**A Nation in Distress:
The Political Economy of Urban Aboriginal Poverty**

**By
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Abstract

This thesis examines the economic outcomes for urban Aboriginal men and women in ten cities across Canada (Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax). It finds that regardless of the city in which one lives, the Aboriginal population faces disproportionately high levels of poverty, unemployment, low median incomes and transfer payments from the government. It also finds that Aboriginal women and families are at greatest risk of socioeconomic stress. Given these findings, and an understanding of the cyclical nature of poverty within the Aboriginal population, it is argued that federal and provincial governments have consciously and unconsciously failed to recognize, reflect and understand the political and economic needs of the Aboriginal population. Future policies will need to go beyond traditional labour market solutions, recognizing that structural barriers have placed the urban Aboriginal population in a situation of great disadvantage.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Executive Summary

1.0 Introduction

There is an increasing body of evidence from Canada and the United States, which identifies the dangers of a concentration of poverty in urban neighbourhoods. This evidence is reflective of the growing concerns related to the cyclical nature of poverty and socioeconomic stress, and the resulting impact of this poverty on the urban core. For example, poverty is often linked to progressively more dangerous neighbourhoods, deteriorating community infrastructure, poor housing conditions, crime, abuse and dependency on drugs and alcohol.

In Canada, the growing attention to urban poverty is arguably the result of a variety of influences. For example, social and economic policy researchers have argued that the changes to federalism, particularly resulting from changes in the 1990s away from directed funding for programs, and a resulting cash crunch in the provinces tended to lead to greater levels of poverty through the 1990s. This change in levels of urban poverty has become clearer through recent statistical analyses.¹ But, of perhaps greater concern is not simply the increasing visibility of poverty, but the concentration of poverty in certain groups, such as visible minorities, immigrants and refugees, and the Aboriginal population.

There is a general perception, particularly in the West, that Canada's Aboriginal population continues to fall behind the rest of the population when it

¹ Kevin Lee, *Urban Poverty in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000; Michael Hatfield, *Concentration of Poverty and Distressed Neighbourhoods in Canada*, Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, 1997.

comes to socioeconomic progress. This may be attributed to the failure of Aboriginal people to adapt to an urban lifestyle as they move from reserve or remote areas with the hope of finding greater employment or educational opportunities. Or, because racism has continually impacted the life chances of the Aboriginal population as the structure of society has never really allowed for the fair and equal participation in the mainstream labour market. However, regardless of the rationalization for the current situation, the fact remains that the Aboriginal population is far more likely to experience poverty and socioeconomic stress, than any other group in Canada.

Today, municipalities are playing a greater role in the Canadian political landscape and as urban poverty research and analysis has described, the new era of urban Aboriginal politics has brought a great deal of attention to the needs of the most vulnerable of urban populations. This study will explore the range and extent of poverty and social exclusion faced by Aboriginal peoples. It will also examine the government policies and programs that, up until this point, have established a framework for the continuing economic inequality faced by the urban Aboriginal population.

This investigation is prompted by concerns relating to jurisdictional divisions of power and responsibility and lack of social, political or economic accountability to the urban Aboriginal population. My interest in poverty issues in general and how they relate to the political and economic structures in contemporary society has also led me to want to understand more about how one group in society could disproportionately face conditions of poverty and

socioeconomic stress, regardless of where they live, generation after generation. I believe that the experiences of poverty and socioeconomic stress within the Aboriginal population may be attributed to a modern state that ironically continues to focus on policies that maintain economic stability and prosperity and is based on conditions of assimilation. This latter concept in itself is quite interesting and one that I will revisit as I challenge past research and assumptions about the solutions to Aboriginal poverty.

It is my hope that this study will provide answers to questions relating to the level of poverty and economic stress in cities across Canada. Currently, the study of urban Aboriginal poverty seems to focus on the very visible problems that exist in many western cities. However, it is my suspicion that similar problems exist in cities across Canada, but are neglected because the population is not as visible and does not warrant political or policy action. If this is the case, I will be compelled to use the results of my research as a basis for speaking out to expose these conditions because I believe in social justice and I am dismayed by the historic and contemporary injustices faced by this group.

1.1 Research questions and hypothesis

An increasing number of local poverty profiles such as *Urban Poverty in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, *Ecology of Deprivation: Spatial Concentration of Poverty in Canada*, *Canadian Fact Book on Poverty*, *Poverty By Postal Code* and *Distressed Neighbourhoods in Canada*, *Housing Policy for Tomorrow's Cities*, have identified poverty in Canadian cities as a major issue, with the Aboriginal population often noted as faring the worst of any group in Canada. The socioeconomic problems faced by the urban Aboriginal population, which while

relatively small suffers disproportionately from the effects of poverty. But what is the extent to which the Aboriginal population is being left behind? And, does the Aboriginal population as a whole suffer to the same extent?

The goal of this research is to understand Aboriginal poverty in urban communities across Canada. In general there is a good statistical understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of the urban Aboriginal population, particularly in western Canada; however, there seems to be little material on cities with a relatively smaller Aboriginal population. For this reason, in answering the following three research questions this study will present and compare data on the Aboriginal population living in a wider range of cities including Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax. Western cities, such as Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon and Winnipeg, are typically identified as cities with a visible Aboriginal population. However, other cities, such as Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax have a fairly large Aboriginal population but it is less visible population due to the overall size of the metropolitan area.

The three research questions are:

- What is the incidence of poverty² among Aboriginal people compared to non-Aboriginals in the selected urban areas?
- Is there a notable difference between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations for a range of economic indicators related to poverty. These indicators include: the percentage of individuals below the Low Income Cut

² The terms poverty and low income will be used as mutually inclusive terms in the analysis of urban Aboriginal poverty.

Off (LICO), the unemployment rate, median employment income, and government transfer income, by sex and Aboriginal Identity.

- Are urban Aboriginal women at greater risk of poverty than Aboriginal males?

In this thesis we argue that:

- Regardless of the city in which one lives, the Canadian urban Aboriginal population faces similar conditions of poverty and consequent economic stress.
- We hold that the conditions faced by Aboriginal women are worse than for men, putting them at a greater disadvantage.
- We expect that in western cities (Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon and Winnipeg) Aboriginal people will have the highest levels of poverty, stemming from high unemployment and a greater reliance on transfer payments from the state.
- Overall, we also expect that the data will reveal a greater degree of low income and unemployment, lower employment income and higher levels of government transfers for the urban Aboriginal population compared to the non-Aboriginal population, and conditions of greater economic stress among Aboriginal women than among men.
- Finally, we argue that the persistence of poverty and the resultant socioeconomic stress represents a failure not only of policies but also of the system of governance.

Several studies have documented the wider implications of poverty that have resulted from the systemic discrimination and social exclusion of the Aboriginal population throughout history. While this study will not examine this discrimination and social exclusion directly, present day poverty is certainly an indication of the existence of social exclusion and historical injustice. In moving forward, the documentation of poverty and income inequality in general can provide the basis for change. Rather than perpetuating social stigma and stereotypes, knowledge and understanding may have the power to help to break down the blame surrounding the presence of Aboriginal poverty. This is perhaps evident in the changing belief among Aboriginal policy advocates that creating policies based on the needs of the Aboriginal population, directed by the Aboriginal population, develops a sense of ownership and sustainability of social change.³

Still, federal and provincial governments have consciously and unconsciously failed to recognize, reflect and understand the political and economic needs of the Aboriginal population. For this reason, future policies will need to look beyond traditional labour market solutions for this population recognizing that structural barriers have put this population in a situation of great disadvantage.

1.2 The urban Aboriginal population

The 2001 Census revealed that for the first time in history over 50 per cent of the Canadian Aboriginal population is living in cities. This seemingly simple

³ Martin Papillion; Gina Cosentino, *Lessons from Abroad: Towards a New Social Model for Canada's Aboriginal People*, CPRN Social Architecture Papers, Research Report F/40, Family Network, April 2004.

population statistic has become a significant issue for both Aboriginal people and governments because the Aboriginal population is now recognized to be an urban population, rather than a traditional ethnic or cultural group associated with Indian reservations and living in remote rural or northern communities. Successive Federal governments⁴ have acknowledged this demographic shift, but the response to the social, cultural, political and economic issues that are directly linked to the demographic shift to urban areas has been limited.⁵

While there has been increasing interest in the urban Aboriginal population, the presence of Aboriginal peoples in cities is not a new phenomenon. In fact, statistics reveal there has been no mass migration off of reserves to cities. Historically, many people of Aboriginal origin and identity have lived in cities, but government policies have not reflected this. Since the 1960s, however, successive federal governments have tried to pass the responsibility for Aboriginal people to the provinces, with the objective of denying services to anyone who moves off reserve.⁶

Today, Aboriginal peoples live in cities for many different reasons. Transition or mobility may compel some to call both city and reserve their home, some have lived in cities for more than one generation, others are more recent

⁴ Frances Abele, *Urgent Need, Serious Opportunity: Towards a New Social Model for Canada's Aboriginal Peoples*, Canadian Policy Research Networks Social Architecture Papers, Research Report F/39, April 2004; Abele, Frances, Katherine A. Graham, and Allan Maslove, "Negotiating Canada: Changes in Aboriginal Policy over the Last Thirty Years," in *How Ottawa Spends 1999-2000*, edited by Leslie A. Pal, Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁵ Siggner, Andrew, "The Challenge of Measuring the Demographic and Socioeconomic Conditions of the Urban Aboriginal Population," *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*, edited by David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, 2004; Papillion and Cosentino, 2004; White, Jerry P; Paul S Maxim; and Dan Beavon, *Aboriginal Conditions: Research as a Foundation for Public Policy*, Vancouver, Toronto: UBC Press, 2003.

⁶ Allan Moscovitch and Andrew Webster, *Social Assistance and Aboriginal People: A Discussion Paper*, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples CD ROM, 1997.

arrivals, and some have no ties to reserves or lands outside of urban areas. In other words, as Newhouse and Peters declare, Aboriginal peoples are “Not Strangers in These Parts”.⁷

However, despite the fact that the Aboriginal population has many ties to cities, it has only been in the past decade that this population has been identified as a core group in need of targeted social, political, and economic support. In fact, while some would argue that this demographic change reflects a reality for the modern Aboriginal population, it poses an acute challenge for policy making and intergovernmentalism. Understanding the historical context of Aboriginal policy making is key to understanding the current policy conflicts over the urban Aboriginal population. As Hanselmann and Gibbins describe, “the urban Aboriginal scene, at least until recently, has been characterized by a lack of jurisdictional clarity and as much by policy avoidance as by intergovernmental collaboration.”⁸ Despite this growing awareness of the socioeconomic problems facing Aboriginals living in urban areas, there has been little attempt to adequately address the needs of the urban population through appropriate policies and intergovernmental action because of a lack of accountability that is rooted in historical jurisdictional divides.⁹

⁷ David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters (eds.), *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*, Policy Research Initiative, 2004.

⁸ Calvin Hanselmann and Roger Gibbins, *Another Voice is Needed: Intergovernmentalism in the Urban Aboriginal Context*, Reconfiguring Aboriginal-State Relations in Canada, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen’s University, November 1-2, 2002.

⁹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Aboriginal Peoples in Urban Centres: Report of the National Round Table on Aboriginal Urban Issues*, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1992; Abele, 2004; Abele, Graham and Maslove, 1999; Hanselmann and Gibbins, 2002.

1.3 Putting urban Aboriginal poverty in context

Recent studies on urban poverty have painted a grim picture of the extreme poverty, poor housing conditions, low educational attainment and health outcomes, and disproportionate levels of unemployment, addiction, abuse, lone parent families, and mental health and criminal justice issues that are experienced to a greater extent within the urban Aboriginal population.¹⁰ In fact, it is widely understood by researchers and policy makers that “no other group in Canada experiences such high rates of poverty, or as much family and community distress”.¹¹

Not all Aboriginal people living in cities face these conditions. However, what is true is that while cities may offer greater economic opportunities for the Aboriginal population on the whole, research has found that urbanization has not resulted in economic conditions for Aboriginal people similar to those of the non-Aboriginal population.¹² The Aboriginal population in Canada, whether they live in cities, on reserve, in the North or in rural areas, is overwhelmingly faced with disproportionate levels of poverty and socioeconomic stress. Still, the socioeconomic outcomes in cities are certainly better than in rural and remote communities, the concern is the gap between Aboriginals and the rest of the population.

¹⁰ Hanselmann, February 2003; John Richards, “Neighbours matter: poor neighbourhoods and urban aboriginal policy,” *CD Howe Commentary*, November 30, 2001; Frances Abele, *Urgent Need, Serious Opportunity: Towards a New Social Model for Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples*, Canadian Policy Research Networks Social Architecture Papers, Research Report F/39, April 2004.

