Arctic Institute of North America, 1967, 3–6 and 32–40. See also Robert MacDonald, “Challenges and Accomplishments: A Celebration of the Arctic Institute of North America,” *Arctic* 58, no. 4 (December, 2006), 440–51.

road. Their rivers had heard for years the painful thrash of stern wheel steamers built a generation ago. Now they became highways of commerce used by large and powerful diesel tugs and strings of newly built barges.⁴⁵

For New North writers, regret for the past was inseparable from hope for the future – one could not exist without the other.⁴⁶ Only by interpreting history as something to mourn, could one argue forcefully for correcting past trajectories and implementing future possibilities.⁴⁷ We have already seen this play out with Cameron’s dismissal of British Empire and Stefansson’s frustration over the ignorance about the North across civilizations and throughout time. By the 1940s, this rhetorical commitment required New North writers to diagnose New World forms of colonialism as a problem – to a certain extent. Lloyd reckoned that the Canadian government had looked after the Inuit “in a half-hearted and hesitant manner”. “As a result”, he continued, “there has been some exploitation by white men; there is disease, neglect and undernourishment, and no serious attempt has been made to train, for example, the Eskimo in manual skills for which many of them are well suited”.⁴⁸ Following this diagnosis, however, was the prescription of more governmental involvement not less. Lloyd saw only two options for moving forward with Inuit administration – continued isolation or complete integration – and both options necessitated an active state presence, while avoiding colonial-like behaviour. Isolation, Lloyd decided, would take “extraordinary care, a thorough scientific study of [Inuit] ways, money, and an informed and enlightened electorate”.⁴⁹ The obvious downside to this plan was that the natural resources on what would essentially become reservations would not be developed. On the other hand, complete integration necessitated an even larger dose of governmental intervention. The geographer concluded,

If the far north is to be developed, co-operation of the native peoples will be needed. Such training will take several years. A beginning should be made by choosing some intelligent youths and attaching them as apprentices to northern air bases.

Positioning themselves between regret and hope, between the past and the future, New North writers after the Second World War also made a space for the state as a force for altering the path of history.⁵⁰

Like Cameron and Stefansson, Lloyd projected revisions to geographical understanding based on changes unfolding in the northwestern corner of North America.

⁴⁵Lloyd, 10.

⁴⁶Grace has pointed out that the trope of neglect or forgetting within the history of Canada’s North is a “trend of ambivalence,” of wanting to recognize a national northern identity and regretting the inescapably of the cold, the climate, and the political boundaries. Grace, 46–7. A similar trope is evident throughout early Alaskan historiography, especially in the writings of C.L. Andrews and Ernest Gruening. See C.L. Andrews, *The Story of Alaska*, (Seattle: Lowman and Hanford, Co., 1931); and Ernest Gruening, *The State of Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1954). Gruening’s chapter titles include “The Era of Total Neglect,” “The Era of Mild but Unenlightened Interest,” and “The Era of Flagrant Neglect.”

⁴⁷Emilie Cameron has written about emotional geographies in the Canadian Arctic in the eighteenth century. See Emilie Cameron, “To Mourn’: Emotional Geographies and Natural Histories in the Canadian Arctic,” in L. Bondi, L. Cameron, J. Davidson and M. Smith (eds.) *Emotion, Place, and Culture*, (London: Ashgate, 2009) 163–86.

⁴⁸Lloyd, 9.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

The aeroplane had shrunken the planet and Canada seemed to benefit from this situation. He assured readers that “In a world of transport, Canada has a strategic location second only to the USSR”.⁵¹ Where the Arctic had been imagined as a place-to-be-passed through, or the fringe of a continental empire made possible by water networks, or a Polar Mediterranean, Lloyd advocated for picturing the globe from the Arctic’s point of view. For Canadians, this perspective might be “something of a shock”. “Accustomed to thinking of ourselves as rather away from the beaten track”, Lloyd suggested, “we find that we are heirs to a central location in the world of tomorrow”.⁵² The projection of a nationalist and northern cartography related to Canadian anxieties that US military forces responsible for the CANOL pipeline and Alaskan Highway might not retreat from the north and instead result in an informal annexation of Dominion land. Lloyd made such suspicions evident when he closed his article by warning of possible American occupations in the subarctic.⁵³

