

Echo of the Last Howl – 2005 (54 minutes)
Taqramiut Productions, Nunavik, Canada
Produced by Makivik Corporation, directed by Dr. Guy Fradette

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“In the past, a man without dogs wasn’t a man.”

Paulusie Weetaluktuk, Inukjuak
quoted in “The Slaughtering of Nunavik Qimmit”

“It’s fundamental, from one day to the next they couldn’t go fishing. They couldn’t go hunting ... imagine if someone took away all the means of transport from one day to the next in a city. Imagine if we took away camels from the Bedouin or the Touaregs. What would that do? It forces people to change their way of life, and those who were nomadic to become settled. That’s a major transformation in a society and no one worried about that at all.”

Gilles Duceppe, leader Bloc Québécois
quoted from *Nunatsiaq News* article, 28 January 2005

“... it is an absolute certainty that it [the North Pole] would still be undiscovered but for the Eskimo dog to furnish traction power for our sledges ... enabling us to carry supplies where nothing else could carry them”

Robert Peary
quoted from the brief, “The Slaughtering of Nunavik Qimmit”

“The Eskimo dog has the persistence and tenacity of the wild animal, and at the same time the domestic dog’s admirable devotion to its master. It is the wildest breath of Nature, and the warmest breath of civilization.”

Otto Svendrup
From *New Lands*, 1904

Inuit Dogs (Qimmiit):

No one is certain where or when dog sleds were invented but it is assumed that it may have been in Siberia given the long history of nomadic existence in that region. It was the Thule or Tunit culture that brought dogs with them to Canada’s North between 900-1100 C.E. (The Thule are the direct ancestors of today’s Inuit.)

As the Inuit were a nomadic people, they depended on the Qimmiit for transportation. The dogs also aided the Inuit in survival—they were able to identify seal breathing holes, navigate in storms or darkness and were the first to realize when the ice was too thin or when a threatening animal was nearby. They also provided a food source and fur trim for hoods when they died or were sacrificed during periods of starvation.

In rare cases, according to the report, “Regarding the Slaughtering of Nunavik Qimmiit,” in some cases the Inuit would feed their dogs before their families. There was even a spiritual dimension to the relation between the Inuit and their dogs in that if the dogs were sick it was understood that they took in the disease to save the people.

Non-Inuit also depended on the Qimmiit. The RCMP used the Qimmiit for their patrols and early explorers like Peary, used dogs for transport.

Administration of Nunavik:

Nunavik occupies about one third of the total land mass of the province of Québec and is home to about 10,000 Inuit. In 1975 the Inuit gained considerable revenue from land claims and jurisdiction over education, health care and justice when they signed the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement. Today the region is in the process of creating its own government and will be the last of four Inuit political regions in Canada to do so. Nunavik is and will continue to be part of Québec and Canada. The history of jurisdiction in Nunavik has some bearing on the issue of the dog slaughter and which government (federal or provincial) is responsible.

Nunavik or the northern Québec was originally part of Rupert's Land that belonged to Great Britain. In the late 19th century the land was given to Canada and in 1912 Québec's provincial boundary was extended to include all lands above the 55th parallel or what is now Nunavik. However, Québec had no involvement in the region until the 1960s. From World War II into the 1960s, the federal government administered the region providing health, education and welfare. Federal government interest in the region was primarily a result of sovereignty issues in the North during the Cold War and also the realization of tremendous natural resources.

The federal government started the first day schools in 1949 as well as nursing stations. In order to take advantage of services—family allowance and welfare—the Inuit had to put their children into school. In a short period of time, this traditionally nomadic people began to settle into communities. It was the RCMP that administered many of the services including the annual dog vaccination program.

In 1960 the new Liberal government of Québec under Premier Jean Lesage took a keen interest in natural resource development in the North and began to take over administration services from the federal government opening the first provincial school in 1963. During this transition period, some of the services to the Inuit were interrupted including, apparently, the dog vaccination program. More dogs became diseased causing more slaughters. Also, at the same time that the federal and provincial governments were negotiating for control in Nunavik, the Inuit were also pressing forward to regain control over their communities and land.