¹¹ John Richards, *CD Howe Commentary*, November 30, 2001; pp.1.

¹² Janice Stokes, Ian Peach and Raymond B. Blake, *Rethinking the Jurisdictional Divide: The Marginalization of Urban Aboriginal Communities and Federal Policy Responses*, The Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy, Public Policy Paper Series, Public Policy Paper 28, December 2004; Hanselmann, February 2003; Richards, November 30, 2001.

In a 2000 report entitled *Urban Poverty in Canada*, Lee noted that “the incidence of poverty among the urban Aboriginal population was the highest of any population examined”.¹³ Using 1996 census data, his report revealed that 55.6% of Aboriginal people living in Canadian cities were poor, with above average rates of social assistance among the Aboriginal population as a whole.¹⁴ In 2001, John Richards acknowledged that the situation had not improved. In a study for the CD Howe Institute, a conservative research and policy organization, he suggests that while the urban Aboriginal population tends to fare better economically than their counterparts in remote areas and on reserve, the Aboriginal population remains geographically over-represented in the poorest of urban neighbourhoods, particularly in Western Canada.¹⁵

Aboriginal women are in a markedly disadvantaged position. A literature review prepared for the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry found that urban Aboriginal women and families were suffering from a range of social and economic problems. For example, it was found that over half of Aboriginal families were headed by single female parents.¹⁶ In a 1981 report, Stewart Clatworthy also notes that this high percentage of mother-led single parent families may have serious socioeconomic repercussions.¹⁷ Evidence suggests that the education level of Aboriginal women is far behind that of the general population and that Aboriginal women often have little or no employment history.¹⁸ In fact, even in the examples

¹³ Lee, 2000: p. 38.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Richards, 2001.

¹⁶ Jennifer Yarnell, *Urban Aboriginal Issues: A literature review*, prepared for the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, February, 1990.

¹⁷ Stewart Clatworthy, May, 1981.

¹⁸ Clatworthy, 1981, cited in Yarnell, 1990.

where Aboriginal women have found steady employment, labour market segmentation has pushed them into low paying occupations where there is no upward mobility.¹⁹ Inadequate childcare support and lack of knowledge of existing programs to assist single mothers or families, has also made employment opportunities inaccessible and sometimes undesirable.²⁰ The result is the creation of a cycle of poverty and other social problems that are an extension of the poverty that is experienced.

Social commentaries and studies of the Aboriginal population have highlighted ongoing concerns over the deterioration of the social conditions of Aboriginal families. Of notable concern are the high percentage of lone parent families, high rates of child poverty, and the very high rate of Aboriginal children apprehended into the child welfare system.²¹ These indicators certainly qualify the concern that a greater proportion of Aboriginal families are under stress but what is the cause of this stress? There are several factors.

Within the family and the community, Aboriginal men and women tend to face a number of distressing challenges. The residual effects of the residential school system have left an entire generation of Aboriginal people haunted by social, cultural and psychological suffering. In addition to these challenges, Aboriginal women also experience sexism and physical and sexual abuse far more often than any other group in the population. The long-term emotional effects of physical, psychological or sexual abuse have been found to have manifested in

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Yarnell, 1990.

²¹ Stewart Clatworthy, *Issues Concerning the Role of Native Women in the Winnipeg Labour Force*, University of Winnipeg, 1981.

alcohol and drug abuse. The widespread nature of abuse within the Aboriginal population has created serious concerns for families, the community and the ability of individuals to cope in everyday life.

In a 1990 study for the Aboriginal Justice Commission, Jennifer Yarnell notes that substance abuse (alcoholism in particular) has been a contributing factor to the deterioration of the Aboriginal identity and consequently Aboriginal families, and has led to high involvement in the criminal justice system, high unemployment, family disintegration (for example, children apprehended by the child welfare system) and low life expectancy.²² These serious problems are inextricably linked to the high rates of Aboriginal lone parent families and family poverty. Together, the lack or precariousness of a secure family unit, poverty and substance abuse, and are arguably the source of the cyclical nature of Aboriginal socioeconomic distress.

As the literature review will reveal, the poverty that is experienced within the urban Aboriginal population is more than simple inadequacy of income. It is cyclical, often affecting multiple generations, and rooted in social exclusion.²³ While poverty and social exclusion often go hand in hand, social exclusion is perhaps of greater overall detriment as it speaks to the capacity or freedom that one has to influence their own environment.²⁴ For Aboriginal people this is an important concept because it speaks to the ability to maintain self-respect despite

²² Ibid.

²³ Social exclusion is a complex phenomenon, which is generally the result of a permanent or long term situation, rather than a temporary one. It is caused by insufficient material resources, as well as socio-demographic and cultural factors, and is relative to a given period and society.

²⁴ Andrew Mitchell and Richard Shillington, "Poverty, Inequality and Social Inclusion", *Social Inclusion: Canadian Perspectives*, edited by Ted Richmond and Anver Saloojee, Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005.

adversity. With a long tradition of colonial policies that have effectively socially excluded the Aboriginal population from mainstream society because of their culture, poverty has created an additional barrier and further exclusion from economic opportunities and advancement.

1.4 Bridging the knowledge gap

While current research has done much to identify the conditions faced by many Aboriginal people living in urban areas, there remains a gap in empirical knowledge about the level of poverty, employment, sources of income (employment and government transfers) and the discrepancies between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, as well as between Aboriginal men and women. Of the few studies that provide insight into socioeconomic, demographic, and labour market variables, they often have been limited to a particular city or province in western Canada, or they focus the analysis on labour market indicators and how the failure to achieve gainful employment is the root cause of poverty. What is more, research tends to generalize about the Aboriginal population, without recognition or consideration of differences between men and women. For example, existing studies address Aboriginal people within research as a homogeneous group, both in terms of culture and gender, without identifying the complexity of experiences and socioeconomic differences. With the exception of some very dated work done by Yarnell and Clatworthy, there is little information distinguishing the experiences of men and women. This creates a huge gap in knowledge because it is well recognized in sociological and feminist research that men and women face very different experiences, particularly when it comes to political economic experiences.

In conceptualizing this thesis, a study by Dominique Fleury in 2002 prompted me to think about the participation of Aboriginal people in the labour market and barriers that may or may not be present. In this study, Fleury suggests that there exists a relatively more favourable situation in the labour market that enables off-reserve Aboriginal people to more frequently escape persistent poverty.²⁵ This report was somewhat contradictory to much of the other research that examines the urban Aboriginal population, but it created a point of reflection on poverty and the limited success of labour market policies in addressing the root causes of poverty. It is certainly worth understanding the economic performance of the urban Aboriginal population as it relates to the labour market, given that many prescriptions for progress are based on improved employment outcomes. However, what was most intriguing about this study was the concept of looking at the high risk subgroups that do not benefit from labour market policies. It is these groups that are most affected by extreme poverty and socioeconomic distress, and the ones who are neglected by labour market policies that are often purported by politicians and policy advocates as the true agents of change. It is these high-risk groups that will be at the center of a political and economic analysis and critique of urban Aboriginal poverty and of government policies that too often focus on work as the primary approach to addressing poverty.

1.5 Conclusion

For many Aboriginal people, the promise of a better life in the cities may be an illusion. The following literature review will describe how over the past

²⁵ Dominique Fleury, *Economic Performance of Off-Reserve Aboriginal Canadians: A Study of Groups at Risk of Social Exclusion*, Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, 2002.

decade research has repeatedly shown that no other group in Canada faces the same level of socioeconomic distress as the Aboriginal population. Moreover, it has been found that “whether they live in cities for a short time or plan to stay there permanently, Aboriginal people in urban centres often face overwhelming problems that are rooted in cultural dislocation and powerlessness, discrimination and economic hardship.”²⁶

This study will take a broad look at urban Aboriginal poverty across Canada, with consideration given to the notable conditions of socioeconomic stress in Western Canada. Following this will be an examination of 10 cities (Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax) in order to determine if the experiences and conditions of low income and economic stress facing Aboriginal peoples in these cities is comparable. Like other studies done in the west, the focus of this research will be to identify the economic characteristics of the urban Aboriginal population in order to understand if this population is in need of policy changes that will specifically address the needs of the population and the life chances of Aboriginal people living in urban areas.

Aboriginal peoples across Canada have repeatedly faced policies of social and economic exclusion, political harassment, and cultural hypocrisy, all with little opposition from mainstream society. It is time to address this injustice because we, as a society, cannot afford (economically or socially) to let a segment of the population continue to be affected by poverty, abuse, criminal and social injustice, dependency, poor health and social exclusion. Using a political

²⁶ Ibid, 1993: p. 3.

economic argument I will identify why it is not productive to let these problems continue. In doing so I will bring together a comprehensive, nation-wide study of urban Aboriginal poverty, which can help shape future policy related to the needs of urban Aboriginal groups in Canada.

This study is also an attempt to bring justice and insight into the economic conditions faced by the urban Aboriginal population. At the heart of the study is a statistical profile that focuses on the urban Aboriginal population in order to establish the incidence of poverty in relation to the rest of the population. In doing so, this research will examine various quantifiable factors that may explain the incidence of poverty such as employment and income, but will also look at the level of government transfers as an indicator of dependence on the state for support, and determine whether men and women face similar economic outcomes. To better understand these variables this paper will also identify some historical factors and policy decisions that have contributed to the depressed economic status of the Aboriginal population.

Chapter Two: Literature Review & Critique

2.0 Introduction

In December 2004, the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy released a public policy paper on the marginalization of urban Aboriginal people and federal policy responses. In this paper the authors explain “As the percentage of the Aboriginal population living in urban areas has grown rapidly, from 7 percent in the 1950s to about 50 percent today, this has become a significant issue for both Aboriginal people and provincial governments.”²⁷

While many Aboriginal issues are urban issues, the fact remains that the urbanization of Aboriginal people over the last fifty years has effectively transferred federal financial responsibilities to provincial and municipal governments.²⁸ Today Aboriginal policy is built on a patchwork of jurisdictional responsibilities, none of which have been effective in providing a social support system that enables a population in distress. Municipalities have been hit hardest by this gap in policy, as cities are unable to generate enough tax revenue to fully support the programs and services most needed to address the socioeconomic ills of the Aboriginal population. And, despite stated objectives by the federal government since the 1990s to address urban Aboriginal poverty, the Aboriginal population has continued to face marginalized socioeconomic circumstances.²⁹

This chapter will examine the literature relating to the urbanization of Canada’s Aboriginal people, with a specific focus on the socioeconomic

²⁷ Janice Stokes, Ian Peach and Raymond B. Blake, *Rethinking the Jurisdictional Divide: The Marginalization of Urban Aboriginal Communities and Federal Policy Responses*, Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy Public Policy Paper Series, December 2004; p.1.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

circumstances of this population. This chapter will also take a critical look at the solutions presented in research and policy recommendations that centre on labour market solutions to the high incidence of poverty, unemployment and other socioeconomic factors that contribute to the depressed conditions experienced by a large proportion of Aboriginals living in Canada's major cities. Finally, this review will offer a political economy critique of the jurisdictional framework of Aboriginal policy in Canada, which has done little to redress the socioeconomic stress facing the urban Aboriginal population.

2.1 The Urbanization of the Aboriginal Population

In the twenty-first century, cities are thought to offer more opportunities, both social and economic, particularly for First Nations on reserve and Inuit in remote Northern communities who often face distressing socio-economic conditions including high rates of poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health issues, food insecurity, and suicide. For this reason, factors relating to mobility and relocation to cities from reserves and remote areas may explain changes to urban Aboriginal demographics. For example, on reserve and in the North, services are often limited to deal with the primary needs of the population. As a result, more specific needs related to health and family supports may not be met. These may include facilities for aging parents, assistance for those living with a disability or caring for someone with a disability, shelters and counseling for families with domestic violence issues, adequate childcare facilities and medical services, which often are not available because of limited funding or small numbers of people needing these services.

Many communities also face serious challenges linked to having inadequate infrastructure to meet their needs. There are many examples: lack of sanitation services and water treatment facilities, limited roads and access to transportation (especially for remote or fly-in communities), substandard housing, and insufficient housing supply. Families may also face the challenges of limited educational facilities. It is reported that on-reserve education levels remain far below those of other Canadians, thus limiting their chances for finding better paying jobs whether on or off reserve.³⁰ Consequently, individuals or families may come to cities to increase their educational opportunities and chances for labour market advancement.