A fourth New North of the 1950s repeated and intensified many of these elements from the 1940s. The location shifted to the Western Arctic coast, where concerns about continental security spawned the creation of the Distant Early Warning line, a chain of radar stations built every 50 miles from the Alaska–Yukon territory border to Greenland.⁵⁴ As the Second World War became the Cold War, the absence of combat required no immediate engagement but far more comprehensive planning. In this regard, the aeroplane provided exciting and previously unfathomable opportunities for militarization, scientific research, economic development and administration. As we saw in Robertson’s epigraph at the outset of this essay, mineral industries – not those based on fur, muskox, or reindeer – took centre stage in the mid-century New North. War- and peace-time needs for oil, uranium, zinc, copper, iron ore and lead linked the North with southern industrial centres, just as deposits of these same resources became exhausted elsewhere on the globe.⁵⁵ The possibilities inherent in locating and reaching northern oil, gas and mineral reserves created a sharp break with Norths of yore. Importantly, because non-renewable resources were of interest – not the renewable kind – and shipment of extracted materials did not have to contend with the freezing and thawing of rivers, nature no longer seemed a barrier to northern affairs. The governor of Alaska, Ernest Gruening, banished popular concerns about an Arctic that was doomed to underdevelopment because of its climate as “climythology”. In his “Future of the North” speech before Carleton University students and faculty in Ottawa, Gordon Robertson noted that

⁵¹Ibid., 5.

⁵²Ibid., 3–4.

⁵³Ibid., 15.

⁵⁴Matthew Farish, “Frontier Engineering: From the Globe to the Body in the Cold War Arctic,” *The Canadian Geographer* 50, no. 2 (2006), 177–96.; David Neufeld, “Commemorating the Cold War in Canada: Considering the DEW line,” *The Public Historian* 20, issue 1 (1998), 9–19.

⁵⁵R.G. Robertson, “The Future of the North,” a speech given before Carleton University, 1957, “Northern Development” folder, Dick Hill Collection, Inuvik Centennial Library, Inuvik, Northwest Territories. Robertson was optimistic for mineral development, given the evaluation provided him by geologists: “Geologists tell us that we can expect to find virtually every mineral except those laid down under tropical conditions.”

northern temperatures would present an issue only if “we saw the future in terms of growing pineapples”.⁵⁶ The “frigid zone” could be reduced to a cost factor and active governments could shoulder capital investment to pave the way for private companies to exploit natural resources in the north.⁵⁷

While the aeroplane still had to deal with environmental issues (like landing on lakes in the winter), the appeal of technology and mineral extraction allowed Robertson to reorganize the entire drama of the North.⁵⁸ It remained a place long forgotten and misrepresented by southern Canadians.⁵⁹ But with the potential of a New North dotted with mines and connected to the south through aircraft, the Old North now looked more like one restricted by limits of the fur trade and water-based transport. “The north was left to the missionaries, the fur traders, the Eskimos, and the Indians”, Robertson announced. Indeed, the short episodes of the Klondike Gold Rush and war-time exploitation of bomb-making material on Great Bear Lake indicated that minerals had determined the history of the far north all along. Robertson suggested to listeners that “the gleam of gold or radium occasionally pierced this darkness in our national mind but only for a moment”. By pitting the New North as an answer to this history of boom and bust, Robertson implied that the future would bring a more sustainable, if more dispersed, pattern of development.

Because travel by air collapsed distance and time in ways the schooner and steamer could not, the clash of “Neolithic man” and “Atomic man” became a top priority for northern administrators in the New North of the 1950s.⁶⁰ Public outcry over reported cases of Inuit starvation over the winter of 1953–1954 became a national embarrassment for Canadians, tarnishing their sterling international reputation for human rights.⁶¹ Civil servants and scientists defined the “Eskimo problem” through the paucity of available social services, pointing repeatedly to Alaska as a comparative case. There, the expansion of the reindeer industry during the post-First World War era created a network of villages, initially used by Bureau of Education teachers and Bureau of Indian Affairs officers. This infrastructure could be repurposed through town cooperatives, which would help local communities pick themselves up by their own bootstraps and begin a devolution of power to the north.⁶²

⁵⁶Robertson, 10. On “Climythyology,” see Ernest Gruening, “Climythyology: Ernest Gruening’s Address to the American Meteorological Society,” in Ernest Gruening, ed., *An Alaskan Reader, 1867–1967* (New York: Meredith Press, 1966), 367–72.

⁵⁷There were a variety of responses to the special problems of Arctic nature in the Cold War, from attempting to overcome the land to adapting to its natural limits. See Janet Martin-Nielsen, “The other cold war: the United States and Greenland’s ice sheet environment, 1948–1966,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, 38 (2012) 69–80.; and P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Matthew Farish, “The Cold War on Canadian Soil: Militarizing a Northern Environment,” *Environmental History* 12 (October, 2007): 920–50.

⁵⁸See Piper, 47–78. See also Marionne Cronin, “Shaped by the Land: The Emergence of the Canadian Bush Plane,” <http://www.niche-canada.org/node/10132> (accessed November 15, 2012).

⁵⁹Robertson, 7. “The [North] was an oblivion of ice and snow and howling wind in which no thought even of the possibility of a future entered.”

⁶⁰“Symposium on the Arctic,” 135.

⁶¹Peter Clancy, “The Making of Eskimo Policy, 1952–1962: The Life and Times of the Eskimo Affairs Committee,” *Arctic* 40, no. 3 (September, 1987), 191–7.

