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### State policy towards indigenous peoples of Alaska: historical review and contemporary issues<sup>1</sup>



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**Abstract.** The article analyzes main stages of policy development towards indigenous peoples of Alaska and its influence on aboriginal cultures from the beginning of Russian colonization in the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to present time. The authors conclude that current policy towards indigenous peoples in Alaska can be generally evaluated as successful and supporting development of traditional cultures. The main achievements of this policy are: high level of self-organization and self-government of Alaska natives, legally secured rights for land and resources, progress in conservation of cultural heritage. However, social and economic challenges faced by indigenous people present a potential threat to the political stability in Alaska.

**Keywords:** *Alaska, indigenous peoples, policy, acculturation, segregation, assimilation, multiculturalism, rights*

Today it is the recognized at the international and national level that sustainable development of the Arctic region is not possible without ensuring social well-being of indigenous peoples of the Arctic and the preservation of their historical and cultural heritage and unique language. This problem is actual for the Russian Federation on the territory of which 40 indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East live as well as the titular peoples of the North: the Komi and the Yakuts. The scientific literature notes the need to ensure sustainable socio-economic and cultural development of the peoples that make up the ethno-cultural space of the Arctic region, as well as more effective migration policy in the northern regions [1, Zaykov K.S., Tamitsky A.M., p. 50]. For the formulation of a coherent policy that meets the interests of the peoples and conducive to sustainable development of the North of the country, it is necessary to study the experience of foreign countries, in particular the United States of America. The US experience is interesting for several reasons. First, the indigenous population of Alaska, as well as the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation is different in the ethnic and cultural composition. Secondly, the peoples of northern Alaska and Russia face similar problems of socio-economic nature and the

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preservation of cultural and historical heritage. Finally, the unique relationships between indigenous people in Alaska, the state and the authorities of the state, formed for a long period, represent practical and research interest. The purpose of this article is to identify the characteristics of policy on indigenous peoples of Alaska and its impact on aboriginal culture at various stages since the beginning of the Russian presence in the XVIII century until now.

Single issues of history and current condition of the peoples of Alaska are largely studied in the literature [2, Taxami N.Ch.]. A large number of works have been prepared by Russian researchers on a period of Russian colonization of Alaska and its impact on daily life, beliefs, social structure of indigenous communities [3, Saveliev I., Hildebrand S.; 4 Grinev A.V.; 5, 6, Piterskaya E.S.; 7, Philin P.A.]. Much attention in the scientific community is paid to the aboriginal self-government [8, Hays L.; 9, Pullar G.; 10, Krasnopolskiy B.K.], education [11, Barnhardt S.], racial and ethnic composition [12, Williams G.]. Review articles are published devoted to the current state of indigenous peoples [13, Roderick L.].

The study does not consider separately the peoples living in the Arctic Circle or related to the "Arctic" peoples as per other criteria. This is due to the fact that aboriginal population in Alaska, as a rule, appears as integral subject and object of the policy. Tribes and aboriginal corporations of Alaska are not fundamentally different in their legal status and are treated in most of the scientific literature as a whole. It is also necessary to bear in mind that most part of the US legislation extends on indigenous peoples of Alaska (Aleuts, Eskimos, Indians), as well as on the entire US indigenous population including Indians of the lower 48 states. American Indians and Alaska Natives are the generally accepted names of the indigenous population.

### ***The Russian presence in Alaska in 1743-1867***

By the beginning of the Russian colonization of Alaska in XVIII century, the territory of Alaska, the Aleutian Islands, Kodiak Island and the northwest coast of North America was inhabited by a number of people different in economic-cultural type. The main occupation of Aleuts and Kodiak Eskimos was the sea and fishing. Eskimos inhabiting the continent, in addition to marine hunting, made salmon fishery in the estuaries and rivers of Yukon, Kuskokwim, Nushagak. Athabasca, most of them were involved in fisheries in inland waters of Alaska. Tlingit, Haida and Eyak, inhabiting the north-west coast of America, engaged in hunting, fishing, sea mammal fishing. By this time there was a stable system of relations between nations, including both multiple tribal wars and trade exchanges [5, Piterskaya E.S., pp. 14-15].

The Russian colonization of North America, which began in 1740s., became a key factor influencing upon the national and cultural development of people of the Aleutian Islands and

Alaska. At various times, in the scientific literature polar points of view have evolved on the nature and consequences of the impact of the Russian presence on the indigenous peoples of North America: from the sharply critical, accusing colonialists in implementation of slavery to apologetic, underlining the progressive and humane development of the Russian America [4, Grinev A.V.].