Perhaps the most limiting experience for on reserve and rural communities is the lack of employment opportunities for residents. An on-going dilemma faced by First Nations reserves is the inability to create enough jobs required for self-sufficiency or economic prosperity. As a result, reserves are plagued by low income and reliance on welfare. In 2004, John Richards reports high rates of poverty and reliance on social assistance on reserve, noting with some concern, that “reserves are only good for some people” and describing that the “have nots” from the reserve tend to end up in cities as they are often treated like second class citizens even in their own communities.³¹ For all of these reasons, it is believed that more and more Aboriginal people are moving to cities to create more opportunities and a better standard of living for themselves and their children.

³⁰ John Richards, “Aboriginal Policy – Time to Rethink,” Policy Options

³¹ John Richards, “Reserves Are Only Good For Some People,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, spring 2000, 35(1): p. 190-202.

However, as noted in the introduction, Aboriginal people living in cities are certainly not a new phenomenon. So what explains the significant demographic shift that has found more than 50 per cent of the Aboriginal population living in cities for the first time in history? No doubt economic opportunities play a role. But, as Andy Siggner suggests ethnic mobility provides an explanation of the modern urban experiences of the Aboriginal population. The concept of ethnic mobility will be examined in more detail in the methodology section, but in general it refers to the macro-historical, sociological, and legal events that are contributing to the demographic size and growth of the Aboriginal population.³²

2.2 Urban Aboriginal Experiences

The Aboriginal population has been faced with extreme conditions of socioeconomic stress throughout history. As urbanization has increased in recent years, the complex social, political and economic conditions that have affected Aboriginal communities in remote and rural areas are also affecting urban Aboriginal people. In Regina, for example, the 2001 Census revealed that there remain significant socioeconomic disparities between the Aboriginal population and the total urban population.³³ This is an important finding, not only because it contributes to an understanding that Aboriginal issues are in reality also urban issues, but also because it identifies the socioeconomic gap between urban Aboriginal communities and the rest of the population.

³² Siggner, Andrew, "The Challenge of Measuring the Demographic and Socioeconomic Conditions of the Urban Aboriginal Population," *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*, edited by David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, 2004.

³³ Ibid.

Within cities and communities there is diversity, and each city's demographic and geographic circumstances have implications for the situation of the urban Aboriginal population. In a recent study by Lorna Jantzen, indicators were selected and applied to illustrate the different demographic, cultural and socioeconomic situations facing the Aboriginal population living in seven census metropolitan areas (CMAs).³⁴ The study found that while the situation for urban Aboriginal people is quite similar, the socioeconomic indicators vary across CMAs based on varied urban situations. Differences in the reporting of Aboriginal origin and identity also lead to differing results. Ultimately, Jantzen suggests that the varying degrees of socioeconomic stress and cultural differences, as represented by the different language, culture, history and diversity of the Aboriginal population, mean that solutions need to be specific to the context and experiences of each city.³⁵

With this said, there are general socioeconomic concerns that face urban Aboriginal communities. The urban Aboriginal population is at greater risk of poverty and socioeconomic stress than any other group in Canada. The 1996 census revealed that 55.6% of Aboriginal people living in Canadian cities were poor, with above average rates of social assistance among the Aboriginal population.³⁶ In 2001, the situation had not improved. While the Aboriginal

³⁴ Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) is a term used by Statistics Canada to refer to a city and its surrounding area. It is the main labour market area of an urbanized core of at least 100,000 population.

³⁵ Lorna Jantzen, "Top seven Aboriginal Census Metropolitan Areas: Similar Issues and Different Circumstances," *Our Diverse Cities*, Number 1, Spring 2004; pp. 83.

³⁶ Canadian Council on Social Development, *Aboriginal Children in Poverty in Urban Communities: Social exclusion and the growing racialization of poverty in Canada*, presentation by John Anderson to the Subcommittee on Children and Youth at Risk of the Standing Committee

population tends to fare better economically than their counterparts in remote areas and on reserve, John Richards suggests that the Aboriginal population is geographically over-represented in the poorest of urban neighbourhoods, particularly in Western Canada.

Aboriginal women are in a particularly disadvantaged position. A literature review prepared for the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry found that women and families were suffering from a range of social and economic problems. For example, it was found that over half of Aboriginal families were headed by single female parents.³⁷ In a 1981 report, Stewart Clatworthy also notes that this high percentage of mother-led single parent families may have serious socioeconomic repercussions.³⁸ Other research has found that the education level of Aboriginal women is far behind that of the general population and they often have little or no employment history.³⁹ In the examples where Aboriginal women have found steady employment, labour market segmentation has pushed them into low paying occupations where there is no upward mobility.⁴⁰ Inadequate childcare support and lack of knowledge of existing programs to assist single mothers or families, has also made employment opportunities inaccessible and sometimes undesirable.⁴¹ The result is the creation of a cycle of poverty and other social problems that are an extension of the poverty that is experienced.

on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Wednesday November 9, 2003.

³⁷ Jennifer Yarnell, *Urban Aboriginal Issues: A literature review*, prepared for the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, February, 1990.

³⁸ Stewart Clatworthy, *The Demographic and Economic Circumstances of Winnipeg's Native Population*, Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, May, 1981.

³⁹ Clatworthy, 1981, cited in Yarnell, 1990.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Yarnell, February 1990.

Clatworthy also reasons that the high percentage of lone parent families is an indicator that the Aboriginal family has deteriorated.⁴² Within the family and the community Aboriginal women tend to face sexism, as well as physical and sexual abuse far more often than the rest of the female population. The results indicate that the long-term emotional effects of physical, psychological or sexual abuse may manifest in alcohol and drug abuse, which in turn, affects the family and the ability to cope in everyday life.⁴³ Various studies have noted that alcoholism, in particular, has been a contributing factor to this deterioration and has led to high levels of involvement in the criminal justice system, a disproportionate apprehension of children into the child welfare system, high unemployment, family disintegration and early death.⁴⁴ However, some of the more serious problems related to high rates of Aboriginal lone parent families are connected to the creation of a cycle of poverty and distress.

The risks of such concentration within a population or community are great. Studies examining urban conditions have found that 40% poverty⁴⁵ is the threshold whereby “a self-sustaining chain reaction is set off that creates an explosive increase in the amount of crime, addiction and welfare dependency.”⁴⁶ In other words, when poverty crosses the 40% threshold a neighbourhood reaches

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Clatworthy, 1981.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Based on American studies, 40% poverty is a commonly accepted definition of “high poverty”, meaning that 40% or more of the population is living in households with incomes below the poverty line (Jargowsky and Bane, 1991; Hatfield, 1997).

⁴⁶ Abdolmohammad Kazemipur, “Ecology of Deprivation: Spatial Concentration of Poverty in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Regional Science/Revue Canadienne des sciences regionales*, XXIII(3), Autumn, 2000; Michael Hatfield, *Concentration of Poverty and Distressed Neighbourhoods in Canada*, Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, 1997.

a critical mass that leads to a community of distress and significantly reduces the life opportunities of its residents. Such levels of poverty perpetuate a cycle of distress.⁴⁷

There are a number of socioeconomic indicators that suggest the Aboriginal population faces this critical mass in several urban areas.

- In a 2005 study conducted by Lorna Jantzen it was found that in seven cities across Canada the Aboriginal Identity population has a much high proportion of lone parent families than the non-Aboriginal population. The percentage of lone parent families ranges from 19 per cent in Toronto and Calgary to 34 per cent in Regina and Saskatoon.⁴⁸ The study clearly finds that the Aboriginal population makes up a disproportionate share of the lone-parent population, “particularly in cities where the Aboriginal identity population comprises a relatively significant share of the city’s population.”⁴⁹
- Educational attainment amongst the Aboriginal population also remains a concern. Tait and O’Donnell reported on the release of the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, which suggests some increases in levels of education for the Aboriginal Identity population; however, they note “Aboriginal Identity youth between the ages of 15-24 continue to have a lower rate of school attendance than the non-Aboriginal population.”⁵⁰ This number is significant in relation to the demographics of the Aboriginal population in general. As this age

⁴⁷ For the purpose of this study, Statistics Canada’s Low Income Cut Off (LICO) will be used as the economic measure of poverty; however, the use of the LICO as a poverty measure is contentious, as it is a relative measure of a household’s ability to maintain a basic standard of living, allowing it to meet its shelter, food and other costs in relation to the income received (Statistics Canada, 2004).

⁴⁸ Jantzen, 2004.

⁴⁹ Ibid: p.81.

⁵⁰ Tait and O’Donnell, cited in Jantzen, 2004.

cohort represents a large proportion of the population, low education levels are significant for the future of urban Aboriginal people. In spite of this, the research does suggest a more positive educational trend as the Identity population is more likely to return to school as mature students.⁵¹

- Ultimately, the greatest concern for the Aboriginal population who face conditions of poverty and socioeconomic stress is the mounting evidence that suggests growing up in a neighbourhood with “bad” characteristics increases the probability of future undesirable outcomes. Research has found that harsh neighbourhood conditions do affect children, and if poor choices are made as these children grow up, they are likely to have lifelong consequences. For example, if children drop out of school, get involved in criminal activity or become single teenage parents, this confluence of factors suggests that the community has passed the poverty threshold.⁵²

These facts and figures provide a socioeconomic context to the realities of urban Aboriginal communities. While there remain some gaps in knowledge and quantitative analysis of the socioeconomic conditions of the urban population in many cities in Canada, there is no doubt that a serious problems exists. The literature suggests this is particularly true in Western cities as they have a higher proportion of Aboriginal people than in other Canadian cities.

The literature from the West strongly indicates that Aboriginal people disproportionately live in poverty and in poor neighbourhoods that contribute to social exclusion and a psychology of distress. While most Aboriginal people

⁵¹ Jantzen, 2004: p. 82.

⁵² Jargowsky, 1996: p. 4-5.

remain at or below the poverty line (the mainstream indicator for this being Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut Off), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada cites data to suggest that in major western cities four times as many Aboriginal people as other citizens are below the poverty line.⁵³ This poverty is particularly visible in Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg and Vancouver, but also notable in other western cities such as Calgary and Edmonton.

Several authors suggest that the most pressing problem associated with the trend of urban poverty is that the migration of Aboriginal people to cities from reserves transfers the social and economic costs of inadequate on-reserve conditions from the federal government to other levels of government.⁵⁴ This becomes a huge concern for Western cities in particular where the urban Aboriginal population is sizeable. The Canada West Foundation emphasizes this concern in its 2003 report, *Shared Responsibility: Final Report and Recommendations of the Urban Aboriginal Initiative*. The author reports: "nearly two-thirds of urban Aboriginal people live in the West", and that "the concentration of Aboriginal people in major urban areas of western Canada is rapidly increasing. For example, the proportion of Saskatoon's population that is Aboriginal increased by more than one-fifth in five years, from 7.5 percent in 1996 to 9.1 percent in 2001."⁵⁵ While there has been increased policy activity to

⁵³ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *Social Development: Health and Social Indicators*, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, cited on-line December 27, 2006 at http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/gs/soci_e.html.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Calvin Hanselmann, *Shared Responsibility: Final Report and Recommendations of the Urban Aboriginal Initiative*, A Western Cities Project Report, Canada West Foundation, February 2003; p.2.

address this demographic shift, there remains a very realistic fear that no order of government will assume primary responsibility for urban Aboriginal policy.⁵⁶

This is of concern, particularly when knowing the extent to which socioeconomic problems will impact the life chances of this population. For example, research has found that in western cities the labour market participation rate is lower, while the unemployment rate is higher, and in Winnipeg, Regina and Saskatoon roughly half of all Aboriginal adults are without a high school diploma.⁵⁷ While it is dangerous to try to understand employment and labour market indicators without understanding the psychology of the Aboriginal population, these indicators offer a worrying picture of the degree to which the Aboriginal population has been unable to access wealth or participate in the economic structure of contemporary society.

2.3 Examination of Aboriginal policy in Canada

Historically, Aboriginal policy is rooted in the exploitation by foreign powers and was created with the intent to “civilize” Aboriginal people. Colonial practices of the state and policies and legislation intended for the Indian population were created to destroy the dignity and identity of Canada’s First Peoples.⁵⁸ Several authors have commented on the problems experienced by the Aboriginal population and suggested a clear link to a history of abuse and the denial of basic civil rights, such as the right to vote,⁵⁹ by the Canadian state. The

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ John Richards, CD Howe Commentary, November 30, 2001.

⁵⁸ Andrew Webster, *The Political Economy of Indian Relief in the Territorial North, 1927-1973*, Masters thesis, Department of Social Work, Carleton University, 1993; Robin Brownlie, “Enough to keep them Alive: Indian Welfare in Canada, 1873-1965 (review), *The Canadian Historical Review*, 86(1), March 2005.

⁵⁹ Under the Indian Act, Canada’s First Nations were denied the right to vote by the Canadian state until 1961.

denial of economic and political rights explains why the Aboriginal population has been faced with and continues to be faced with so much poverty and so much attendant economic inequality.