⁶²*Ibid.*

Canadian officials bemoaned the sparse state presence in the vast northern frontier, even as they looked past their own historic experiences with reindeer and administration in the Mackenzie Delta. Continuing the trope of neglect, Robertson wondered why previous Canadian leaders had not built “one single school, not even a one-room school” in any location other than Yellowknife.⁶³ His New North would make up for past mistakes by issuing social services through family allowance payments, old age and blind pensions, hospital care for cases of tuberculosis, and education through residential schooling and vocational training. Education became a crucial space for converting the Old North to the New. There was “no need for an education” to “chase a walrus or a caribou”, but such knowledge was “vital” to be “a clerk in a mining office or a successful carpenter”. As Stefansson had imagined reindeer in the 1920s, Robertson saw school teachers and sociologists as helping native northerners adjust to the “disruption of old patterns of life, old customs, [and] old standards of value”.⁶⁴ While Inuit in Alaska and Canada had known missionaries, teachers and northern police before, the arrival of hordes of doctors, nurses, social workers, engineers and Northern Service Officers, and the establishment of entire towns dedicated to governmental administration of people and nature (Inuvik and Frobisher Bay) indicated a New North.⁶⁵

Robertson turned to history to re-imagine the state’s role in private development, too. Taking the trope of neglect in another direction, he complained about the ways northern resources had been laying dormant throughout the first half the twentieth century. “The Canadian north is one of the last great undeveloped regions on this globe”, he announced. “There are few other parts of the world of great size that have not been occupied – insofar as they are capable of it – and to a substantial degree exploited”.⁶⁶ As Lloyd had done with plans of isolation or integration, Robertson created a void in the past which could only be filled by the state. Northern underdevelopment was the “old story of any frontier area”: transportation facilities were too expensive to build without a viable market for minerals, and resource exploitation would not proceed without transportation infrastructure in place. Both US and Canadian officials called upon the public to break this “vicious circle” by investing in railroads, roads and airfields.⁶⁷ Of course, in building support for these plans, New North authors had to gloss over the fur trade, commercial whaling and the introduction of reindeer to erase past traces of frontier exploitation and intervention.

In the 1970s, a fifth New North appeared, reversing the drive toward centralization apparent in the 1950s. While officials in the US and Canada continued to imagine government’s role as using public capital to provide the “infrastructure” for

⁶³Robertson, 7.

⁶⁴Ibid., 20–1.

⁶⁵For an interesting discussion of Northern Service Officers, their relation to the Distant Early Warning Line construction, and change in the Western Arctic region, see David Neufeld, “Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line: A Preliminary Assessment of its Role and Effects upon Northern Canada” Revised for the Arctic Institute of North America, May, 2002, 16. Neufeld writes, “The NSO were to facilitate communications between northern construction crews, government agencies, and native people. Basically they were to protect the interests of the Inuit and Inuvialuit and prevent any local difficulties from slowing the pace of defence construction ... Hired to represent the best interests of the Inuit and Inuvialuit and so encourage their participation in local government, the NSO were instructed to maintain tight control over the relations between aboriginal peoples and non-natives.”

⁶⁶R.G. Robertson, “The Future of the North,” 6.

⁶⁷Ibid., 12–3.

private economic development, they believed new structures and technologies could empower Inuit to lead this development in tandem with corporate elite. This turn toward the community was in part a reaction to decolonization in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, and observers often compared the “underdeveloped” Arctic to these other regions.⁶⁸ It also drew from the 1968 oil strike at Prudhoe Bay, which confirmed for multinational companies, ecologists and Chamber of Commerce-types in Alberta and Alaska alike that the Arctic was best conceived of as the “Middle North” – a reference to its similarities to the Middle East in terms of its resource-riches and state of development.⁶⁹

The Arctic Institute of North America’s 1969 conference, “Community Development in the Middle North”, provides a window on this new New North imaginary, and an example of how scientists became more forceful arbiters of social, economic, political and ecological change over the last quarter of the twentieth century. At the meeting in Hanover, New Hampshire, scientists, politicians, developers and military officials gathered to chart the future of the Institute’s involvement in northern affairs, and to make specific recommendations for a series of conferences in the early 1970s to connect ecological research, policy formation and economic development. Testimony from the Carrothers Commission report of 1966 – which recommended Fort Smith as the Territorial capital of the Northwest Territories – had indicated a desire among Inuit for an “authoritative voice” in northern matters.⁷⁰ The Institute marshalled this desire to position itself as a clearing house for correlating and inspiring community development efforts “to meet the specific needs and aspirations of northern peoples”. In order to do so, it had to develop a status independent from, but connected to, government and industry. Because of its “unusual status as a private organization” and its “close relations with both the Canadian and US governments and with commercial and academic institutions”, the Arctic Institute could prevent the “repetition of past errors” of colonial history. The Institute also pulled from stereotypes of native northerners to identify its role as an advocacy agency. The conference attendees wrote, “The resident populations and traditional cultures of the North can accomplish little except in association with enterprise, technology, and resources from the south”.⁷¹ It seemed that empowerment in the New North required as a prerequisite an image of northerners as powerless.

