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A Conference on the Future of Alaska Session 2 – Loyens (no date)

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Notes: Original on 7 inch reel, copy on CD

A man is speaking and he says that the American scene is the discipline of anthropology: the study of man and the behavior of man. He says that in Alaska is a very distinguished anthropologist. The anthropologist's name is Dr. William J. Loyens. Dr. Loyens is a professor of anthropology at the University of Alaska. Loyens has been in Alaska for some 16 years at this point.

At :56 seconds of the recording, Dr. Loyens begins speaking. Dr. Loyens says that when he was asked to address the assembly, he retorted that he was an anthropologist and that anthropologists have a very different way of looking at the world. He says he is mostly familiar with the Eskimo, Indian and Aleut cultures. Dr. Loyens says that he is familiar with Alaska Native problems regarding education, and he will address those problems. Loyens says there is no use talking about the future unless we know what is wrong with the past and the present. Dr. Loyens says unless there are changes to the socio-economic environment, the housing environment, and the health environment, nothing will change. He says unless there are radical changes there will not be a modern Alaska for 60,000-70,000 Eskimo and Aleuts for the next years. A main topic wherever he goes is educating the Alaska Native. Dr. Loyens says that the Alaska Native is an abstraction. Dr. Loyens says you can line up someone from Africa, Mexico, Iraq, and European and they are all white men. He says race has never been an indicator of someone's life or beliefs. He also says that some Native groups in Alaska never met each other before modern lines of communication were built. Loyens says race is not sufficient to identify a person. The question is to ask ourselves "Can we really treat the Alaska Native as one group and use one system?" He says if you have one group that is a homogenous small group subjected to the same influences, then you can describe a model behavior. Loyens says the Alaska Native people are not homogenous. Alaska Natives are not homogenous in language and are not homogenous in cultural history. It is his contention that there are true and serious regional differences that should be taken into account.

At 6:45 Dr. Lyons begins discussing the regional differences.

Southeast Alaskans have been guided and bonded by very strong clan and family feelings. They have a very strong hierarchical architecture. There is a strong sense of pride and tradition. The Alaskan Natives had money before Columbus. Southeast Alaskans had an economical system that included fishing. Dr. Loyens says he is not surprised that the first land claims came from Southeast Alaska. He says if you consider the Aleut, history has treated the Aleut very badly. Russians came into the Aleutian area with the idea of grabbing whatever there was. Loyens says within less than 75 years the Aleuts had been reduced from 18,000 to roughly 2,000. Aleuts were forced to focus on the new ways of living in order to

make a living. He says the Aleuts lost a very successful way of life and received a generalized existence that was nothing to be proud of. The interior Athabascan situation is different. The Athabascan were people who always had stable communities. Their seasonal needs meant migration. They had no need for large communities and had no need to be political at all. The Athabascan saw the newcomer as an individual and also saw that the newcomer had ways of doing things that were superior. The interior Athabascan then became enthralled with all the new technology according to Dr. Loyens. According to Dr. Loyens the Athabascan was not smart enough to realize all of the social and economic changes that go along with new technology. Dr. Loyens says if there is any planning involving Native people, it better be done with Natives involved.

The Eskimos occupied a very large territory in Alaska. Just by the expanse of the territory they had to specialize in hunting and fishing. Because of the steady resources they could live in communities. Because they are in inaccessible lands, Dr. Loyens says that Eskimos are still Eskimos. Dr. Loyens then defines what a true Eskimo is in his opinion. Dr. Loyens says that besides the cultural differences between people there are also different contact histories between the people. Loyens says there is also a different educational history from region to region. Dr. Loyens says as people talk about Alaska Natives, they should not consider Alaska Natives an abstraction. Instead people should speak of a diverse group. Dr. Loyens says that Alaska is a mosaic, including the newcomers. Dr. Loyens says for every group of people education is a way of making the people competent members of that society. Anthropologists call this enculturation. When speaking of cross cultural education in Alaska, Dr. Loyens says that the people should be realistic and face the fact that Alaska Native children should be taught Euro-American values in preparation of living among Euro-Americans. Many educators were inspired by the false idea of the "Great Melting Pot" when teaching. Few understood that people can be attached to radically different patterns and perhaps preferred them. The feeling of ethnocentrism led education to adopt numerous damaging educational policies which had tremendously negative effect on Alaska Native enculturation.

Early educators commonly insisted on a complete abandonment of aboriginal cultures. A student who hears that his culture should be dismissed in exchange for the Euro-American culture is taught that "He is only an invalid white man" according to Dr. Loyens. Dr. Loyens says that particularly in Alaska we should want to achieve the coexistence of articulated differences. Dr. Loyens explains to the crowd that Alaska Native children don't take an active role in learning because they feel bad for making so much work for the teachers. The Alaska Native students then retreat to their shell [Laughter in the crowd]. Dr. Loyens says people have to start from a perspective of realizing people are raised a certain way and that's the way they want to live their life.

Dr. Loyens says usually the educators are white from middle class homes. The educator expresses a set of life experiences. These attitudes are very common. It's very fine if the teacher and students are sharing the same experiences and world view. The assumptions that the Euro-American is self-evident is absolutely ridiculous to Dr. Loyens. The willingness to exchange in competitive discussion that is taught in Euro-American schools is objectionable among Eskimo people according to Dr. Loyens. When Eskimos are together they are egalitarian.

Dr. Loyens discusses how the Extension Services for many years tried getting gardening going in the state of Alaska. There was an assumption that potatoes were necessary for survival and Dr. Loyens says he doesn't believe that coming from Belgium. They tried and tried to get people to grow gardens. In many places there were no tastes for gardens. Dr. Loyens says when you begin to look at Alaska Native cultures you see that work always had an immediate award. You go out hunting and you come back with something. The idea of working and working and hoping that in September something will come out just isn't part of the culture pattern. Dr. Loyens says much of the technology changes fast but the culture is slow changing. Dr. Loyens says that education in Alaska must expand vertically and horizontally. By vertically he means start younger and end much older. He says there must be advisory councils including elders. Teacher aides should be trained to become teachers. Dr. Loyens discusses the Teacher Corps program for teacher aides.

He discusses regional schools in order to keep the students closer to the world they are going to live in. He says you can't provide students at the boarding schools the opportunity to see the new Alaska developing. Chemawa, Chilako [Eklutna?], and Mount Edgecombe are given as examples. Because of this, regional high schools are extremely important. He says the time has come to use Native resources in all the schools no matter the level. He says there are people with a special expertise that can contribute to young Native people. Loyens asks why the crowd why there are schools standing empty in the summer and not being used for enrichment programs. He says there is an Upward Bound Program at the University of Alaska that he thinks is one of the most marvelous things to happen to high schools in Alaska. He asks why there isn't a upward Bound program going full blast in Nome and Copper Valley School, St. Mary's in the Upper Yukon, or Mount Edgecombe.

The horizontal changes Loyens would like to see are in the curriculum. Loyens wants to see more culturally relevant materials. Loyens says in Alaskan High Schools there should be a required course to be taken by non-Natives because there is a mutual peer relationship that is necessary. Loyens says that Alaska Native youth don't know who they are because they don't do what the old Alaska Natives did. Another horizontal change that must take place is that there are out of town teachers who come to Alaska and teach students. Loyens believes there is a need for an orientation that is a weeklong. He says there needs to be changes to the teaching strategy and he says "This is where Mr. Marshall made reference to the media." Loyens closes by saying the time is now for the change and only Alaskan citizens can do it [Crowd claps].