A review of literature and policy that examines the socioeconomic struggles faced by the urban Aboriginal population suggests that the approach to the study of Aboriginal poverty is typically the same as the methodology and basic assumptions used in the study of poverty in general. While the use of a similar methodology provides a useful comparison, there is perhaps a need to examine the methodology to identify latent biases or values in the approach, and a need to look beyond the basic economic differences between income groups to examine other structural barriers that have created conditions of social exclusion.

For example, it is increasingly accepted that past injustices, colonialism and the unique jurisdictional politics and policies complicate the study of Aboriginal affairs of state. However, given this knowledge and recognition of the historical influences of the Aboriginal population, it is interesting that there is little consideration given to an alternative, historically and culturally sensitive interpretation of how to address Aboriginal poverty. Hugh Shewell offers such in his commentary on Indian Welfare in Canada entitled *Enough to Keep Them Alive: Indian Welfare in Canada, 1873-1965*.

Based on an historical analysis of Indian welfare, it is clear that there has been discriminatory actions by the state that have targeted the Aboriginal population. In recent years, the federal government has attempted to overcome these unjust policies by creating conditions to improve economic opportunities for

the Aboriginal population. However, it is of concern that in spite of these efforts, on the whole, the population continues to face devastating poverty and poor socioeconomic conditions, disproportional confrontations with the legal and correctional systems, high rates of domestic violence, substance abuse and homelessness. For this reason, serious attention needs to be focused on cities, and services comparable to those found on reserve and in Aboriginal communities. Funding needs to be offered to urban centers with high numbers of Aboriginals in order to deal with their substandard circumstances. Political and policy leadership in this area needs to come from all levels of government, but with a notable role for the federal government to provide targeted and ongoing funding to establish real opportunities to overcome the cyclical effects of poverty and social exclusion that have been experienced by the Aboriginal population for generations.

Changes are certainly necessary because cities and communities (as well as Canadian society in general) can no longer expect the living conditions of the Aboriginal population to remain static. Policy needs to reflect the location of the Aboriginal population on reserves, in rural and remote communities AND in cities. Policy needs to reflect the reality of where the population is choosing to live, while incorporating methods to close the socioeconomic gap that exists between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population.

After ten years there is also further concern that the policy recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) have done nothing but collect dust. Since 1996, the socioeconomic conditions of the Aboriginal population on and off reserve have not changed, but the political

situation has. John Richards is quite critical of the RCAP final report, suggesting that the Commission overstated the place for treaty rights and Aboriginal self-government in Canadian society. His concern is that RCAP “ignored the extent to which many Aboriginals want to participate in mainstream society; it exaggerated the potential for economically viable on-reserve communities.”⁶⁰ It is clear from the conditions on reserve that the current structure of funding is not working to improve the conditions or life chances of many people and reserve communities, nor offer the community dignity and respect through identification of their distinct culture.

And while it is clear that many Aboriginal people do want an urban lifestyle, the fact remains that the urban Aboriginal policy scene is a political hot potato that continues to be characterized by a lack of jurisdictional clarity and policy avoidance by all levels of government.⁶¹ Even despite the evidence and awareness of the socioeconomic problems facing Aboriginals living in urban areas, there has been little attempt to adequately address the needs of the urban population through appropriate policies and intergovernmental action because of a lack of accountability that is rooted in historical jurisdictional divides. Racism also plays an important role as it is the underlying motivation of the unjust policies and discrimination faced by Aboriginals throughout history and into today.

⁶⁰ Richards, “Aboriginal policy: let’s get past our reservations,” *Globe and Mail*, December 19, 2001.

⁶¹ Calvin Hanselmann and Roger Gibbins, *Another Voice is Needed: Intergovernmentalism in the Urban Aboriginal Context*, Reconfiguring Aboriginal-State Relations in Canada, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen’s University, November 1-2, 2002.

2.4 Understanding Aboriginal Poverty

Research conducted by Helmar Drost notes that little quantitative research has been carried out on the economic conditions and labour force activities of urban Aboriginals. It is quite interesting that a group that is more likely than any other in Canada to face poverty, greater depth of poverty, social exclusion and socioeconomic stress has only recently become a focus of economic analysis. With this said, it is of some concern that his analysis fails to recognize the historical and cultural context that has influenced these economic conditions. The focus of his analysis is specifically on labour market outcomes as an explanation of the economic conditions facing the urban Aboriginal population. This is not to say that this research does not serve as an indicator of some of the problems that exist within urban Aboriginal communities. However, relying on labour market variables to explain the economic outcomes does little to explain poverty or socioeconomic stress, particularly within the Aboriginal population. In fact, it can be detrimental to understanding the true nature of poverty as it often places blame on individuals without consideration of why a person or group does not meet its economic potential, and suggests that by simply adopting mainstream economic values one can overcome poverty.

In a chapter written by John Richards in the CD Howe Institute's Social Policy Challenge Series, he asks the question: What does explain Aboriginal social problems? His trust is in two fundamental explanations. First, that the traditional Aboriginal culture is "dramatically at odds with the requirements of

success in an industrial society”⁶² and second, “government policies have encouraged unemployment and welfare dependency on a large scale.”⁶³ Both in an historical and contemporary context these assertions appear quite valid. However, while there may be some truth in this analysis, and the argument that there is no going back in time to change the political economic history of the Aboriginal population, labour market participation may not be the way to move past the social problems faced by the Aboriginal population. In fact, from a political economic perspective Richards’ prescription for future welfare reforms is distressing. He suggests that social assistance be reduced in its present form and replaced by incentives to engage in training and work through “workfare” type reforms. It is my view that this approach will not be effective as tied benefits only create a paternalistic situation where the social or structural root of poverty is simply ignored.

The fundamental concern with this argument is that labour market solutions have not been successful up to this point, as the Aboriginal population both on and off reserve, continues to face a range of barriers to participation in paid employment. In fact, the failure of labour market and training programs (i.e. workfare) has been documented as ineffective as the people targeted by these programs have little interest or motivation to perform the low-skill menial work that is assigned to them, not to mention the fact that the work does not offer a

⁶² John Richards, “Neighbours matter: poor neighbourhoods and urban aboriginal policy,” *CD Howe Commentary*, November 30, 2001: pp. 153.

⁶³ *Ibid*; pp. 154.

sense of pride as people often are working for a wage that does not meet their basic needs.⁶⁴

Equally important is the fact that Richards' approach is a modern version of the policies and programs long supported by successive generations of federal governments – “if only” the Aboriginal population would assimilate into the mainstream capitalist market, then their socioeconomic ills would be cured. For many reasons this is a dangerous political and policy argument; however it is important to think clearly about why this position has been taken, and how in the future, policies can be developed in a way to address socioeconomic ills, knowing that some greater degree of social and economic integration into mainstream society is not only inevitable, but necessary.

The paradox in creating effective economic policies for the urban Aboriginal population is that solutions to poverty and socioeconomic stress will require participation in the mainstream capitalist market; but there is a consistent failure of these policies to actually improve socioeconomic conditions. In the literature on solutions to Aboriginal poverty, two researchers in particular gave strong and consistent messages regarding economic prescriptions for change. John Richards and Helmar Drost make clear arguments that advocate economic integration, labour market participation, or focusing on skills and training. While these arguments are certainly well reasoned, their greatest flaw may be in the fact that labour market policies will not change the circumstances that lead to poverty, such as abuse, addiction, health and mental health problems, low educational

⁶⁴ Andrew Mitchell and Richard Shillington, “Poverty, Inequality and Social Inclusion”, *Social Inclusion: Canadian Perspectives*, Ted Richmond and Anver Saloojee (eds.), Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005.

attainment, domestic violence, family breakdown, the pressures of single parenthood or dependency on a single income, and other factors which lead to social exclusion.

In addition to the many social and structural barriers that lead to social exclusion or a feeling that one does not belong, there are also stereotypes that exist in mainstream society that have led to frustration and lack of sympathy for many of the urban Aboriginal individuals who are caught in a cycle of poverty, unemployment or underemployment. The psychology of the mainstream is based on the “Protestant work ethic” which is at the very foundation of free market capitalism. In other words, the perception of success in modern western society is based on the confidence in liberal markets to create and distribute wealth for those who demonstrate the virtues of responsibility, honesty, frugality, ability, and self-control. For anyone who does not achieve economic success, particularly those who live in extreme socioeconomic hardship or live in a cycle of poverty, it is not that the market has failed them, but rather, they have failed themselves and the market. The result of this is stigma or blame of the individual who is living in poverty.

While there is recognition that past injustice has had lasting effects, the blame for poverty, both at the policy and societal level, remains on the Aboriginal population. In fact, this blame, I would argue, undercuts much of the labour market policies that aim to address poverty itself. This is not to say that meaningful, long term employment is not the best way to improve the socioeconomic stability and improve the life chances for both individuals and

families. However, a job in and of itself is not a magic bullet. A job is a short-term solution if there is no opportunity for individual fulfillment, if it does not offer a living wage, if it is not in a geographic location that is accessible to the individual, if it does not provide opportunity for personal or professional advancement or cultural continuity and integrity.

Further, employment cannot be a long-term solution for poverty or socially excluded individuals if there are no supports in place to make it advantageous to choose that option. To choose to participate in the labour market there needs to be an opportunity for a better life. This means that there needs to be affordable childcare spaces for single mothers in their own neighbourhood, public transportation that is convenient and accessible, safe and affordable housing, appropriate hours of work that make work both safe and a viable option for individuals and families, and a range of supports and benefits that are available for those who are faced by health or mental health challenges. Many urban Aboriginal people who are living in poverty are faced with many challenges that create a cycle of socioeconomic distress. Unfortunately, employment in itself does not offer a logical economic choice if it means giving up health and social benefits that may be available while living on social assistance.

The introduction to this research identified the interest and importance of a situational analysis of high-risk subgroups. It was noted that a group like urban Aboriginal poor are most affected by extreme poverty and socioeconomic distress, but they are also a group that does not, or perhaps cannot, benefit from policies based on economic integration through the labour market. The urban

Aboriginal population is at greatest risk of extreme poverty and socioeconomic stress and also the least likely to be employed. But within this population are high-risk groups, such as single mothers, those faced with health and mental health issues, addiction issues, conflicts with the law and homelessness. For the Aboriginal population in general, cities offer many opportunities that may not be present on reserve or in remote, rural or northern communities. Economic opportunities and benefits exist and cities can no doubt offer more educational opportunities, employment, better living conditions, and overall economic security. However, within cities and the urban Aboriginal population are people that will not benefit from the opportunities that exist.

Even for the Aboriginal population that has chosen to live in an urban area for economic reasons, their decision does not mean that they are willing to give up their culture and identity for economic advancement. This is where political and policy recommendations that address poverty through economic integration with mainstream society can be quite limited. Policies that require a compromise of culture to become part of mainstream society will not work. While the Canadian political economic structure and mainstream society have historically had a very difficult time understanding the overwhelming problems faced by Aboriginal peoples of all descent (Status, non-Status, Métis, Inuit), ultimately there needs to be some balance that recognizes culture and identity, while bridging opportunities for economic integration. To pay lip service to historical injustices and then make policy recommendations solely on a person's perceived ability to participate in the labour market without recognizing structural barriers

that exist for this group is not only damaging to the psychology of this group (i.e. continues the negative stereotype and stigma of “the savage”) it will also be ineffective in dealing with the roots of poverty.

Understanding the roots or causes of poverty also means understanding how a population lives. Urban Aboriginal people (particularly Status First Nations who have ties to reserves) are often described as “highly transient” and unable to integrate into the urban workforce. These are no doubt factors that contribute to their socioeconomic status in cities, but these explanations also offer clues to how we see the Aboriginal population in general or shape how policy is made. In other words, for generations Indian policy has focused on assimilation as the key to Aboriginals becoming self-sufficient, but with little consideration for the lifestyle, culture or identity of Aboriginal people themselves.

Even today, while assimilation policy holds a very negative stigma, it still exists in recommendations favouring economic integration. In a 1993 report of the National Round Table on Aboriginal Urban Issues for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, it was found that “Aboriginal people who find steady employment and social acceptance in the city blend into the increasingly multicultural city scene, while those who encounter difficulties retain high visibility and reinforce the stereotype of urban Aboriginal people as poor, marginal and problem ridden.”⁶⁵ This quote can certainly be interpreted in both positive and negative ways, but at the heart of the statement is the suggestion that integration or assimilation is a determining factor for socioeconomic betterment.

⁶⁵ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report to the Standing Committee on Urban Issues*, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993: p. 3.

