

## Flag — Flak

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Alas'kaam Flagaa cungartuq.—Alaska's flag is blue.

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Photo: American flags mark the graves of servicemen in the Old Harbor cemetery, 2020. AM905

The Alutiiq language has numerous words borrowed from Russian. Although Russian colonists taught Russian, they also favored bilingualism. As a result, many Alutiiq people were fluent in both languages and Russian words were commonly adopted in Alutiiq speech. By adding Alutiiq endings to Russian words, Russian terms were Alutiicized. For example, the Russian word *lampa*, for lamp, became *laampaaq* in Alutiiq. Flag or *Flak* in Alutiiq, is another word of likely Russian origin. Flag is the same in Russian and English, but Alutiiq speakers borrowed few words from English during the early twentieth century. The strict English only policies of the American era suppressed Alutiiq speech and the borrowing of English words.

Although flags have many uses today—symbolizing national or cultural identity, communicating messages, or decorating a house or boat—they were not used by ancestral Alutiiq people. Instead, Alutiiq people displayed social affiliations through their clothing designs, tattoos, and jewelry and their use of hand gestures.

Flags and their symbolism are the subject of a unique beaded headdress by Alutiiq artist Kayla Christiansen McDermott. Created to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Alaska Purchase, McDermott's piece is a timeline in glass beads. The top and center of the headdress uses traditional Alutiiq colors of red, white, and black to represent ancestral life. Below this, a second row features the colors and patterns of the Russian flag to symbolize conquest and colonial rule. The third row shows the colors and patterns of the American flag, reflecting the most recent period of cultural change. Below the cap, a train of grey and black beads recalls the hardships experienced by Alutiiq people over two and a half centuries of western rule.