Starting in the 1970s, and arguably continuing to today, science seems to be both the problem and the solution in New North stories. Trevor Lloyd – the geographer who articulated a vision of the New North of the immediate post-Second World War era – gave opening remarks to conference participants on a February morning in New England. He lamented how, over the first half of the 1900s, governments and scientists had developed independently of one another in the North, such that Arctic Alaska – and knowledge about it – was separate from Arctic Canada, even if the region containing these places was ecologically connected. Lloyd

⁶⁸“Community Development in the Middle North: Report of a Conference Seminar, Sponsored by the Arctic Institute of North America,” Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, February 26, 27, 28 and March, 1, 2, A-3. This document found in the Dick Hill Collection, Inuvik Centennial Library, Inuvik, NT.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., 3. “Gallop change is as much a feature of the North as elsewhere and this compounds living problems for a small and voiceless northern population.”

⁷¹Ibid., 7–20.

accused historical interveners with “balkanizing the North”, thus presenting the Arctic Institute of North America as an agency that could “bridge these different culture zones”. It was clear that the explosion of research activity associated with the search for oil and gas meant that social and natural scientists penetrated all facets of everyday life in the Arctic. One of the conference reports included, as an opening epigraph, a statement from Eric Kierans, Minister of Communications: “The average Eskimo family consists of the father and mother, five children, an aunt or uncle, one or more grandparents, an anthropologist and a sociologist”.⁷²

The answer, for scientists and residents of Arctic towns, was not less research in the New North but more local control over it. Arctic Institute scientists called for the creation of multiple task forces on subjects ranging from mineral development to the creation of craft industries and education policy: “Local representatives should be co-opted to the task force(s) to give an all round picture of each community situation”.⁷³ These sentiments were shared in the north, too, even if conference organizers were unsuccessful in recruiting northerners to attend the meeting in the south. In Inuvik, scientists stationed at the Inuvik Research Laboratory collaborated with local residents to convene the Mackenzie Delta Environmental Project, a “communication program to acquaint the residents of the Mackenzie Delta with present government and industrial activities so that they can be more involved in the ‘action’”. The Project was itself part of a larger community group called the Mackenzie Institute, which brought citizens and researchers together to share knowledge and expertise and to build capacity for development programmes.⁷⁴ These institutional structures paralleled the development of the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, and many observers in the 1960s and 1970s hoped for a similar University of the North in Canada to act as a hybrid space for local engagement with research, economic development and policy formation.⁷⁵

⁷²Quoted in “Man in the North Technical Paper: Communications Study/Part II Arctic Institute of North America,” found in Dick Hill Collection, Inuvik Centennial Library, Inuvik, Canada.

⁷³“Community Development in the Middle North: Report of a Conference Seminar, Sponsored by the Arctic Institute of North America,” 13.

⁷⁴Rose Mary Thrasher, “Mackenzie Delta Environmental Project.”; “Introductory Prospecting for Northerners,” and “A New Northern Educational Institute.” My sincere thanks to Dick Hill for providing me these documents from his personal collection. See also *Inuvik Drum* October 10, 1968, 3, no. 25, “Public Notice” which announced the formation of the Mackenzie Institute and its objectives.

⁷⁵*Inuvik Drum*, September 26, 1968, 3, no. 24. In this edition of the local paper, the editors ran a reprint of *The Canadian Forum* from 1968 that is worth quoting at length: “Development specialists have recently come to realize that information and knowledge are forms of capital and of production. In Alaska, the booming state university located at Fairbanks contrasts strongly with the moribund conditions of the mining industry. Gold mining employs 150 people in the area; the University has a staff of 570. The “knowledge” industry forms a vital and growing part of Alaska’s economy. In the summer of 1967, activities on the campus ranged from the Arctic Institute of North America’s international conference on circumpolar health problems to a training course for sawmill operators ... Although Canada prides itself on being a northern nation, it does not yet possess a northern university ... Many “Northern” problems are similar to those in the developing countries. The lessons we can learn in the north may have a vital part to play in understanding how man can control and use his social and physical environment. The balance is delicate in the north, and research there can tell us how the balance is tipping.” The University of the North did not come to fruition, but Yukon College, Aurora College, and Ilisagvik College are all products of this line of thinking. See Amanda Graham, “The University that Wasn’t: The University of Canada North, 1970–1985,” M.A. Thesis, Lakehead University, 1994.