The idea or notion of assimilation is emotionally and politically charged and one that should be addressed with caution. However, it seems that despite the care taken in the contemporary period to avoid the suggestion of assimilation, the term has simply been replaced in policy circles by the term labour market or economic integration.

While present day government policies certainly do not focus on assimilation as an end goal for socioeconomic improvement, there is a general understanding in contemporary society that economic integration is necessary to create conditions of stability and prosperity. For those most impacted by poverty and social exclusion, the economic debate needs to include, if not focus on, how policies have developed in a way that have created a structure of disadvantage for the Aboriginal population. Further, there needs to be an ongoing discussion of how to create culturally sensitive policies which recognize that past injustices have led to many of the current socioeconomic ills that plague Aboriginal people generation after generation, and identification that present policies will begin to build a brighter future.

Researchers and policy advocates need to go beyond the traditional understanding of poverty as being a class or market issue and realize that economic relations may be the result of social divisions created by a colonialist past, which has limited the socioeconomic development of the Aboriginal population by controlling Aboriginal peoples' political authority, cultural self-determination, economic capacity, and strategic location. This type of analysis may overcome the concern that research has traditionally treated Aboriginal

people as an “other” category, assuming their experiences are both homogeneous and comparable to other minority groups within the population.⁶⁶

We hope that if research is conducted in a culturally sensitive manner, by applying appropriate research methods to understand the causes or nature of poverty, inequality or socioeconomic stress, the outcome will be to avoid placing stigma or blame on a population that has been deprived of its traditional way of life and subjected to a wide range of government policies and programs which aimed to assimilate them against their will. However, it seems that this is not always possible, practical or accepted as a priority in policy making.

2.5 The Political Economy of the Welfare State

This critical look at Aboriginal policy is rooted in concerns with the ability of the modern welfare state to meet the needs of those who are disadvantaged and socially excluded. The principle of the welfare state is to prevent the cycle of poverty, disease, neglect and destitution, all of which are more likely to be linked to the lowest income members of society.⁶⁷ While the development of the welfare state in the postwar era was successful in providing a minimum standard of living, and basic opportunities for citizens to participate fully in society, these opportunities have not been granted to all members of society equally, and are arguably waning today.

Recent statistics reveal that there is a growing gap between rich and poor in Canada and throughout the world. Statistics Canada reported that in 2005, the

⁶⁶ Ibid; Vic Satezwich and Terry Wotherspoon, *First Nations: Race, Class, and Gender Relations*, Nelson Canada.

⁶⁷ Richard Titmuss, *Commitment to Welfare*, London, 1968.

median net worth of the poorest group has stagnated over the past two decades.⁶⁸ News reports focused on the fact that "The value of [the poorest group's] assets never exceeded the value of their debts during the 1984 to 2005 period," and the top 20 per cent of Canadian households possessed 75 per cent of the total wealth in Canada.⁶⁹

The challenge governments are faced with today is that of creating an infrastructure of services, which will develop support and opportunities for all citizens.⁷⁰ This structure should no doubt be objective, independent of individual preference, and include the universal application of policies in the prevention of serious harm.⁷¹ Yet, much of the focus of contemporary Canadian welfare state policy is on plans for reducing the role of the welfare state with little focus on the needs of low income individuals and families. Rather, contemporary policies focus on reducing "dependency" on the state, an approach which is apposite to investing in the health and social well being of citizens.

The economic flaw in this approach to welfare state politics, and the governing of a modern economic state, is that by increasing the gap between rich and poor, the state is in effect reducing the productivity of society by creating a situation where the lowest income members of society (a demographic unit which is increasing) are increasingly unable to meet their own basic needs and are forced to withdraw from economic activity in the market because they cannot afford to

⁶⁸ Statistics Canada, "Study: Inequality in wealth 1984 to 2005", *The Daily*, Wednesday December 13, 2006 cited on live at <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/061213/d061213c.htm>.

⁶⁹ "Gap between rich and poor widens: StatsCan", *CBC News*, December 13, 2006. Cited on-line December 26, 2006 at <http://www.cbc.ca/money/story/2006/12/13/wealth.html?ref=rss#skip300x250>.

⁷⁰ Titmuss, 1968.

⁷¹ Len Doyal and Ian Gough, *A Theory of Human Need*, New York, 1991.

participate. Not only that, there is an increasing number of citizens who will be forced to rely on the core services of the state, such as the health care system, because they cannot afford the basic necessities of good health, such as food, preventative medication and opportunities for physical recreation.

In general, the commitment to social welfare should be a part of a constitution, through which the ideals of a socially inclusive and prosperous society are firmly entrenched. In this constitution, the government needs to reaffirm the fundamental goals of the society. That is, to have healthy citizens, actively participating in the sustainability of a progressive, prosperous and productive state. Commitment to such policies should not be limited to marginalized groups who often fall through the cracks, but rather be universal and benefit everyone as a way to compliment the political, economic and social vitality of a state by granting basic human rights and creating physically, emotionally and economically healthy citizens. With this said, we will focus on one group that faces more hardship than any other: the Aboriginal population. For this reason, it is important to scrutinize how and why the state has failed to address their needs as citizens in order to go forward with more productive policies.

Aboriginal People and the Welfare State

Of greatest concern is despite the fact that billions of dollars are spent each year to fund the Aboriginal population, conditions of socio-economic distress persist on reserve and in remote Northern communities, and are becoming more evident in cities. This situation is complicated by jurisdictional politics, which leads to many challenges in advocating for policy changes. Still, recent efforts

have been made to recognize that this is an important area in which the federal government should invest and provincial and municipal governments (primarily in the west and prairie regions) have made some notable changes that specifically target the urban Aboriginal population.

- For example, the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) was an important first step in responding to the socioeconomic circumstances of the Aboriginal population. The funding provided \$25 million for pilot projects, spread over three years in eight cities and featured innovative partnerships between federal and provincial governments and community based Aboriginal organizations.⁷²
- Major cities have also begun to enhance programming and services to address Aboriginal needs by integrating urban Aboriginal issues into strategic plans. For example, the city of Winnipeg in its 20-year development plan defined a new policy framework to work collaboratively with the Aboriginal community to develop new pathways and promote sustainable community development.⁷³
- Since 2003, the Big City Mayors Caucus of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has also committed itself to lobby the federal government for targeted urban Aboriginal funding.⁷⁴

Still, the complex history of the Federal and provincial government policies towards the Aboriginal population, has no doubt contributed to a cycle of poverty, low health status, low educational status, low self-esteem, social disruption and

⁷² Stokes, Peach and Blake, 2004.

⁷³ City of Winnipeg, *First Steps: Municipal Aboriginal Pathways*, City of Winnipeg, September 2003.

⁷⁴ Hanselmann, 2003.

exclusion. It is becoming more commonly accepted that these conditions are largely due to their dispossession from lands and resources and the persistent failure of a range of policies. Public hearings held for Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) also repeatedly stated that many social ills, such as alcohol addiction and family breakdown are related to the oppression and abuses of the residential school experience, and that low self-esteem, which leads to carelessness about life and health, is reinforced by the racism encountered daily from employers, landlords and schoolmates.⁷⁵ Assimilation is certainly not the answer; however, the very existence of an urban Aboriginal population requires an examination of economic integration, which may hold clues for future research and understanding of how to find a healthy balance of urban economic policies, which would set an alternative framework for the advance of the Aboriginal population.

While this study focuses on the struggles of the urban Aboriginal population who are greatly affected by poverty, there are some positive trends and success stories for many urban Aboriginal people. That is, despite high rates of poverty and socio-economic stress in urban areas, there is also a growing middle class, increasing numbers of Aboriginals are graduating from post-secondary institutions, and in 1995 it was reported that the median income of off reserve Aboriginal people was 40% higher than that of people living on-reserve.⁷⁶ These are certainly some successes worth noting, and ones that have arguably been built

⁷⁵ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993: p. 6-7.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

through intergovernmental collaboration and the recognition that programs and services need to be developed regardless of jurisdictional barriers.

Although intergovernmental efforts still focus on a patchwork of programs and services, there are some policy initiatives that are worth noting. In 1998, the UAS was developed in response to growing pressure of the federal government to respond more effectively to the needs identifies by Aboriginal communities. Despite some criticism of the program, through partnership agreements it is working to better align federal programs to both provincial programs and other efforts to respond to local priorities, to test innovative and policy programming ideas, to gain a better understanding of what works and what does not and why, and most importantly, to improve the socio-economic conditions of urban Aboriginal people.⁷⁷

The structure of this program reflects the changes suggested in Frances Abele's work *Building a New Social Model for Canada's Aboriginal Peoples*. In her recent report published through Canadian Policy Research Networks, she highlights the need for innovation and cooperation between federal and provincial governments with the ultimate aim of improving the status and conditions of Aboriginal people throughout Canada. In doing so, she stresses that the varied levels of autonomy and rights for Aboriginal people makes it a difficult task to address the needs of Aboriginal people as a whole.

For this reason, the UAS is an encouraging initiative, but it is not without its limitations. As a pilot project, the Strategy has a three year term to test ideas in order to better respond to the local needs of Aboriginal people. At the end of the

⁷⁷ Abele, 2004.

three years, the Strategy will be evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the approaches and projects. However, the UAS is subject to many of the same criticisms of other funding for Aboriginal initiatives. There is a lack of long-term planning, continuity and predictable and sustainable funding. The Urban Aboriginal Strategy may simply be one more program paying lip service to the problems that exist, without actually solving them.

A formalized structure with adequate and predictable funding is necessary to improve the socio-economic conditions and life chances of the urban Aboriginal population. This is important because this is a population with a colonial past and one that has experienced generations of abuse, denial of culture and racism. The government of Canada has made an effort to acknowledge its shameful practices through history;⁷⁸ however, the appropriate next step is to recognize that federal jurisdiction should not be limited to “Indians, and lands reserved for Indians”.⁷⁹ Rather, funding should be re-structured to recognize all those of Aboriginal origin (including Métis, Inuit, Status and non-status Aboriginals), because as a group they face a disproportionate amount of distress and discrimination. Thus, funding and programs should be established in cities to create a sense of belonging for all Aboriginal people, regardless of their status or place of residence.

2.6 Conclusion

The literature on the urban Aboriginal population shows that Canada’s cities are currently ill equipped to deal with the socioeconomic stress that is

⁷⁸ Indian Residential Schools settlement agreement, Aboriginal Justice Strategy, the Kelowna Accord, Bill C-6 The Specific Claims Resolution Act, and Bill C-7 The First Nations Governance Act.

⁷⁹ British North America Act, cited in Richards, CD Howe Commentary, 2001

concentrated in the urban Aboriginal population. Regardless of the causes of socioeconomic differences, there is no other ethnic group in Canada that experiences such high rates of poverty and as much family and community distress, as the Aboriginal population. Research has found that these issues are a fundamental concern for Western cities, which have a greater percentage of their population of Aboriginal origin. However, there is a gap in research identifying the economic experiences for Aboriginal peoples in major cities across Canada, and in any current research identifying the differences between Aboriginal men and women.

The following chapters will present a quantitative analysis of the 2001 census and begin to explore the economic conditions facing the urban Aboriginal population in 10 major cities across Canada. While there is no doubt that a proportion of the urban Aboriginal population will have greater life chances than those on reserve, it is anticipated that there will be a greater incidence of poverty and economic stress facing them. It is also expected that there will be similar findings in all cities, suggesting that the complex history of social, political and economic oppression and control has contributed to the desperate picture of the Aboriginal population.

Specifically, however, this analysis will:

1. Explore the incidence of low income and other factors of economic stress such as unemployment, employment income and the level of income from government transfers, for both Aboriginal men and women compared to the rest of the population.

2. Focus will be on several key economic and social indicators in order to fill the gap in knowledge about the conditions of urban Aboriginal in a range of Canadian cities.
3. Use a political economy analysis to place these indicators in a broader interpretation of the nature of urban Aboriginal poverty.
4. Develop prescriptions for change that will address the needs of these most vulnerable people within Canada's cities.

Based on a quantitative analysis of 2001 census data and comprehensive review of information relating to urban Aboriginal poverty, this study will explore the experiences of poverty within the Aboriginal identity population and, more specifically, high risk sub-groups, such as women, who are expected to be at greater risk of poverty and socioeconomic stress. It is anticipated that an examination of these groups will confirm that labour market policies are not the solution to this complex problem. It is with hope that an analysis that takes a closer look at socioeconomic differences within the Aboriginal population will provide a better understanding of how to overcome the various risk factors that have led to a concentration of poverty and social exclusion in this group. The overall recommendations will address concerns relating to jurisdictional divisions of power and responsibility, and a lack of social, political and economic accountability to the urban Aboriginal population, and present ideas which take into account the social construction of poverty in order to find more effective solutions.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter we are not looking to simply confirm the existence of poverty. Rather we will take a closer look at the indicators that may cause or be present in situations of long-term disadvantage and social exclusion. In Chapter two we noted that not all Aboriginal people are living under the same conditions, and that there are some groups within the Aboriginal population that may be at greater risk of social and economic exclusion than others. In this chapter we will outline the methodology that we will use in this analysis of the urban Aboriginal population. We begin with an explanation of the important differences between the use of terms such as poverty, inequality and social exclusion, and the role that all three of these concepts play in a comprehensive study of poverty. We follow this, with a definition of terms and an outline of the data used in this study. We also include sections that address both the limitations and benefits of quantitative analysis, particularly as it relates to a study of this type. Finally, we describe the data sources and the methodology used in the quantitative analysis.