Until XIX century it is not possible to speak about presence of formulated coherent policy of the Russian Empire regarding the indigenous population of North America. However, it is significantly different from the policy of soft assimilation pursued by the Russian authorities on its north-western outskirts [14, Zaykov K.S.].

The practice of forced labor, forced weaning of wealth among the population of the Aleutian Islands led to armed appearances locals and the violent suppression of protests. Regulatory authorities humanely treat indigenous people, as a rule, are not complied with, as there was no effective these regulations control. The practice of forced labor, the forced weaning of wealth from the population of the Aleutian Islands led to the armed actions of the locals and to the violent suppression of protests. Instructions of the authorities to treat the indigenous people humanely, as a rule, were not performed, as there was no effective control system for these instructions.

Besides, A.V. Green notes that often Aleuts were the first who showed aggression towards the industrialists. The appearance of the first permanent Russian settlements and the creation of a parastatal Russian-American Company (hereinafter — RAC) in 1799, marked the creation of the system of economic and non-economic coercion, which set the dependence of the local population based primarily on coercion. As a result, according to various estimates since the first contacts with the European population till 1820, the number of Aleuts decreased in 4-8 times. In work «Alaska Native Tribes, ANCSA Corporations, and Other Organizations» the population decline is mentioned as one of the Russian colonization results, from 74 thousand at the beginning of the XIX century till 23 million in 1890, due to infectious diseases, alcoholism and mass killings. [8, Hays L., p. 10].

Since 1820, there was a more humane treatment of RAC to the local population noted, which was related to several factors: naval officers started to manage the RAC, they were brought up on the ideas of enlightenment, it was apparent that population decline was caused by the regime of over-exploitation. In addition, the RAC tried to show the humane treatment of Aboriginal people in order to obtain exclusive rights to operate in North America for the next 20 years.

The cancel of reindeer-team driver system was noted among the positive changes (actually it was forced labor), as well as providing medical care to local residents, creating insurance funds products, social support of disabled people, the construction of schools. All the indigenous population was considered as full-fledged citizens of the Russian Empire [3, Saveliev I., Hildebrand S., p. 29].

In 1867, after the sale of Alaska to the USA, the activity of the RAC actually stopped at the American continent. The Russian presence in Alaska has had a significant impact on the culture of the local population, primarily on the Aleut and Kodiak Eskimos. The culture of other peoples of Alaska who interacted with the Russian population — Chugach Eskimos, Eskimos of the interior Alaska, Athabaskan, Tlingit — has been much less subjected to the Russian influence.

The most significant changes took place in family relationships (bride service and bride price, avunculate, polygamy dissappeared). Toyon leaders lost their influence, as the colonial administration did not give them a privileged status. The new enforcement system led to the disappearance of patriarchal slavery [5, Piterskaya E.S., p. 20]. Creating a commercial group from the representatives of different tribes and resettlement of indigenous people to the new places became a strong factor in the destruction of traditional social bonds [6, Piterskaya E.S., p. 194]. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) played a significant role in cultural transformation. At the initial stage of the Russian colonization, when sacraments were carried out by industrialists, the majority of convert Indians took the Orthodoxy formally, including the purpose of obtaining the material benefits. After the arrival of the Orthodox mission in 1793, ROC influence on culture of the indigenous population significantly increased. As a result, the Orthodoxy with elements of traditional religions got widely spread among the Aleuts [6 Piterskaya E.S., p. 195]. Creating of writing system of the Aleut language by the Orthodox priests, in particular by I.E. Veniaminov, helped to improve the literacy of the local population and to preserve languages. The Orthodoxy got wider spread after the sale of Alaska, because it became an important element of the identity of the indigenous peoples against the background of the settling of Alaska by new colonizers.

Educational institutions became a powerful tool of the Russian influence: Kodiak school, later ransferred to colleage and moved to Novoarkhangelsk, a seminary, the Russian-American male college founded in 1859, numerous parochial schools. Aleuts got high level of education as they most closely faced with the Russian influence.

A large number of representatives of this ethnic could easily read and write both in Russian and in mother tongue [11, Barnhardt S.]. The practice of hostage-taking (amanats), as a rule, leaders or their children — boys of 12-15 years, led to the fact that they subsequently took over

the language and religion. Returning to their tribes, they played the role of mediators, translators, guides of the Russian culture for the local tribes and also acquainted the colonists with the peculiarities of everyday life, mentality, craft skills.