While the idea of a “New North” had always involved internal tensions, the 1970s stories became quite contradictory. At a 1968 meeting of the Alaskan Science Conference (in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory), ecologist Cowan McTaggart described the human “appetite for energy and minerals” as unleashing untold ecological and human consequences across the world, and potentially throughout the north.⁷⁶ Scientists pointed to these concerns to advocate for the expansion of wilderness areas on the Beaufort Sea coast – namely to grow the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (legislated into being in 1960) into an internationally protected area to prevent the most-likely route for pipelines out of the region.⁷⁷ Prime Minister Jean Chretien redressed ecological protection as colonialism, because locking up the north as a sanctuary would squash Inuit aspirations for jobs and leading roles in oil extraction. Development had become both imperialism and decolonization, and conservation had become the tried and true trope of “neglect and indifference”.⁷⁸ All of these concerns informed the Arctic Institute’s recommendations moving forward from the 1969 conference on community development.

In a two-part technical paper released in 1971, the Arctic Institute of North America laid out detailed plans for supporting massive communications programmes in the North to address these social and ecological dimensions of resource exploitation. Their audience was broad, including “interested persons in industry, government, the professions, academia, and the public at large”, but they also attempted to speak to northern residents. Inuit leaders in the Western Arctic also turned to radio broadcasting, local newspapers, television programmes and research collaboratives to circulate concerns about political representation, ecological protection, and their desire to administer sustainable economic development.⁷⁹ Inuit voices were as diverse as any other, however – some northern residents wanted control of their own land and the resources in it; others were fine to let oil companies in as long as they did not interfere with trapping; and still others offered diatribes against the wholesale destruction of wildlife, the tundra and the ocean, signs

⁷⁶“19th Alaskan Science Conference at Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada, August 26–30, 1968” printed by the Alaska Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 7–8. Found in Dick Hill Collection, Inuvik Centennial Library, Inuvik, Canada.

⁷⁷University of California, “George Collins: The Art and Politics of Park Panning and Preservation: An Interview,” Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, 1980, 215–25.

⁷⁸Jean Chretien, “Plain Talk on Northern Development,” a speech given before the Inuvik Chamber of Commerce, June 1972, Dick Hill Collection, Inuvik Centennial Library. “It has become fashionable in some southern circles to call for a freeze on northern development for two, three or five years while southerners think out what they believe would be a better northern future. Those I call the “Toronto-Montreal Professional Northerners” would halt development of jobs and futures for all of you here ... A freeze in this vast land would be a return to the days of neglect and indifference. It would make it impossible to achieve our national goals in the North. It would thrust northerners back into a new Dark Age.” 4.

⁷⁹A recent speech before the Inuit Studies Conference by Nellie Cournoyea, current Chair and CEO of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, makes clear the role of northern communications programs in building community political engagement. See Nellie Cournoyea, “Adaptation and Resilience: The Inuvialuit Story,” a speech before the 18th Inuit Studies Conference, Washington, DC, October 26, 2012. See also Natasha Lyons, “Inuvialuit Rising: The Evolution of Inuvialuit Identity in the Modern Era,” *Alaska Journal of Anthropology*, 7, no. 2, (2009), 71–3.

of which were already evident through seismic exploration in the 1950s and 1960s.⁸⁰ Southerners often pointed to a changing, unstable northern environment, whether social or natural, as a cause for concern about cultural loss. These concerns were inflamed when northerners described the possibility that oil development might weaken cultural traditions. But, as Paul Sabin has noted, for Inuit, Dene and Metis residents in the Mackenzie Delta during the 1970s, “tradition” did not refer to

a preserved specimen from the ancient past, but rather a way of life that had evolved in concert with the fur trade, missions, mines, and transportation infrastructure. Just because these people lived in history, however, did not condemn them to be victims of it.

By the time sweeping land-claims decisions redrew lines of jurisdiction in Arctic Alaska and Canada, the region’s future had been caricatured into winner-take-all choices between environmental conservation and economic development, industrialization and cultural preservation.⁸¹

The Old North at play in the New North of the 1970s echoed the legacies of British imperialism Cameron appealed to in 1910. Now, continental empires marked by western expansion were fading into the past, just as overseas empires had given way to Cameron’s Belts of Fur and Wheat. At the conference on community development, participants dismissed the history of “filling up” the prairies that allowed both the USA and Canada to become powerful nations. The North of the future would not be found distributed along the westward-marching line of the rural frontier, but concentrated in urban areas.⁸² This was not a simple repetition of Lloyd or Robertson’s visions of the North in the world of air travel. In the 1970s, a tightly focused and urbanized development scheme was a response to the end of colonialism. Working with northern communities was a means of avoiding “past errors” and making good on a century of neglect. Such logic increasingly aligned the Arctic with the Tropics in a post-colonial geography of development. “Urban-industrial society which has extended its long shadow over tropical Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia shows signs of doing the same in the North”, the Arctic Institute cautioned in its final conference report. “The problems there are going to be similar, and so must be the solutions”.⁸³ Once again, Old and New Norths reinforced one another as the Arctic took its seat on a shuffling world stage.