3.1 Poverty, inequality and social exclusion

Poverty

The definition of poverty and its measurement are no doubt contentious. In Canada today there is no official “poverty line”. However, Statistics Canada’s Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) has been used by many analysts to study the characteristics of the relatively worst off families in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, the LICO is “an economic indicator, which measures a household’s ability to maintain a basic standard of living, allowing it to meet its

shelter, food and other costs in relation to the income received.”⁸⁰ This measure has enabled Statistics Canada and social researchers to report important trends, such as the changing composition of low-income groups over time. However, the use of the LICO as a poverty measure is not without limitations or criticism.

While the LICO is adjusted for family size and geographic population size,⁸¹ it does not adequately reflect differences in the costs of living in different metropolitan areas. For example, the proportion of one’s income that goes toward rent, utilities, and food may be very different from one city to the next. Therefore, an annual income of \$10,000 may go a lot further in Winnipeg than it would in Toronto. Still, the LICO serves as a good indicator of “the low income circumstances of Canadians and unhealthy environments for child development.”⁸²

The Market Basket Measure (MBM) on the other hand does take into account the cost of living for individuals and families in different cities or rural areas based on the average price of goods, such as food and clothing, housing, utilities, transportation, and reasonable costs for participating in normal activities, such as going to a movie or sending children on a school trip. While this measure may more accurately reflect the costs of living a modest lifestyle, the designers of the MBM are adamant that this is not an official measure of poverty nor will it be used to determine eligibility for federal government income support programs. The MBM is simply a result of a 1997 request by Federal/Provincial/Territorial

⁸⁰ Statistics Canada, 2004

⁸¹ Statistics Canada calculates different measures based on the size of area in which one lives. That is, there are different cut-offs for rural areas, small towns, medium-sized cities and Metropolitan areas.

⁸² Lee, 2000: p. 100.

Ministers Responsible for Social Services who asked their officials to work on developing the MBM to complement Statistics Canada's low-income measures: the Low Income Cut-offs (LICOs) and the post-tax Low Income Measure (LIM-IAT).⁸³

Regardless of the definition or measure used to report on poverty, it is important to understand, or even be cautious of what the term 'poverty' can mean. In 2000, The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty identified that the use of the term poverty is often limited to material poverty, despite the fact that there are several dimensions and consequences of living in poverty that go beyond material goods. Second, the term "poor" is meant to describe material deprivation and insufficient income, and should not be taken to imply that a person is inadequate or inferior because of their income level. Third, the authors recognized that the discussion of the poor was done in a collective sense, but they did not want to imply that all poor people are members of a permanent underclass with similar backgrounds, expectations and behaviours.⁸⁴ These are extremely important points to highlight and will be reflected in the understanding and analysis of this study.

Inequality

Inequality is the condition of being unequal; social or economic inequality is more specifically the growing inequality between the rich and poor, not only with regard to income, but in opportunity, treatment and status. Thus, monitoring changes in inequality, not just poverty, and attempting to understand its causes

⁸³ Human Resources Development Canada, *Understanding the Low Income Statistics Based on the Market Basket Measure*, Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, May 2003.

⁸⁴ David Ross, Katherine Scott and Peter Smith, *Canadian Fact Book on Poverty*, Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000.

may provide the best means of identifying practices and regulations, which have undesirable effects on the position of particular groups in society.⁸⁵

Income measures typically do not take into account assets, health or welfare, nor do they offer an indication of the degree of inequality between groups within the population, or the growing inequality, which can be the result of growing prosperity for one group in society, while other groups are left behind. While inequality is not necessarily something that a society should strive for, there are valid reasons why it exists. The modern-day trend of rising incomes for the wealthy, while not entirely “fair”, it is linked to four main factors.⁸⁶ First, higher education and enhanced marketable skills has rewarded the privileged with better jobs and higher incomes than in the past. As these market trends continue, those with lower educational attainment and skills are left behind, creating a greater gap between rich and poor. Second, the creation and growth of new business has been an important source of the increasing number of individuals with high incomes and significant wealth. Third, high wage individuals are increasingly working longer hours and driven by monetary reward. And finally, the stock market and investment has allowed more individuals with a disposable income to benefit from the increasing prosperity of the global economy, which may not have been possible in the past.

Inequality in and of itself does not necessarily demand redistributive policies by the state. What policies should focus on is poverty and the ability of members of society to meet their basic needs. In Canada, the United States and

⁸⁵ Mark Lalonde, *Distribution of Income Inequality in Canada*, Statistics Canada, 1977.

⁸⁶ Martin Feldstein, “Reducing Poverty, Not Inequality”, *The Public Interest*, 137, Fall 1999.

many countries around the world, inequality is widening. For this reason, in the study of poverty there needs to be a careful and critical analysis of income measures to identify if this growing inequality is in fact directly related an increasing rate of poverty.

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion offers a broader understanding of the issues of income inequity. In sociological studies the term is used in three distinct ways.⁸⁷ First, the term is used to refer to groups that may have not only insufficient material resources but also may be affected by a range of socio-demographic and cultural factors. Second, the term is used relative to a given period and a given society. Third, the term refers to a dynamic phenomenon, which is generally the result of a permanent or long term situation, rather than a temporary one. Regardless of the use of the term, it is agreed that the existence of social exclusion is evidence of factors which are having detrimental effects on the current and future well being of parents and children.⁸⁸

Measuring social exclusion is difficult and ultimately requires greatly simplifying the definition. In her study, *Economic Performance of Off-Reserve Aboriginal Canadians*, Fleury notes that most studies reduce or restrict the definition to the economic dimension, using low-income variables as indicators of the risk of social exclusion. This study, will take into account economic indicators that will help to identify the level and extent of social exclusion, but we are not able to provide a definite prediction or conclusion of social exclusion.

⁸⁷ Dominique Fleury, 2002; p. 2.

⁸⁸ Ibid; Andrew Mitchell and Richard Shillington, "Poverty, Inequality and Social Inclusion", *Social Inclusion: Canadian Perspectives*, Ted Richmond and Anver Saloojee (eds.), Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005.

3.2 Definitions and use of data

Regardless of the definition selected there remains concern that the term “Aboriginal” refers to a relatively homogeneous “racial” minority whose position and experiences have been shaped outside of the larger system of social, political and economic relations in Canada.⁸⁹ By assuming homogeneity researchers neglect the diverse languages, culture, traditions and experiences of the many peoples that identify as Aboriginal, and continue to put the variety of people at the margins of society by not recognizing their diversity. Research today should recognize that Aboriginal peoples are not simply one group. Unfortunately, while they have different histories, identities and experiences, there continues to be some methodological concerns with measuring the numbers of Aboriginal people. This is because Aboriginal people are grouped together using one common variable, and in this process their unique identities are lost.

The use of the term “Aboriginal” is something that presents some concern for this research. The use of one term to describe the experiences of Canada’s Indigenous peoples is troubling because of the great diversity within this grouping of people. However, due to the sensitivity in identifying Aboriginal subpopulations in urban poverty research, it is not possible or practical to subdivide the Aboriginal identity variable.

What this means for this research is that the findings and economic outcomes of the urban Aboriginal population will be generalized. This will be most obvious in the discussion of the urbanization of Aboriginal people, colonialism and the impact of Federal government policies such as the reserve

⁸⁹ Vic Satezwich and Terry Wotherspoon, *First Nations: Race, Class, and Gender Relations*, Nelson Canada: p. 11.

system and the residential schools. While it is understood that there are very different lifestyles and historical experiences of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit, state policies and systemic racism have created obstacles that are similar for ALL groups that are labeled “Aboriginal”. Therefore, while much of this study will draw upon experiences of First Nations peoples, there are parallel experiences within other Aboriginal groups that will support the claim that colonialism has adversely affected the life chances of Aboriginal people as a whole and can help to explain why urban poverty disproportionately affects all Aboriginal peoples.

With this understanding in mind, the definition of Aboriginality used in research and analysis is extremely important. This is because the distribution of the Aboriginal population within urban areas will vary based on the definition, and significant differences can occur in the socioeconomic characteristics, depending on which definition is used. Hence, it is suggested that the first question that policy makers, planners and researchers should ask when using census data to study the Aboriginal population in Canada should be: how are Aboriginal peoples defined?⁹⁰

While there are some fundamental problems in trying to accurately measure the ‘true’ Aboriginal population, Statistics Canada’s Aboriginal identity variable was developed in 1991 for the Aboriginal Peoples Survey to capture the “core Aboriginal population”.⁹¹ In 1996 the question of Aboriginal identity was added to the Census, thus identifying “those persons identifying with at least one

⁹⁰ Andrew Siggner, “The Challenge of Measuring the Demographic and Socio-economic Conditions of the Urban Aboriginal Population”, *Not Strangers in these Parts*, David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters (eds.), Policy Research Initiative, 2003.

⁹¹ Jerry P. White et al, *Aboriginal Conditions: Research as a Foundation for Public Policy*, Vancouver, Toronto: UBC Press, 2003.

Aboriginal group, i.e. North American Indian, Métis or Inuit (Eskimo), and/or those who report being a Treaty Indian or Registered Indian as defined by the Indian Act of Canada and/or those who were members of an Indian Band or First Nation.”⁹²

Aboriginal Origin or Ancestry is another variable to consider. This term refers to a person who can trace his or her ancestry to an Aboriginal group, but does not require any affiliation with that group today. While research suggests that this group also experiences disproportionate poverty and socioeconomic stress, the rapid growth of this population in the last two census surveys indicates that the analysis may not be accurate when using this definition. A recent report released by Andrew Siggner explains that trends in Aboriginal population growth have been so dramatic that demographic factors alone cannot explain the increases in the population.⁹³ Rather macro-historical, sociological, and legal events are contributing to the demographic size and growth of the Aboriginal population. This phenomenon, which is known as “ethnic mobility” has revealed a causal explanation to increases in those identifying as Aboriginal, especially within the urban population.

In the context of the increasing interest in the urban Aboriginal population, one must identify the sources of the sudden appearance of change in urban demographics. This concept of “ethnic mobility” explains that the changing of ethnic or cultural affiliations from one census to the next may be a more accurate cause of growth for the urban Aboriginal population, not factors of mobility and

⁹² Statistics Canada, 2003.

⁹³ Siggner, 2003.

natural increase.⁹⁴ Sources of this growth have been attributed to changes in law, as well as new found political inclusion. In other words more people are identifying themselves as Aboriginal. For the purpose of this study the Aboriginal Identity definition will be used as it will most accurately describe the circumstances of those living in urban areas that identify themselves as Aboriginal in name, history and culture, rather than just ancestry.

Still, it is important to consider the definition of Aboriginality used in all research and analyses because of the important role that it may play in the conclusions that may be drawn, both in terms of a review of relevant literature, but also in recommendations and policy making.⁹⁵ Depending on the definition of Aboriginality selected in one's analysis the statistical outcomes will vary; thus, it is important to be cognizant of the selection of a definition in one's own research, as well as in the research of others. With this understanding that there exist statistical discrepancies between definitions, it can be argued that *regardless* of the definition selected, there is a gap in the economic conditions of Aboriginal people in general (Status, Non-Status, Métis and Inuit peoples) compared to the conditions of those people of non-Aboriginal origin (see Figure 1). For this reason, this research will take an inclusive look at the Aboriginal Identity population to describe the conditions facing the population as a whole.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Siggner, 2004.

Figure 1

Source: Siggner, Andrew, "The Challenge of Measuring the Demographic and Socioeconomic Conditions of the Urban Aboriginal Population," *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*, edited by David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, 2004.