Russian industrialists often had an affairs and married the representatives of indigenous peoples: Aleuts, Kodiaks, Eskimos, rarely with Ttlinkits. The main reason for the large number of mixed marriages was that to send the Russian women to Alaska was not profitable economically. Indigenous women played a large role in cultural exchange, particularly in the domestic sphere, as well as acted as intermediaries between colonizers and aboriginal family members [6, Pitserskaya E.S., p. 194].

P.A. Philin notes that at the stage of emergence of permanent settlements of the RAC, serious changes started to occur in the culture of the indigenous population, through the borrowing of household items, clothing, songs, habits, behavior from the Russians [7, Phlin P.A., p. 79]. In addition, the Russian presence in Alaska changed the diet of indigenous peoples, who quickly gained access to bread and other flour products.

Indigenous peoples, in turn, made a measurable impact on the newly arrived Russian population. Harsh climatic conditions stipulated the necessity of borrowing by industrialists the traditional adaptation strategies, in particular the construction technology, methods of hunting and the manufacture of clothes and vehicles (kayaks), the use of plants, including for medicinal purposes. There were borrowings of the local vocabulary in relation to food and means of transport [6, Pitserskaya E.S., p. 196]. As already noted, the most important factor in cultural exchanges became inter-ethnic marriages and the practice of hostage-taking.

#### ***Policy of segregation and assimilation in relation to indigenous population of Alaska in 1867-1945***

Sale of Alaska to the North American United States in 1867 marked a new stage in policy of indigenous people. The opportunity to take a new citizenship status or remain subjects of the Russian Empire was recorded in the contract for sale of Alaska. But this rule did not apply to "uncivilized tribes", which from that time became the subject of American law. [9, Pullar G.]. The active policy of segregation and assimilation of the indigenous population began in the late XIX century, when large reserves of gold were discovered in Alaska, resulting in "gold rush" and arrival white population from the "low states". Widespread views on the superiority of the "white race" over the "savages" became a major factor of the spread of discriminatory laws to indigenous peoples. These laws included segregation practically in all social life: at school, in church, in public institutions, during employment, etc. [15, Stebing H.M., p. 7].

Until 1924 the indigenous population of Alaska, as well as American Indians, did not have any citizenship and voting rights. However, since 1925 to get such right it was necessary to prove proficiency in English and get recommendations from the 5 white citizens who were citizens of Alaska at least one year [15, Stebing H.M., p. 13].

Segregation policy was implemented in school education. Since 1905, the system of two types of schools began to work at Alaska: 1) for the white population and the small number of "civilized" indigenous population under control of local authorities; 2) for Aboriginal people under control of the federal Bureau of Education [11, Barnhardt S.]. At the same time, Bureau of Education (later its functions were transferred to Bureau of Indian Affairs) arranged centralized management not only of educational services, but also health care, the supply of remote areas. Teaching at all schools was only in English and was aimed at the assimilation of the indigenous population. By 1928 about 40% of children, the representatives of the indigenous population, went to schools which were under control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. About 80% from them were trained at boarding schools, i.e. were permanently located outside indigenous areas, which contributed to their assimilation and isolation from the traditional way of life.

Some positive changes in lives of indigenous people of Alaska occurred in the 1930s. Adoption of the Federal Law "About Indian reorganization" in 1934 formalized in legislation the right to local self-government for aboriginal people. Johnson — O'Malley act in 1934 provided funding for Indian education in public secondary schools that were not included into Bureau of Indian Affairs, which stimulated to take the indigenous population at traditionally "white" schools.

By law the segregation in Alaska was banned only in 1945 with the adoption of the "Law Against Discrimination", which was the first legal act in the United States. The indigenous population itself played a major role in its adoption, in particular, the social activist Elizabeth Peratrovich, a representative of the Tlingit tribe. The movement of civil rights led to the emergence of a whole anti-discrimination legislation in the United States: Civil Rights Act of 1964, "Equal Pay Labour", 1963, "Employment Equality" in 1964, etc.<sup>2</sup>.