The parallel developments of the federal and provincial governments and Inuit culminated in the signing of the James Bay and Québec Agreement (11 November 1975) that gave the Inuit extensive responsibility over economic and social development, education, the environment and territorial management.

In 1979 the Makivik Corporation was founded pursuant to the signing of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement. Makivik was the recognized Inuit party to the Agreement with the mandate to protect the integrity of the Agreement and to focus on the political, economic and social development in Nunavik. It is the Makivik Corporation that funded the 2005 report on the dog slaughters and the film, *Echo of the Last Howl*.

Slaughtering of Sled Dogs:

According to the Inuit of Nunavik, from the mid-50s to the late 60s the federal government ordered the slaughter of millions of sled dogs apparently without effective consultation with the Inuit or their consent. The rationale was public safety and health. The government felt that the dogs were in competition with the Inuit for scarce food resources. In addition, they felt the dogs were a health hazard and physical threat. The rabies vaccination program was also very expensive to administer and was a government program. And, there was also an interesting Agricultural Abuses Act in Québec. This Act was created to protect agricultural

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and farming land from stray dogs but was used as a rationale for killing roaming dogs in Nunavik where it made no sense to tie them and where roaming did not cause a problem.

In 2000 the Makivik Corporation in collaboration with the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (representing the Inuit of Baffin Island, the High Arctic and the Belcher Islands) requested a public inquiry into the dog killings in the 1950s and 60s. Neither the federal or provincial government accepted Makivik's request so the corporation conducted its own study interviewing over 100 Inuit in Nunavik about the Qimmiit in Inuit culture and the slaughter.

In 2005 the Makivik Corporation produced a 25-page brief entitled, "The Slaughtering of the Nunavik Qimmiit" for both the federal and Québec provincial governments that discusses the killing of the sled dogs and the impact on Inuit culture primarily through testimonies. In a nutshell the report says that the slaughters were conducted without proper consultation with the Inuit and without their consent and a public apology and appropriate compensation are requested. At the same time, Makivik commissioned Taqramiut Nipingat Inc. (a radio and television production company) to produce a video on the slaughters. The video is entitled, *Echo of the Last Howl*—the report and the first screening of the film both took place in January of 2005.

Inuit Argument:

The Inuit argument is that the Qimmiit are vital to Inuit culture, to their traditional livelihood and even safety. Until the 1940s and 50s the Inuit were a nomadic people whose relationship to the Qimmiit was essential. In the words of one Inuk, the Qimmiit are, "our most treasured possession."

Although the snowmobile was introduced in the 1960s, there was a transition period between when the dogs were slaughtered and when the Inuit had ready access to snowmobiles. For a period of time some Inuit were without any means of transportation. Some of the Inuit hunted on foot and others moved into the newly established communities and depended more on welfare and food from the community stores than traditional food. Even when the Inuit gained access to snowmobiles, they are expensive to purchase and maintain and do not provide a reliable form of transportation.

As mentioned above, the Inuit argue that the killings were conducted without consultation or consent and that they felt *iligasutuq* toward the police and government officials (roughly translated as "felt intimidated by/had much respect for") making it difficult for them to challenge the government's decision. In some cases the language barrier was too great to allow the Inuit to dialogue about the issue and resolution.

The Inuit charge that the massive killings of the Qimmiit destroyed a way of life for the Inuit and accelerated their culture towards a non-Inuit lifestyle. The report also speaks of emotional distress over the loss of their animals and a way of life. The slaughter of the sled dogs forced the Inuit into a wage-earning system and welfare system that impacted their sense of worth. And, the report mentions the guilt that many Inuit felt for allowing the killings to occur.

The Inuit are asking for an apology and appropriate compensation for the losses.

RCMP Argument:

The RCMP put out an *Interim Report: RCMP Review of Allegations Concerning Inuit Sled Dogs* in September of 2005 with a full report due out in May. The RCMP response is very interesting and certainly speaks to the complexity of the issue. For starters, the RCMP report describes the incident as a "mass culling" rather than "slaughtering."