Other Government Income

The examination of government transfer payments includes the census variable "Other income from government sources" for the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population. This variable is intended to be a general indicator of the receipt of low-income government assistance for the population, as it excludes income or transfer payments from Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, Canada and Quebec Pension Plans, Employment Insurance Benefits and Canada Child Tax Benefits. According to the 2001 Census Dictionary, this variable includes:

Social assistance payments received by persons in need, such as mothers with dependent children, persons temporarily or permanently unable to work, elderly

*individuals, the blind and persons with disabilities. Included are provincial income supplement payments to help offset accommodation costs. Also included are other transfer payments, such as payments from provincial automobile insurance plans, veterans' pensions, war veterans; allowance, pensions to widows and dependants of veterans, and workers compensation.*⁹⁶

Given that social assistance, and social support programs vary by province, then in the analysis of this indicator we will not be looking at the level of income support coming from the government, but for the trends and variations between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population, and between males and females.

3.3 Limitations of data and quantitative analysis

The issue of measurement is complex and requires an in-depth examination of both the benefits and the limitations of using a statistical survey to research some of the sensitive issues related to urban Aboriginal poverty. The fundamental difficulties in conducting this analysis may include the use of statistics as a method sensitive to the socioeconomic conditions, which persist alongside poverty within a marginalized group, the definitional, and language issues associated with concepts such as Aboriginality and poverty, and the importance of investigating both low income and inequality as measures of poverty.

Statistical surveys, such as the census, are common tools used in the study of populations. This is because they are able to survey or sample large populations, gather general social and economic information, and pull together indicators of various kinds, which can ultimately be very helpful in identifying

⁹⁶ Statistics Canada, *2001 Census Dictionary – Internet Version*, Catalogue No. 92-378-XIE; p. 40.

trends and analyzing phenomenon. Still, statistical analyses are not without their limitations. Of importance to a study of poverty is the concern that surveys may underestimate the extent of poverty because those who experience extreme poverty, such as the homeless and those with no permanent address, are not counted; and, that populations with a greater incidence of mobility are also left un-represented in census data. These two factors are particularly important in a study of the urban Aboriginal population because these individuals face extreme poverty and because they regularly move back and forth from cities and reserves or other Aboriginal communities.

Quantitative analysis can also overlook the role of culture and context in the lives of individuals who are quantified in the data. This prompts some concerns whether this type of research can be culturally sensitive. However, despite the fact that one can be skeptical of how much can be identified through demographic and socioeconomic variables there is a social value and importance linked to quantified knowledge of the population. Moreover, the knowledge gathered by this method can not only benchmark present conditions in order to measure change, but can also reveal insight into the situations faced by many Aboriginal people. Future study can build on this knowledge and employ multiple measures and observations, thus making the study in and of itself a valuable step in initiating change.

Researchers have also identified inherent problems in collecting information, particularly health data from the Aboriginal population. In a 2006 study of health indicators in Canada, Anderson et al. found that coverage that

does exist for the “Aboriginal” population is primarily for First Nations persons with status – and even this data has problems with accuracy.⁹⁷ There is also inconsistent surveying of the Aboriginal population as a whole, exclusion from national longitudinal studies, and an ongoing concern with response rates for the census, as there is a lingering mistrust of government when it comes to information collection on reserve.⁹⁸

One final limitation or obstacle to identify before delving into the analysis is a key limitation of empirical data when it comes to measuring poverty, in particular related to the Aboriginal population. As mentioned, there is some concern that this study will not be able to accurately measure the incidence of poverty amongst the urban Aboriginal population. This is because of the transient nature of some First Nations groups who travel between reserve and city, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the corrections system, concerns related to the representation of Aboriginal people in the homeless population, a population which Statistics Canada has not been able to consistently capture in survey data. Unfortunately the data employed in this research do not capture these details and so they will not be included in the analysis. However, the conclusions and recommendations will address this limitation by highlighting other research findings, which identify that the Aboriginal population disproportionately suffers from these problems.

⁹⁷ Anderson, M., J. Smylie, I. Anderson, R. Sinclair, S. Crengle, *First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Health Indicators in Canada*, Saskatoon: Indigenous Peoples’ Health Research Centre, 2006.

⁹⁸ Ibid, Boxhill, Walton O., *Report on a Series of Workshops on Data Collection Among Aboriginal and other Hard-to-Enumerate Populations in Urban Areas*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1989.

3.5 Benefits of quantitative analysis

Notwithstanding the limitations of quantitative analysis in the study of poverty or social exclusion, the study itself is of value because it presents evidence as to the current socioeconomic situation and offers a point of comparison to the rest of the population or other measures. As the introduction and literature review suggest, there is an increasing amount of information about the socioeconomic situation of the urban Aboriginal population, but there remains significant gaps in evidence when it comes to quantitative indicators. The review of literature certainly found gaps in the information available for non-Western cities, as well as for sub groups within the population. Conducting this quantitative analysis can help to build a better understanding of the degree to which Aboriginal peoples are in poverty and excluded.

It is also believed that quantitative indicators tend to have a greater social value and legitimacy than qualitative information, particularly amongst politicians and policy makers. This is because the use of numbers provides the impression that a population can be scientifically measured without bias in the pursuit of 'truth'. Quantification of the population and its socioeconomic differences is understood as a reliable measure. From a policy perspective, this information can also be used to make evidence-informed decisions and target policies to address specific problems.

In recent years, accountability has become a major focus of government policies. As a result, the role of policy makers is to build evidence that allows informed policy and decisions. The benefit of quantitative analysis is that it helps

to provide what many believe is an unbiased measurement of fact or reality. How this information is then interpreted and used is, of course, a different matter.

3.6 Data source and selected variables

The data source for this study will be custom tabulations of 2001 Census data. This data was ordered from Statistics Canada as a part of the Canadian Council on Social Development's 2005 Urban Poverty Project and shared with multiple partners from across Canada who have come together to form a consortium as part of Statistics Canada's Data Liberation Initiative. For the purpose of this study, the Ottawa-Carleton Social Planning Council (OSPC) has granted access to this data. The OSPC is a member of the Canadian Council on Social Development's consortium, which is more commonly known as the Community Social Data Strategy.

The analysis will focus on a selection of demographic and income variables from the 2001 census for ten cities across Canada. For all of the indicators selected, the data will be broken down by sex, to identify differences between men and women, and the Aboriginal identity population will be compared to the rest of the population. The selected cities include Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax. With the exception of Halifax,⁹⁹ these cities represent the cities in Canada with the largest Aboriginal population. Halifax is included in this analysis to represent a city from the Atlantic region in order to provide a cross-Canada analysis and identify if urban Aboriginal poverty is something experienced in all regions of Canada.

⁹⁹ The tenth most Aboriginally populated city in Canada is Hamilton, Ontario.

This study will analyze poverty and inequality in a chosen sub-population. This will be done by comparing the people of Aboriginal identity living in one of Canada's 10 most Aboriginally populated cities to the rest of the population. The variables selected for this study include low income cut off (LICO), employment, employment income, and income from other government transfers (not including Employment Insurance). These indicators will be evaluated for the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population and by sex. It is expected that this analysis will find that the urban Aboriginal population, regardless of the city, experiences a markedly higher level of poverty, inequality and dependence on income from government transfers.

These indicators are intended to paint a picture of the income status of the urban Aboriginal population. An examination of the transfer payments will offer some indication of the level of social support provided by the government for low-income residents of the cities. Included in the transfer payments is a wide range of social supports for all members of society, but they primarily focus on low income and disadvantaged members of society.¹⁰⁰

3.7 Research questions and hypothesis

As stated in the opening chapter, the goal of this research is to understand poverty in urban Aboriginal communities across Canada. In general the literature available documents the socioeconomic experiences of the urban Aboriginal population, particularly in western Canada; however, there is little information for

¹⁰⁰ While some Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) have been signed in Western cities to create a financing structure for the at risk urban Aboriginal population, federal and provincial governments do not target specific or specialized transfer payments to the Aboriginal population in cities. Specific health and social transfer payments for the Aboriginal population are only targeted to status Indians living on reserve.

cities with a smaller Aboriginal population. For this reason, we pose the following three research questions. We will use a series of economic variables for the Aboriginal population living in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax to investigate these hypotheses. Based on our analysis in chapter 2 we believe that:

- the data will show that the incidence of low income among Aboriginals compared to non-Aboriginals in the selected urban areas is higher
- The data will show that there is a notable difference between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations for all of the selected economic indicators
- The data will show that urban Aboriginal women are at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion than Aboriginal males

It is predicted that regardless of the city in which one lives, the urban Aboriginal population will have similar experiences of poverty and economic stress. It is also held that this stress will be higher for Aboriginal women, than for men, putting them at a greater disadvantage.

Based on the focus and findings in the literature, it is expected that western cities (Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon and Winnipeg) will have the highest levels of low income Aboriginals in Canada, stemming from high unemployment and a greater reliance on transfer payments from the state.

It is the assumption of this investigation that the Aboriginal population faces systemic discrimination and political economic exclusion. While it is expected that the data will simply confirm the incidence of Aboriginal poverty witnessed in just about any low income neighbourhood in the west, it is hoped

that a political economic analysis will provide an alternate interpretation to urban Aboriginal poverty, which will help to breakdown the social stigma and blame surrounding the presence of Aboriginal poverty.

While many researchers and theorists have offered explanations as to why these differences exist, it will be argued that the persistence of poverty and socioeconomic stress represents a failure of government and its to recognize, reflect and understand the political economic needs of the population. It is hoped that future policies may look beyond traditional labour market solutions for this population because of a better understanding that structural barriers have put this population in a situation of great disadvantage throughout history and into today. Regardless of the unjust policies and legislation that has plagued this group, the outcomes of this analysis will advocate for effective policy changes that will enhance intergovernmentalism and progressive social and economic change that can benefit the Aboriginals living in urban areas across Canada.

3.8 Conclusion

These indicators will provide a basic understanding of urban Aboriginal poverty across Canada. The income variables selected will offer insight into employment status, employment income, a comparison of median income and transfer payments to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, as well as some understanding of the different experiences of men and women and the situation faced by seniors. Given the limited access to variables and the scope of a Masters thesis, this analysis will not measure the depth of poverty or the poor socioeconomic conditions that face much of the urban Aboriginal population. The details provided in the literature review offer a considerable understanding that

with low income also come socioeconomic stress and social exclusion. While these factors are not included in the analysis, reflection and consideration to the links between low income and socioeconomic stress will certainly be provided in the conclusions. It is also with hope that future study will offer the opportunity to examine a range of socioeconomic variables to provide a better understanding of the details and nature of urban Aboriginal poverty.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

4.0 Introduction

Urban Aboriginal people have been left behind by the Canadian economy. In the studies currently available, this population is consistently identified as being a socially and economically marginalized population with higher levels of poverty, lower educational attainment, higher unemployment, greater likelihood of single parent families, poorer health outcomes, and so on.¹⁰¹ It is further clear that public policies have done little to change the socioeconomic outcomes of the population. However, the literature reveals that the majority of the evidence gathered focuses on the urban Aboriginal population in Western Canada. These include studies conducted by the Canada West Foundation, John Richards, Stuart Clatworthy, the Saskatchewan Institute for Public Policy, and others.

In this chapter, we will employ data on urban Aboriginal people in 10 cities across Canada to provide evidence of socioeconomic status of Urban Aboriginal people. We will be concerned with not only Western Canada, but the socioeconomic outcomes for the Aboriginal population in non-Western cities, such as Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax. This focus will serve two main objectives: to identify if urban Aboriginal poverty is consistent across Canada, or if it is simply a Western phenomenon; and if Aboriginal men and women have similar outcomes and experiences.

4.1 Incidence of low income

¹⁰¹ Richards, 2001; Richards, 2003; Richards, 2004; Clatworthy, 1989; Yarnell, 1989; Canadian Council on Social Development, *Aboriginal Children in Poverty in Urban Communities: Social exclusion and the growing racialization of poverty in Canada*, presentation by John Anderson to the Subcommittee on Children and Youth at Risk of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Wednesday November 9, 2003.

In the 10 cities examined, the incidence of low income was significantly higher for the Aboriginal population compared to the non-Aboriginal population. The greatest differences were found in Saskatchewan where the Aboriginal population was three to four times as likely to fall below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) than the non-Aboriginal population. The highest incidence of low income was in Saskatoon, with 46.6 per cent of the Aboriginal population below the LICO; the next highest incidence rate was in Regina at 45.5 per cent.

Table 1.1 ranks the cities in order of incidence of urban Aboriginal poverty, from the highest to the lowest. The data reveal a stark difference in low income rates for urban Aboriginals across Canada. On average, the Aboriginal population is twice as likely to be poor as the non Aboriginal population. Even in the cities where there is a lower incidence of low income Aboriginals, it still represents one quarter of the population.