### ***The struggle for civil rights and the right to land of Alaska native population in 1945-2000s.***

In 1960-1980s. social rise and rise of self-consciousness of the American Indians, at a time of a broad civil rights movement, led to the recognition of indigenous people rights, including Alaska and the value of their cultural heritage. The results were gradual abandonment from the

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<sup>2</sup> Soedinennye Shtaty Ameriki // «Zakonodatel'stvo i politika v oblasti integratsii immigrantov. Sbornik zakonodatel'stva, politiki i praktiki 19 gosudarstv v oblasti integratsii immigrantov». Mezhdunarodnaia organizatsiia po migratsii. Perevod s angliiskogo. M.: 2011. S. 123-138

assimilation policy, the transition to a multicultural policy and the adoption of several laws aimed at ensuring the rights of indigenous people.

Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 provided the extension of the provisions of the Bill of Rights on the Indian tribes. American Indian Religious Freedom Act, accepted in 1978, cancelled the restrictions for traditional beliefs of indigenous peoples. Also in accordance with this law, the tribes have the right to participate in decision-making in land management, where sacred places are situated. Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 banned the common practice of separation of children of indigenous peoples from their tribe. Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 established the right of tribes to dispose of grants, which are allocated by the government. Previously, the ways of using grants were determined by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

A number of important changes affected the sphere of education. In 1965, the Ministry of Education established the Indians' Education National Council, composed entirely of representatives of the indigenous peoples of the United States. Indian Education Act of 1972 provided funding of projects that contribute to the development of opportunities in education for indigenous peoples. In 1975, indigenous communities were given the right to influence the content of education and the selection of teachers at schools, governed by Bureau of Indian Affairs. [11, Barnhardt S.].

Greater attention to the problems of school education in rural areas, where mainly the indigenous population lived, was paid at the level of established State of Alaska in 1959. The result of the decentralization of the state school system was the creation of school districts. Since 1965, the Alaskan government began the process of transfer of schools in the Bureau of Indian Affairs departments for the state management. This process was completed only in 1985.

In 1970s a growing interest in indigenous languages and in their preservation was marked. In 1971, the Law of Alaska on bilingual education was accepted, permitting bilingual education at schools (in English and in the language of the indigenous people). In 1976, the court made the state Alaska to provide rural villages with secondary schools (high schools)<sup>3</sup>. The biggest success in the struggle for the rights to land and resources was the adoption of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act — ANCSA, in 1971. According to it, the indigenous population received the ownership of 12% of the territory of the State within the framework of the historical places of residence, more than 900 million dollars of compensation, as well as special rights to local self-government [10 Krasnopolskiy B.H., p. 135]. Through membership in 12 regional corporations

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<sup>3</sup> Alaska native languages introduction and history. URL: <http://www.akhistorycourse.org/alaskas-cultures/alaska-native-languages-introduction-and-history> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

established in accordance with the cultural and linguistic division of the state, the right to receive income for each representative of the indigenous peoples was guaranteed. Corporations became owners of land and resources, including underground, and they exist till now. Their legal status is similar to other corporations, leading commercial activities. In addition to regional corporations, 200 village corporations were founded that own resources on the surface of the earth. Alaska indigenous people satisfaction act became for that time the most successful example of ensuring the rights of indigenous peoples to land and natural resources.

Since the beginning of the 2000s the federal government is taking steps to involve the American Indians to the formation of state policy in relation to the indigenous population. This commitment is enshrined in the order of US President 13175 "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments" dated 06.11.2000<sup>4</sup>.

In 2009, the US administration created the office of Indigenous Affairs Adviser of the President [16 Chernukhina L.S., p. 106]. In 2013, the administration of President created the Native American Affairs Council [16 Chernukhina L.S., p. 110]. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), founded in 1944, which is the largest organization, uniting Indian tribes, plays a key role in the consultation process between the government and the Indians, on the part of the indigenous population of the United States<sup>5</sup>.

### ***The current situation of indigenous peoples in Alaska and the results of ethno-cultural policy***

Alaska is the largest US state with area of 1,717,854 sq. kilometers, accounting for about one-fifth of the territory of the lower 48 states. The name "Alaska" comes from the Aleut word for continent or mainland. The population of Alaska is 748 432 people, or about 0.43 people per 1 sq km, making it the least densely populated state. The indigenous population in 2015 was 109,515 persons (not including the descendants from mixed marriages), or 14.63% from the total population. In 2010, the proportion was 14.96%, in 2000 — 15.64%, indicating the reduction of the proportion of indigenous people during the growth of their absolute number. Taking into account the negative balance of migration during this period (see Fig. 3), we can conclude that this trend is due to the lower natural growth of the indigenous population.