Conclusion: history, geography and knowledge in the New North

While each of its iterations has been unique, the common forces in the New North are enduring as they are transformative. Technology, capital, science and state power

⁸⁰Peter Usher’s interviews with Western Arctic Inuit in 1973 and 1974 provide a great indication of the variety of opinions on oil development. See Peter Usher, “Notes on interviews,” on file at the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Center, Inuvik Northwest Territories, File E 99 INT, accessed January 27, 2011. See also Paul Sabin, “Voices from the Hydrocarbon Frontier: Canada’s Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry (1974–1977),” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring, 1995), 17–48.

⁸¹Sabin, 17–48.

⁸²“Community Development in the Middle North: Report of a Conference Seminar, Sponsored by the Arctic Institute of North America,” A-4.

⁸³*Ibid.*, A-3.

have repeatedly come together to create and recreate the North over time. From the steamer to satellites, from whale oil to petroleum, from turning against the British Empire to decolonizing North America – these forces have overhauled relationships between people and nature. But New North narratives do not just observe change; they attempt to structure and direct it. To make sense of and manage a metamorphosing place, New North authors situated what first appeared as uncharacteristic regional phenomena as something more recognizable: change in the North was an echo or effect of a longer stream of time and a broader web of social relations. Such appeals to history and geography always depended on the New North storyteller, but they all intended to sanction outsiders' interventions in a land that did not belong to them.

The deployment of the adjective “new” in these stories reflects an embedded view of the northern frontier as culturally, ecologically and historically “exceptional,” or as somehow shielded from the rest of the world in space and time.⁸⁴ When conservationists, ecologists and other members of the Arctic Institute of North America worried about the expansion of oil economies in Alaska and north west Canada into a “New” Arctic in the 1970s, for example, their concern was invigorated by their perception that northern communities lived in “close contact” with the surrounding environment. Here, as in many other instances, an Old North had been called into being as a foil for imaginations of the future.⁸⁵ The presumptions of difference at this moment were threefold: southerners did not live so closely to nature; the north had not arrived on the stage of modern history because its residents had not yet transcended natural limits; and southern nature can be sufficiently distinguished from northern nature. Without these common-sense ideologies at play, this observation, like others in the century of New North stories, would be a non-starter rather than a point for intervention. As Sherrill Grace and Joseph E. Taylor III have argued, then, stories like the New North tell us as much about the people who tell them – their social status, their epistemologies, how they define the north, and how they understand history – as they do about the day-to-day complexities of the circumpolar world.⁸⁶

Readings of history often created paradoxes in the New North. Consider the arguments made between 1910 and 1971 about sovereignty. In order to assert that the Arctic was being claimed successfully in the present, authors had to construe past attempts as failures. Agnes Deans Cameron condemned British imperialism just as Lloyd and Robertson showed regret at mid-century for Canada's stunted northward

⁸⁴As historian Joseph E. Taylor III argued, “Similar forces affect many places, yet nobody else talks of a New New England, New Amazon, or New Nepal.” See Taylor, 155–65. For an insightful read on the place of “exceptional” discourse in a contemporary Arctic Alaskan case, see Josslyn Cassady, “State Calculations of Cultural Survival in Environmental Risk Assessment: Consequences for Alaska Natives,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 24, Issue 4, (2010) 451–71. Alun Anderson discusses how it is time to consider the Arctic as a “region unto itself” and also worries about the consequences of this line of thinking. “By writing about the Arctic as a region, though, I don't want to reinforce the notion of its being a separate, distant, remote place. Nothing could be further from reality; the Arctic is ever more entangled with the south and ever more at the mercy of decisions made elsewhere, often without the slightest consideration for the top of the world.” Anderson, 9.

⁸⁵Grace, 16–7. Grace writes, “True of any discursive formation, the North that is deadly, cold, barren, lifeless, isolated, mysterious, which allowed for the playing out of heroic masculinity and victorious southern technology also contains its opposite – the North of sublime beauty, abundance, natural resources, waiting to be exploited and of great spiritual power – because discursive formations exists by negating or subsuming what it is not.”

⁸⁶Taylor, 155–65. Grace, 266–7. Grace calls this a “politics of location,” because where one sits in space and time determines their view of the North.

expansion in the early twentieth century. In so doing, authors yoked their authority as voices of the New North to the past. Only by erasing or defacing history, could the Arctic be deemed new. Only by redeeming history, could New North authors make history, and enshrine themselves and their hopes for the north on the historical record.⁸⁷

This paradox extends to the geographies of the New North as well. In imagining a place that did not yet exist, or was on the verge of coming into existence, New North authors often relied on existing geographical regions, concepts, or relations. Even as the Arctic was being rendered anew through political, economic, ecological or cultural change, these unusual changes could be understood by readers through the example of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Great Lakes, or Tropical Africa. In order to rescue the Arctic from obscurity and demonstrate its position on the leading edge of global change, New North authors were often forced to allude to the region's connections to history and the planet as we have thus far known it.