The main point of the interim report is that there is no evidence that there was an organized and mass slaughter of Inuit sled dogs in the Arctic between 1950 and 1970. The report does say that indeed dogs were killed that had rabies or posed a danger to the community and some were killed at the request of some Inuit who could no longer feed their dogs. But the report argues that a massive slaughter in the range of 20,000 animals and with little regard for the Inuit and/or to force them to relocate, is not accurate. The report acknowledges that the Inuit sled dog is integral to Inuit tradition life and that they served the role for “transportation, hunting, homing instincts in blizzard conditions, search and rescue, warmth and companionship, and even as a food source, when the harshest conditions prevailed” (interim report).

The report also expresses disbelief that the RCMP or other officials, who had close and respectful relations with the Inuit, could be so thoughtless. “To think that we murdered their dogs and did anything, anything that would make it tougher for them to live off the land or follow their lifestyles is just totally unrealistic” reported one RCMP officer.

Resolution:

The full RCMP report is due out this month and will bring more light to shed on the issue. How it gets resolved will be a fascinating process to follow as two groups—the Inuit and the RCMP/government—have differing opinions and findings on the issue. This is a perfect debate topic for students.

Ivakkak (<http://www.ivakkak.com/eng/index.cfm>):

In an effort to heal the communities in Nunavik and to revive the almost extinct Qimmiit and the dogsled tradition, Makivik started a dog sled race in 2001, Ivakkak. There are three annual dog sled races in North America today. The **Iditarod** is the oldest with a short version of the race first held in 1967 to commemorate early travel in Alaska. The Iditarod course follows the first major route through the state made by miners during the 1920 gold strike. The Iditarod runs from Anchorage in the south to Nome on the north coast or over 1,000 miles. Every February the **Yukon Quest** is run from Whitehorse, Yukon to Fairbanks, Alaska also conceived to celebrate the Gold Rush and mail routes in the late 19th century. The Yukon Quest started about 20 years later in 1984. And, just a couple of years ago, in 2001, **Ivakkak** was founded in Nunavik to support and promote the traditional way of dog sledding and the return of the pure Inuit Husky dog in Nunavik. Ivakkak is Inuktitut for, “when the dogs are at their best pace.” Again, the race’s itinerary follows a mail route used by dog teamers

Background on *Echo of the Last Howl* and Media in Nunavik:

In the early 1970s, as new electronic technology from the south crept into Northern Québec and including the many rapid social changes in the communities at that time, Inuit, and non-Inuit, began a lengthy consultation process to assess the needs of the communities and appropriate responses. The outcome of this process was a report entitled, “The Northerners” and one of the recommendations of the report was that an effective means of communication be established between the communities.

Adamant about having their own voice, in 1973 the Inuit created Taqramiut Nipingat Inc. (TNI) or “Voice of the North” with the primary mission of providing radio communication for the safety of hunters. The mission for Taqramiut has broadened to include the promotion of the culture and image of the Inuit to the Inuit and to the nation and international community. The objective of TNI is to organize and develop comprehensive communications programs that are of relevance to the Inuit of Northern Quebec and to develop and encourage such programs in co-operation with all branches of the news media and public

relations industry. TNI promotes the image of Inuit on the national scene and creates incentives for the development of mutual understanding. TNI communicates with and broadens social interaction among other native groups in North America. It promotes the development of programs to foster the cultural activities of Inuit, to procure and deliver information on subjects relating to social, educational, political, and economic issues facing the native people of Nunavik. TNI is actively involved in training Inuit youth as communications professionals.

In 1978 the first Inuit radio-production facility was established in the Arctic in the Nunavik community of Salluit. About 15 hours of radio programming is provided weekly. Two years later, in 1980, the first television station in Québec's Far North was created. At this time, a half hour of television programming is produced and aired on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. And, in the mid-90s, two commercial video production units were created that are responsible for *Echo of the Last Howl*.

Echo premiered in Kuuujuaq on 19 January 2005 to community members from across Nunavik. Bloc Québécois leader, Gilles Duceppe and President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, attended. After the screening community members went onto the stage and spoke about their experience with the dog slaughters. One of greatest impacts from screening the film was the presence and support of Gilles Duceppe who promised to show the video at Parliament Hill, to call for a public inquiry and to stand beside the Inuit in support for their efforts to resolve this issue.

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