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<sup>4</sup> Executive Order 13175 of November 6, 2000 — Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments. URL: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/136740.pdf> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

<sup>5</sup> National Congress of American Indian. URL: <http://www.ncai.org/> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

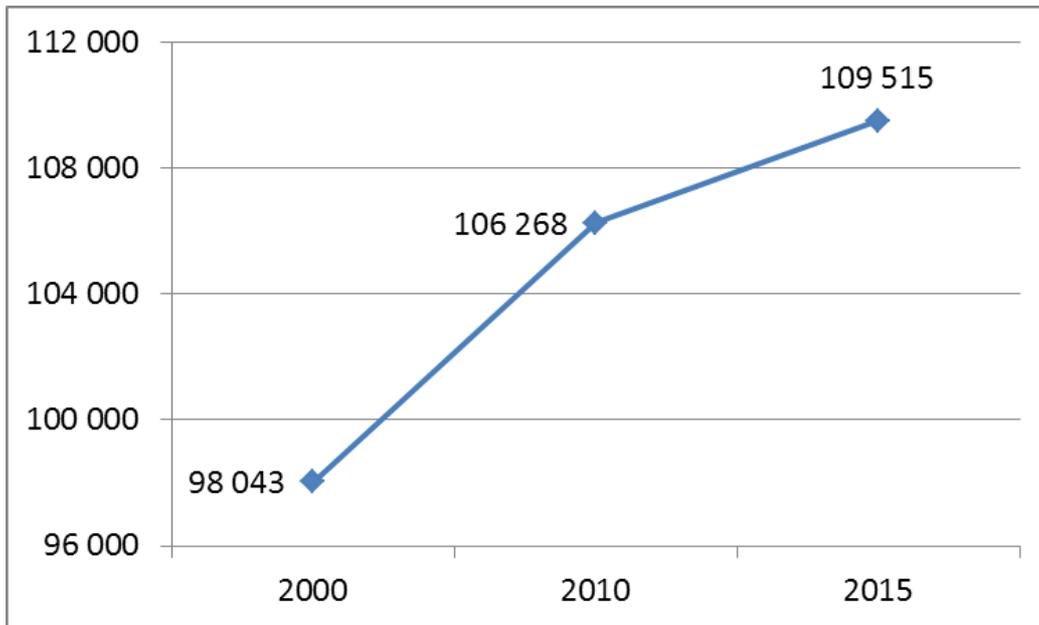


Figure 1. Indigenous population of Alaska in 2000-2015. <sup>67</sup> [7, p. 12]

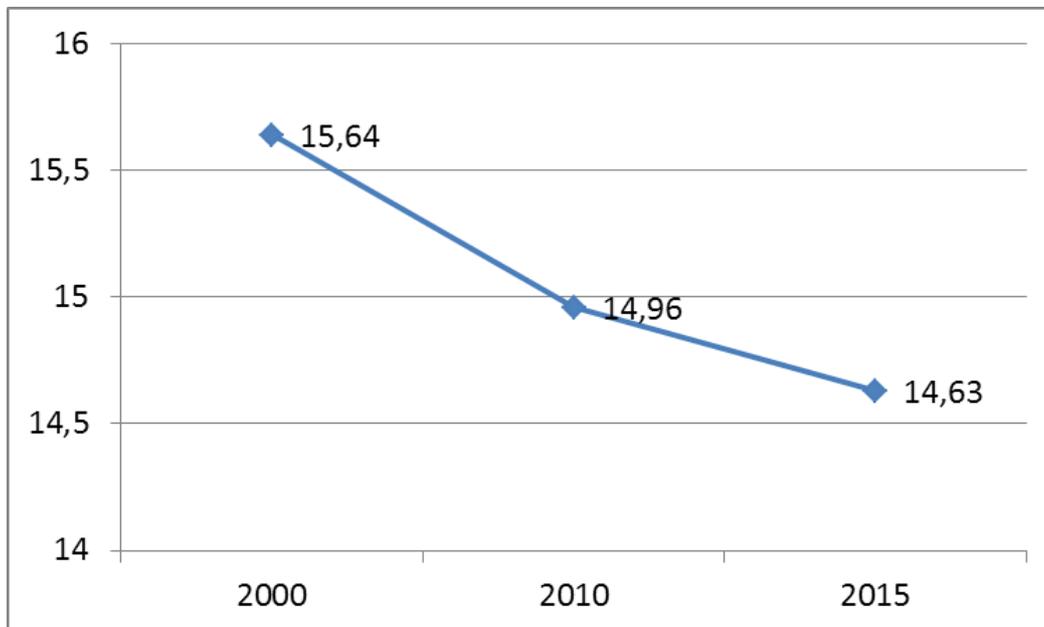


Figure 2. Proportion of indigenous people of Alaska to the total population of the state in 2000-2015. <sup>89</sup> [7, p. 12]