These relations with history and geography are the scaffolding upon which the newest New North is hung, too. Dissections of the New North of today (and tomorrow) have entrenched the notion of the Arctic-as-exotic to provide a cautionary tale about how the world will someday look. If the North is changing, so must the earth, they say. These tendencies have filled the New North with even more paradoxes about the past and the future, about nature and culture and about south and north. If urbanization at home had inspired pastoral dreams abroad in the interwar period, the post-Prudhoe and post-land claims North has fuelled obsessions with climate change's impacts in a seemingly untouched northern zone. In the potent symbol of the polar bear stranded on an ice floe – invoked by Al Gore, and emblazoned on the cover of Alun Anderson's book – we see how global warming threatens to destabilize an already fragile ecosystem. But, we also see why contemporary Americans and Canadians tend to think of the Arctic as an unpeopled wilderness.⁸⁸ For its full effect, the newest New North requires an Old North that is a remote and unchanging place. Because scientists frame the Arctic as outside of modernity, they can treat its so-called pristine environment as a baseline for measuring climate-induced change. Because bureaucrats and businessmen portray the Arctic as experiencing globalization for the first time, they can label the arrival of oil companies as the dawn of a new era.

At the same time, the newest New North contains themes that remove history more subtly. In his prediction of the world in 2050, geographer Laurence Smith provides the clearest example of a global Arctic commanded by its local residents. Smith shows how citizens across the world will abandon flooded coastal cities and underperforming farms in the south to find open land in the north.⁸⁹ There, Inuit and First Nations communities will negotiate the terms of development and land

⁸⁷D. Graham Burnett has made similar claims for the authority of British explorers. See D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of all they surveyed: exploration, geography, and a British El Dorado*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 25–66. Burnett writes, “taking possession always implied a previous *lack* of possession.”

⁸⁸Anderson notes this in his introduction: “All too often, the city folk down south forget that the Arctic is a peopled place, and are unaware of how its inhabitants live. That can lead to some serious misunderstandings, few echoes of which reach the south.” Alun Anderson, *After the Ice*, 7.

⁸⁹Smith, *The New North*, 5–20.

use, given the existing land-claims agreements in northern North America. In this case, changes in the future turn historical decisions about jurisdiction and indigenous rights into mechanisms for redeeming a deeper history of colonialism.⁹⁰ But, in order for such projections to have meaning, readers must imagine that colonial experience differently than New North authors have throughout the twentieth century. Cameron, Stefansson, Lloyd, Robertson and members of the Arctic Institute of North America described attempts at colonizing that either failed, remained concentrated in particular areas, involved significant negotiation with local communities, or were thwarted by a hostile nature. For Smith's future to appear startling or refreshing, the past needs to be written as winner's history in the strict dichotomies of colonizers and colonized, leaving little room for middle ground, grey area, or complex understandings of colonial encounters.

In addition to history and geography, knowledge is clearly at issue in Anderson and Smith's New Norths. The role of science in the newest New North should not surprise us, because the story's appeal to originality takes some of its purchase from shifting scientific practices and applications. When scientists looked north in the late 1800s, they saw a field of knowledge that was over-studied. By the interwar era, the North was misunderstood. In the 1970s, all scientific data that had been collected to that point were misguided. Today, Anderson, a research biologist, suggests the International Polar Year has produced an unprecedented amount of research that remains unsynthesized.⁹¹

These views of Arctic science reflect the creation of new conceptual and technological tools that rendered the far north a frontier for knowledge, a place of exception for scientific communities the world over. The aeroplane, for example, provided the basis for photo-mapping practices which allowed the disciplines of geology, geography, botany and ecology to extend a different set of research questions to northern terrain.⁹² As a result, the north appeared as new ground. Changes in knowledge production were (and are) not always internally guided – they are connected to goals for development. When scientists conceived of the Arctic as a void that could be filled by more (or more efficient) study, they repeated what others had done with Arctic history and geography: they sought to apprehend the region so as to license their

⁹⁰There are indications that elements of Smith's predictions are already afoot. As Bob Reiss illustrates, Alaskan Inupiat, led by former mayor of the North Slope Borough Edward Itta, are working with Shell Oil, the state, and federal government in the US to find a path toward sustainable development of north slope oil reserves. See Reiss, *The Eskimo and the Oil Man*, 1–23. In Greenland, the arrival of Big Oil is a harbinger of economic independence and self-rule, not capitalist invasion and native resistance. See Kirsten Thisted, "Inuit without Igloos: Documenting the Arctic Transition" 18th Inuit Studies Conference, Washington, DC, October 25, 2012. At a recent International Polar Year conference, Inuvialuit leaders called on scientists to provide more data on the ecological and social impacts of development so that they could design more sustainable extraction programs. Bob Simpson, "Inuvialuit Research Agenda," presentation before the NWT International Polar Year Results Conference, January 20, 2011.

