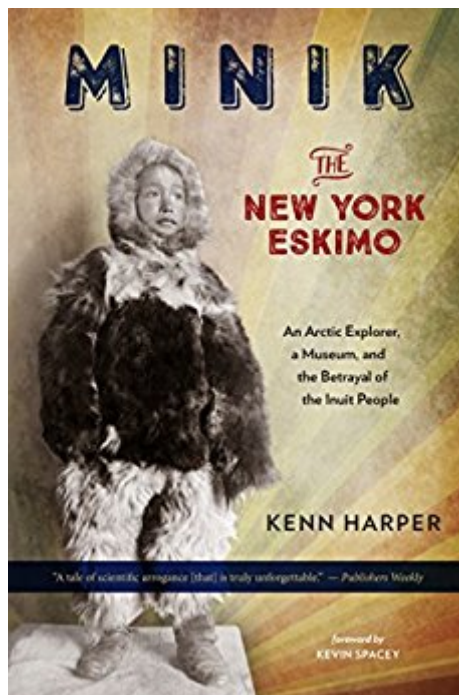




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Minik: The New York Eskimo: An Arctic Explorer, A Museum, And The Betrayal Of The Inuit People



Synopsis

A true story from the great age of Arctic exploration of an Inuit boy's struggle for dignity against Robert Peary and the American Museum of Natural History in turn-of-the-century New York City. Sailing aboard a ship called Hope in 1897, celebrated Arctic explorer Robert Peary entered New York Harbor with peculiar "cargo": Six Polar Inuit intended to serve as live "specimens" at the American Museum of Natural History. Four died within a year. One managed to gain passage back to Greenland. Only the sixth, a boy of six or seven with a precociously solemn smile, remained. His name was Minik. Although Harper's unflinching narrative provides a much needed corrective to history's understanding of Peary, who was known among the Polar Inuit as "the great tormenter", it is primarily a story about a boy, Minik Wallace, known to the American public as "The New York Eskimo." Orphaned when his father died of pneumonia, Minik never surrendered the hope of going "home," never stopped fighting for the dignity of his father's memory, and never gave up his belief that people would come to his aid if only he could get them to understand.

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Customer Reviews

Kenn Harper tells the infinitely sad story of Minik Wallace, an Inuit from northern Greenland. He and five other Eskimos were brought back to the United States in 1897. Lacking the same resistance to

disease as AngloSaxons, all but two of them sickened and died. Minik, one of the survivors, was six years old at the time. The book details how he and his family were treated by the American Museum of Natural History, the explorer Robert Peary and those who were kind and tried to help young Minik. The book is well documented with many first hand accounts of Minik including actual photographs taken at the time. It exposes the prejudices and misconceptions people living then had toward race and science. It also shows how Minik ended up alone by not fitting into American or Inuit culture. The read is an interesting one, but some of the material is repetitive and somewhat tedious. If you're interested in the study of anthropology, culture, and the history of 1898 to 1918 it will be worth the read.

In March 2000 this same author published the book "Give me my Father's Body" about Minik's discovery of his father's skeleton being displayed at the Museum of Natural History. In 1897 Minik was among 6 Inuit Eskimos sailing aboard the Hope from Greenland with Robert Peary, the arctic explorer. 4 of the Inuit died within a year, one returned to Greenland and Minik was the last one left from the original group. This book is about his story. Orphaned when his father died of pneumonia, the boy never surrendered the hope of going home and fighting for the dignity of his father's memory. This is an intriguing read, most especially when combined with the first book. It certainly clears up history's understanding of Robert Peary, the arctic explorer who was known as the "great tormentor."

The story of Minik is sad, reprehensible and fascinating. The story of the various people around him through his life is equally sad, appalling and fascinating. This book does a good job bringing it all together with detailed research and a great collection of antique photos. The book itself bobs a bit between easy, absorbing reading and some repetitive sections with unnecessary details about random people that walks a fine line between tedious and moving right along. In the end though, I've come away from Minik knowing more about the time period, early Arctic exploration in general and this moment of greed, selfishness and true exploitation in American history. A good choice for cool, fall weather reading.

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