<sup>6</sup> Alaska Population Estimates. URL: <http://www.live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

<sup>7</sup> State Characteristics: Vintage 2015. URL: <https://www.census.gov/popest/data/state/asrh/2015/index.html> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Alaska Population Estimates. URL: <http://www.live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

<sup>9</sup> State Characteristics: Vintage 2015. URL: <https://www.census.gov/popest/data/state/asrh/2015/index.html> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

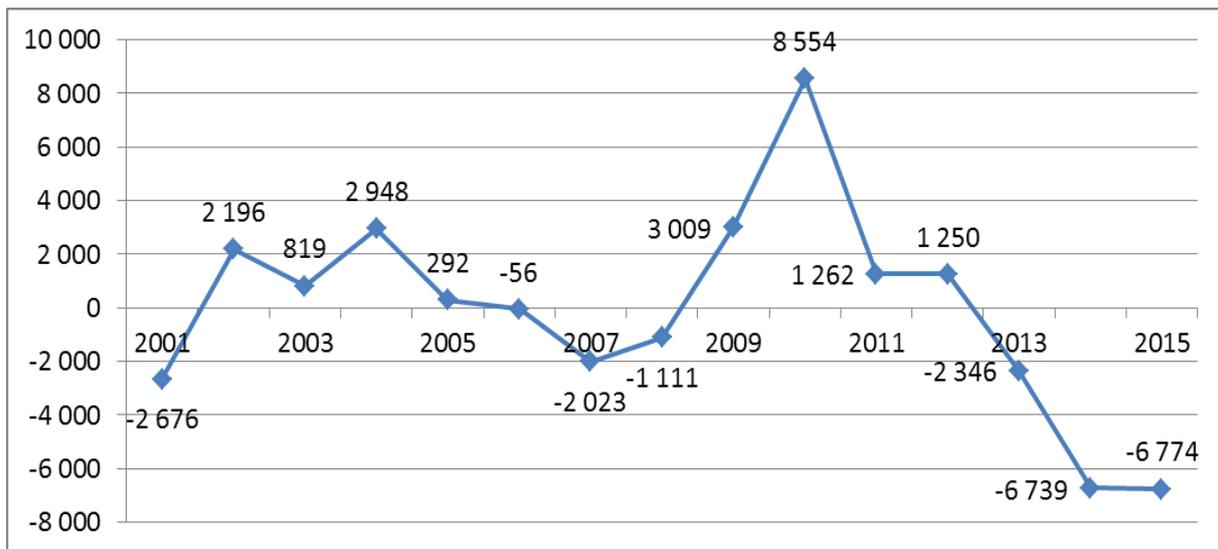


Figure 3. Balance of migration in Alaska in 2001-2015.<sup>10</sup>

The indigenous population of Alaska consists of several groups of people with different cultural and linguistic relations: Aleut, Athabascan, Eija, Eskimos, Haida, Tlingit, Tsimshian. A number of researchers offers a larger division: Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts [11, Barnhardt S.]. Total population of the territory of Alaska is 229 from 566 of officially recognized indigenous tribes of the USA<sup>11</sup>. Linguistically there are 4 main language groups (Eskimo-Aleut, Tsimshian, Haida, Athabascan -Eija-Tlingit), including 20 languages<sup>12</sup>.