⁹¹Alun Anderson, *After the Ice*, 9. "Nothing has driven the circumpolar view forward more than the International Polar Year that lasted until the spring of 2009. Thousands of scientists – natural and social – tackled the myriad issues that are needed to form a big picture of the Arctic. My worry now is not that too little is known, but that so much is known which has not been synthesized."

⁹²Both Liza Piper and Stephen Bocking have made similar claims for the subarctic and the Cold War Arctic. See Liza Piper, 32–58; and Stephen Bocking, "A Disciplined Geography: Aviation, Science, and the Cold War in Northern Canada, 1945–1960," *Technology and Culture*, 50, no. 2, (April, 2009), 265–90.

authority over it. This is nowhere more evident than in mid-century concerns about permafrost (and the lack of scientific understanding of it) as an obstacle to the goal of constructing governmental hubs and oil facilities on the frozen earth. As Ricardo D. Salvatore has argued in the Latin American context, the recurrence of enunciations concerning the “very possibility of knowing” the frontier became a strategy for legitimizing bureaucratic, corporate and academic interventions in foreign lands. A similar role seems clear for Arctic science in northern empires.⁹³

The latest New North authors show great sensitivities to the landscape of history, geography and knowledge in the Arctic of today and tomorrow. In other venues, however, Inuit agency is being unduly contained through New North discourse and practices, especially as they relate to science. In her recent survey of the “human dimensions of climate change” literature, geographer Emilie Cameron has convincingly shown that histories of colonialism are obscured and overlooked, while indigenous actors are relegated as local bystanders and research consultants, blocking opportunities for seats at the decision-making table.⁹⁴ At meetings of the Arctic Council in 2011, Mary Simon and Inuit Circumpolar Council president Duane Smith announced that Inuit voices were being “marginalized” in discussions of the intergovernmental group, primarily because the Secretariat for Inuit was underfunded and overloaded with scientific grey literature, leaving Inuit leaders incapable of balancing a scientific-technocratic view of the region with their own views, comments and critiques. This is ironic, given that Simon helped create the Arctic Council and this body has been instrumental in catalyzing international attention to climate change.⁹⁵

In 2009, geographer Michael Bravo openly wondered why historians had been “so silent on the recent politics of climate change?”⁹⁶ In this essay, I have raised a voice about the New North stories deployed to understand Arctic change over the last century, from the arrival of commercial whalers to rapid warming occurring at high latitudes. As it was for Agnes Deans Cameron in 1910, the New North remains today a powerful trope for redrawing lines between north and south, and east and west. In bridging the actual and the potential, New North storytellers create a rhetorical space where it is possible to define and redefine, to fix and loosen the Arctic. At their worst, these stories presented the Arctic as a vacuum, eliding colonial histories to authorize the continued exploitation of nature and labour. At their best, these narratives confronted previous injustices to redistribute power and wealth more equally between southern institutions and northern communities.

⁹³Ricardo D. Salvatore, “The Enterprise of Knowledge: Representational Machines of Informal Empire,” in Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherin C. Legrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore, eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of US-Latin American Relations*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 90. On the role of science in northern empire, see Richard C. Powell, “‘The rigours of an arctic experiment’: the precarious authority of field practices in the Canadian High Arctic, 1958–1970” *Environment and Planning A* 39 (2007) 1794–1811; and Peter Kulchyski and Frank Tester, *Kiumajut (Talking Back): Game Management and Inuit Rights, 1900–1970*, (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2007).

⁹⁴Emilie S. Cameron, “Securing Indigenous politics: A critique of the vulnerability and adaptation approach to the human dimensions of climate change in the Canadian Arctic,” *Global Environmental Change* 22 (2012): 103–14.

⁹⁵Becky Rynor, “Indigenous voices ‘marginalized’ at Arctic Council: Inuit Leaders,” <http://www.ipolitics.ca/2011/11/07/indigenous-voices-marginalized-at-arctic-council-inuit-leaders/> (accessed November 15, 2012).

⁹⁶Bravo, 264.

There is no doubt that an open ocean, melted permafrost, altered seasons and unpredictable migrations present unconventional ecological conditions in the Arctic. But, if history is any guide, it will be science, state power, capital and technology – and New North stories themselves – that shape the lasting response to climate change. For these reasons, our scholarly hackles should rise anytime we see the word “new” in front of “north” – not just because it signals unexpected and unfamiliar dimensions of Arctic life, or because it flags a bid to seize authority on northern matters, but because it puts history and geography at stake in our future.

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