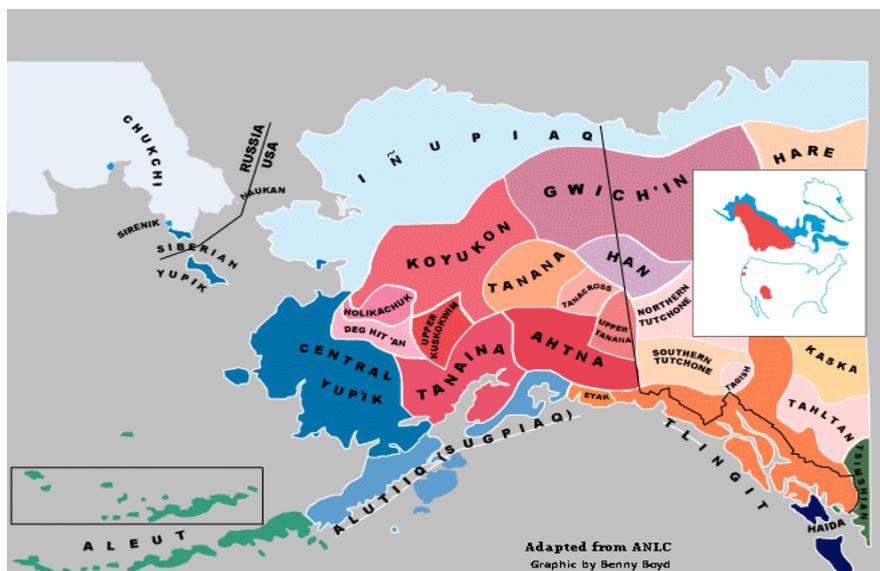


Figure 4. Distribution of Alaska Native Languages [1]

At the level of federal laws, the policy of peoples living in the Arctic and other areas of Alaska, as a rule, is not separated from the common policy of the indigenous population of the

<sup>10</sup> Alaska Population Estimates. URL: <http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction. URL: <http://www.ncai.org/about-tribes> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Alaska Native Languages. URL: <https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/languages/stats/> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

USA. American Indians and Alaska Natives are a single entity of the policy and statistical accounting. At the federal level, policy of indigenous population of Alaska, as well as of all Native Americans in the United States is governed by the President, the Congress (in terms of enacting laws), the Department of the Interior (Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Education). Legislation and court decisions plays a significant role at the level of the State of Alaska.

US strategic documents regarding the Arctic pay great attention to the indigenous peoples. US presidential directive number 66 dated 2009.<sup>13</sup> It points out as one of the policy trends to involve the Arctic indigenous peoples in decision-making that may affect them. US National Strategy for the Arctic region in 2013<sup>14</sup> reiterates this position and underlines the unique legal relationship between tribal governments and the United States. One of the principles enshrined in the strategy is a consultation and coordination with the indigenous peoples of Alaska in accordance with the order of the President of the United States 13175 "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments" of 2000 and Principles of Research of the Alaska Federation of the indigenous peoples, adopted in 1993.

Alaska Native tribes are recognized by the US government and, along with the tribes of American Indians have the right to self-government, jurisdiction over its members, contracting, influence on the content of school education, to take measures for the conservation of cultural heritage. However, there are some important differences. The higher level of mobilization of the indigenous population of Alaska is obvious, compared with the American Indians.

Already mentioned Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 ensured ownership of the indigenous population over a large part of the territory of Alaska. Thanks to the presence of non-profit corporations due to this law, indigenous people have the opportunity to send funds to the management of these corporations for the development of educational programs, health care system and the preservation of cultural heritage. ANCSA also abolished reservations on the territory of Alaska, except Metlakatla reservation in the south-eastern Alaska [13, p. 59]. For this reason, there are no the so-called "Indian casino" in Alaska, which can only be placed at reservations. The commitment of the State of Alaska to provide every rural settlement with high school and permitted bilingual education at schools is undoubted success in the sphere of education.

Important subjects of the policy together with federally recognized tribes are associations of indigenous peoples of Alaska such as Alaska Native Brotherhood, founded in 1912, Tlingit and Haida

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<sup>13</sup> NATIONAL SECURITY PRESIDENTIAL DIRECTIVE/NSPD – 66. URL: [http://www.nsf.gov/geo/plr/opp\\_advisory/briefings/may2009/nspd66\\_hspd25.pdf](http://www.nsf.gov/geo/plr/opp_advisory/briefings/may2009/nspd66_hspd25.pdf) (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

<sup>14</sup> National strategy for the Arctic region. URL: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat\\_arctic\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf) (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

Central Council, established in 1939, Alaska Native Sisterhood, Alaska Federation of Natives, founded in 1966, Inuit Circumpolar Conference, founded in 1975 [13, Roderick L., p.3]. These organizations played an important role in protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples of Alaska are part of an international organizations of indigenous peoples around the world. One of the most influential organizations of its kind in the Arctic is Inuit Circumpolar Council, a permanent participant of the Arctic Council [17 Levit L.V., p. 59]. Also permanent participants of the Arctic Council are other associations, including the indigenous peoples of Alaska: Aleut International Association, Arctic Athabaskan Council and the Gwichin Council International.

Although inspite of the regulatory support of multiculturalism policy in relation to indigenous peoples of Alaska, its results have become ambiguous in terms of socio-economic well-being of the indigenous people. Getting of the ownership for land and resources by the indigenous population has become the unprecedented example.

However, the acceptance of ANCSA is perceived by population of Alaska not only positively. Creating corporations does not mean that every indigenous person receives dividends from its activities. Firstly, not all corporations get profit. Secondly, in most cases, the shareholders are individuals who were born not later than December 18, 1971 — since the time of adoption of ANCSA [13, Roderick L., p. 23]. 21% of the indigenous population of Alaska live below the poverty line. This is significantly lower than the figures for the US Indians (27%), but significantly higher than the national average (14.3%) [18, Macartney S., Bishaw A., Fontenot K., p. 2]. A large part of the rural population continues to live only at the expense of traditional crafts - hunting and fishing. Despite the special health programs, the mortality rate of the indigenous population of Alaska in 2000 was significantly higher than that of other groups. And today the native inhabitants have a higher suicide rate: 50.9 cases per 100 000 persons, which exceeds the average figure for the country in 4 times.<sup>15</sup> Actual problems of social character are the high levels of violence and alcohol consumption. On the whole, education policy of Alaskan Native can be considered a successful one. The problem is the lower progress in studies of the indigenous population of Alaska, which are often expelled from schools and colleges than other students. However, support measures, including scholarships from corporations and foundations, have improved the situation in recent years [13, Roderick L., p. 76-77].

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<sup>15</sup> Alaska Suicide Facts and Statistics. URL: [http://dhss.alaska.gov/SuicidePrevention/Documents/pdfs\\_sspc/AKSuicideStatistics2015.pdf](http://dhss.alaska.gov/SuicidePrevention/Documents/pdfs_sspc/AKSuicideStatistics2015.pdf) (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

The question of language preservation is still an acute problem: 17 of the 20 languages of the peoples of Alaska have fewer than 1000 speakers<sup>16</sup>. Since 1970s at the state level the active work on the study, support the teaching of languages and the preservation of the linguistic heritage has been carried out. Currently, the Fairbanks University of Alaska implements 6 educational programs and 9 separate courses on the languages of indigenous peoples of Alaska, primarily for school teachers<sup>17</sup>.

In 2014, Alaska's parliament approved Alaska Native Languages Bill, according to which 20 Alaska Native languages became the state ones along with English. Despite the fact that this law was subsequently canceled by court at the federal level<sup>18</sup>, this confirms that the conservation of cultural and linguistic heritage are on the agenda of the federal and regional authorities and are supported by the society.

### **Conclusion**

Since the XVIII century it is possible to underline a few stages in the policy of indigenous peoples of Alaska. During the period of the Russian presence from 1740 till 1867 the cultural interaction had the character of acculturation with elements of assimilation. On the one hand, the lower status of indigenous peoples in the structure of colonial society, the destruction of traditional social relations and institutions are obvious. On the other hand, the Russian colonists worked closely with local residents and borrowed a considerable part of the traditional adaptation strategies.

After the sale of Alaska in 1867 the indigenous peoples of Alaska passed a long way from the policy of segregation and assimilation in their relation to the legislative recognition of land rights, self-governance and the preservation of cultural heritage. In many ways, Alaska Natives, thanks to a high level of mobilization, have achieved more rights in comparison with the American Indians of the lower 48 states.

Current policy of the indigenous peoples of Alaska is based on the principles of multiculturalism, recognition and support of the development of traditional cultures. Among its achievements are the high level of self-organization and self-government of the Indigenous population, legally enforceable right to land and resources, progress in the conservation of cultural heritage. However, the heritage of long policy of assimilation and segregation, supported by the state and society has not been overcome completely. Problems of social and economic nature

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<sup>16</sup> Alaska Native Languages. URL: <https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/languages/stats/> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Alaska Native Language Classes and Degree Programs. URL: <http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/classes/> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Alaska native languages introduction and history. URL: <http://www.akhistorycourse.org/alaskas-cultures/alaska-native-languages-introduction-and-history> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

faced by indigenous people, present a potential threat to the political stability in Alaska. Among them: low level of income of the indigenous population, high mortality, high levels of alcohol consumption, suicide, violence, lower levels of education. A serious challenge is also reducing the number of speakers of the prevailing traditional languages of Alaska.

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