Table 1.1

Percentage of Low Income Among the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Population

	City	% Low Income	
		Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
1	Saskatoon	46.6	14.3
2	Regina	45.5	11.7
3	Winnipeg	41.8	15.9
4	Halifax	40.1	28.3
5	Vancouver	35.5	18.7
6	Montreal	33.8	20.9
7	Edmonton	31.4	14.6
8	Calgary	26.0	13.1
9	Toronto	23.1	14.6
10	Ottawa	22.3	13.5

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

As discussed in the literature review, it is cities in Western provinces where the Aboriginal population is cited as facing extreme poverty and socioeconomic distress. While this is certainly true, the data reveals that these low-income conditions are not limited to the West. In fact, even in cities where there is a much lower number of Aboriginal people, such as Halifax and Montreal, there is an alarmingly high incidence of low income Aboriginals (40.1 per cent and 33.8 per cent, respectively).

A gendered look at the incidence of low income found that women, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal are more often faced with poverty. This is not surprising as a gendered look at poverty in general will reveal that women are often faced with low income for reasons such as they are more often out of the labour market while they act as care givers, not only as mothers but as unpaid caregivers for the sick and the elderly; they are more often employed in low skilled jobs making minimum wage; and on average make approximately 71% of the average wage of men in the labour market.¹⁰²

However, the incidence of low income amongst the female Aboriginal population is of notable concern. Table 1.2 reveals that Aboriginal women, face low income at much greater rates than Aboriginal males. In fact, in two cities more than half of the female Aboriginal population was below the LICO. The city where women fared the worst was Saskatoon, with over half (52.6 per cent) falling below the LICO.

¹⁰² Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, Tuesday March 7, 2006, cited on-line May 22, 2007 at <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060307/d060307a.htm>.

Table 1.2

**Incidence of Low Income Among the
Male and Female Aboriginal
Population**

		% Low Income		
	City	Total	Male	Female
1	Saskatoon	46.6	38.8	52.6
2	Regina	45.5	39.0	50.7
3	Winnipeg	41.8	35.3	46.9
4	Halifax	40.1	32.9	48.2
5	Vancouver	35.5	33.1	37.6
6	Montreal	33.8	32.3	35.0
7	Edmonton	31.4	25.6	36.1
8	Calgary	26.0	21.4	30.4
9	Toronto	23.1	19.3	26.3
10	Ottawa	22.3	20.7	23.8

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

The differences in low income amongst non-Aboriginal women in these 10 metropolitan areas were not as stark, with perhaps the exception of Halifax. Table 1.3 indicates the incidence of low income for non-Aboriginal males and females. As witnessed in this table, the median difference in the incidence of low income between the male and female non-Aboriginal population is 3.7 percentage points. However, among the Aboriginal population, this percentage point difference is almost 10.0.

Table 1.3

**Incidence of Low Income Among the
Male and Female Non-Aboriginal
Population**

		% Low Income		
	City	Total	Male	Female
1	Saskatoon	14.3	12.2	16.4
2	Regina	11.7	10.0	13.4
3	Winnipeg	15.9	13.5	18.2
4	Halifax	28.3	21.1	38.3
5	Vancouver	18.7	17.6	19.8
6	Montreal	20.9	18.6	23.1
7	Edmonton	14.6	12.6	16.5
8	Calgary	13.1	11.6	14.5
9	Toronto	14.6	13.3	15.9
10	Ottawa	13.5	11.9	15.0

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

From these figures it is clear that there is a very real gender difference: the female urban Aboriginal population is a much greater risk of being poor. From the literature review we found that there is a higher percentage of Aboriginal single parent families, which are most often headed by females. When women are at risk of low income it often means that families are at risk. not just of poverty, but also of social exclusion, poor health, low educational attainment, and many other factors of social distress. The socioeconomic indicators in the literature review stress the relationship between these variables and the risk of perpetuation of poverty over more than one generation, a risk which is present in the Aboriginal population. Research by Michael Hatfield has identified 40 per cent poverty as the point at which a community reaches a critical mass that breeds socioeconomic

distress. This significantly reduces the life opportunities of its residents, and contributes towards the perpetuation of a cycle of poverty and social exclusion.

The Aboriginal population in four out of the 10 major Canadian cities examined has hit this critical mass. Of the other six, three cities are faced with significant levels of poverty with approximately one in three Aboriginal people living below the LICO. The remaining three cities have marginally better statistics, but overall Aboriginal people living in urban areas suffer from disproportionately high levels of poverty. There is no doubt that these considerable rates of poverty negatively affect the life chances of this population.

4.2 Unemployment at a Glance

In 2001, the unemployment rate for the Aboriginal population in Canada was nearly three times that of the rest of the population (19.1 per cent compared to 7.1 per cent).¹⁰³ All 10 cities examined in this analysis had Aboriginal unemployment rates above the national average for the overall population; however Ottawa was just slightly above the national unemployment rate at 7.2 per cent. With the exception of two cities, Saskatoon and Regina, the average unemployment rate for the urban Aboriginal population in the other eight cities was actually lower than the overall unemployment rate for Aboriginals in Canada. This suggests that, while the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people is higher than for the non Aboriginal population, cities are providing some employment opportunities that may not be found in other geographic locations (see Table 2.1).

¹⁰³ This figure represents all Aboriginal people included in the census for cities, rural areas and some reserve populations willing to submit for the census.

Table 2.1**Unemployment Rate by City for Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Population, Ranked Highest to Lowest**

		Aboriginal Unemployment Rate			Non-Aboriginal Unemployment Rate		
	City	Total %	Sex	%	Total %	Sex	%
1	Saskatoon	22.2	Male	23.0	5.8	Male	6.1
			Female	21.4		Female	5.3
2	Regina	20.7	Male	24.1	5.2	Male	6.1
			Female	17.2		Female	4.3
3	Vancouver	15.3	Male	17.4	7.1	Male	7.1
			Female	13.2		Female	7.1
4	Halifax	14.8	Male	16.9	7.1	Male	7.1
			Female	13.1		Female	7.1
5	Winnipeg	14.0	Male	12.9	4.9	Male	5.1
			Female	15.2		Female	4.7
6	Edmonton	13.1	Male	12.6	5.2	Male	5.1
			Female	13.6		Female	5.2
7	Montreal	12.2	Male	13.3	7.4	Male	7.6
			Female	11.0		Female	7.2
8	Calgary	10.0	Male	9.7	4.8	Male	4.8
			Female	10.3		Female	4.9
9	Toronto	8.6	Male	6.9	5.9	Male	5.4
			Female	10.1		Female	6.4
10	Ottawa	7.2	Male	6.2	5.5	Male	5.4
			Female	8.0		Female	5.6

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

When we examine the unemployment figures for the Aboriginal versus the non-Aboriginal population, it is quite important to see the differences in the statistics. For a city that has high unemployment rates in general, and is perhaps struggling in terms of economic prosperity and generating economic activity, high unemployment rates among the Aboriginal population could perhaps be explained simply in economic terms. However, the statistics reveal that there seems to be

little connection between the unemployment rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. This leaves us to search for other factors that impact employment opportunities for the Aboriginal population. Some of these may be related to broader socioeconomic conditions such as educational attainment, conflicts with the legal system limiting access to stable employment, or access to transportation. Other factors may be connected to culture, such as increased mobility within First Nations communities who may choose to migrate between the reserve and urban areas, language, or the way that “work” is approached by the Aboriginal culture.¹⁰⁴ Others may be structural barriers, such as racism or social exclusion.

Looking at the average of the 10 cities examined, the unemployment rate for the non-Aboriginal population was similar for both men and women. In eight of the cities, there was less than one percentage point difference between the sexes, with the exception of Toronto, where there was a difference of 1.0 percentage point favouring employment for men, and Regina where there was a 1.8 percentage point difference favouring employment for women.

Among the urban Aboriginal population, however, there is a much different picture of unemployment between men and women. There are a range of variations in the unemployment rate of Aboriginal men and women, from a 0.6 percentage point difference in Calgary to a 6.9 percentage point difference in Regina. The median difference in the unemployment rate for Aboriginal men and women is 2.3 percentage points. However, there was no consistency in whether

¹⁰⁴ Not all cultures take the same approach to work as the capitalist structure of Western society assumes. The Protestant work ethic assumes that there is a positive value that can be applied to hard work and success. However, this “work ethic” is not a part of all cultures.

men or women were more likely to be unemployed. Nevertheless, based on the knowledge that there is a small difference in the unemployment rates between men and women in the rest of the population, and that these rates appear to be fairly consistent, one might ask why there is so much variation in the Aboriginal population. This is perhaps worth further examination in the overall analysis of the statistical evidence.

Back to the evidence at hand, given the low-income figures for the Aboriginal population, it is not a surprise that the unemployment rates are much higher than the non-Aboriginal population. However, in comparison to low-income figures it is interesting to find that the unemployment rate for Aboriginal men was much higher than for women (21.4 per cent versus 16.0 per cent respectively). Aboriginal women on the whole are far more at risk of low income than Aboriginal men, but by looking at the unemployment figures one can deduce that Aboriginal women are likely not to be in the labour force at all, which explains why their unemployment rate is lower and why their experiences of poverty are higher. Based on this deduction, we should also be inquiring into why Aboriginal women are not active labour force participants, and if the labour force is in fact a likely avenue for Aboriginal women to escape situations of low income.

4.3 A Profile of employment income in Canada

All 10 metropolitan areas have a lower median income for the Aboriginal population than for the non Aboriginal population. The three cities with the lowest median income were found in the West (Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg). It was not surprising to find the lowest median incomes in these cities,

as income is lower in general in smaller metropolitan areas compared to cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Ottawa. These cities also ranked in the top three for the highest percentage of the Aboriginal population below the Low Income Cut Off and the highest level of unemployment among the Aboriginal population. While these three Western cities have consistently fared worse by these indicators, the lowest median income cities were not necessarily concentrated in the West. Table 3.1 ranks the median employment income by city from lowest to highest for both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations.

While the data reveals a high incidence of low income, it is also important to examine inequality and depth of poverty to understand the extent of vulnerability and social and economic exclusion faced by this population. Unfortunately this study did not have access to the disaggregated variables that would lead to an analysis of income by quintiles, but future study should take this into consideration to understand how poor is poor? Does the Aboriginal population fall just below the low income cut off? Or are they faced with extreme poverty whereby an individual or family cannot meet their basic needs for adequate food, shelter and utilities (e.g. heat, hydro and water)? Future study should also examine the differences in the depth of poverty for Aboriginal men and women, as this could reveal a more accurate depiction of the life chances of the urban Aboriginal population for different cities in Canada.

Table 3.1

Median Employment Income for Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Population

		Median Employment Income (\$)	
	City	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
1	Saskatoon	15,003	22,956
2	Regina	16,934	25,569
3	Winnipeg	16,956	24,868
4	Edmonton	17,926	26,027
5	Halifax	17,987	24,970
6	Montreal	20,037	25,269
7	Calgary	20,039	28,031
8	Vancouver	20,039	27,905
9	Toronto	26,065	29,991
10	Ottawa	26,095	30,965

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

Among the male and female population there are differences in the median employment income for all cities, regardless of whether a person is Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, with men faring better in all cases. However, as Table 3.2 indicates, there are much larger income gaps for Aboriginal when compared to non-Aboriginal males. Upon analysis of this situation it is perhaps not unusual that the non-Aboriginal population would encounter this disparity because on the whole the income levels of the Aboriginal population are much lower and there is a much greater incidence of low income among the Aboriginal population. What these figures do suggest is that when the Aboriginal population does locate employment, it will more often be in a low wage job, or possibly not fulltime or full year, creating a situation where employment earnings are less than the non-Aboriginal population.

Table 3.2

Median Employment Income for Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Population by Sex

		Median Employment Income (\$)			
	City	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Saskatoon	19,000	12,168	29,985	17,564
2	Regina	20,011	14,006	30,122	21,750
3	Winnipeg	19,997	14,582	30,016	20,058
4	Edmonton	23,028	13,791	34,038	19,688
5	Halifax	21,311	15,016	30,625	20,044
6	Montreal	23,993	17,861	30,024	21,074
7	Calgary	23,966	16,049	34,894	21,966
8	Vancouver	23,004	17,347	32,092	23,027
9	Toronto	30,070	21,949	34,911	25,049
10	Ottawa	26,924	25,991	36,061	26,902

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

Table 3.2 also reveals that the non-Aboriginal male population receives much higher employment income than the Aboriginal male population. We can see that in all but one city the non-Aboriginal median employment income for males was in the \$30,000 per year range, and the lowest median income city, Saskatoon, found the median income for non-Aboriginal males just slightly below \$30,000 per year at \$29,985. The median employment income for the Aboriginal male population was on average in the low \$20,000 per year range, with one exception (Toronto) just about \$30,000 per year.

The city with the largest variation between the Aboriginal male and female population the median employment income was Edmonton, with almost a \$10,000 per year difference. The city with the least variation in income was Ottawa at just under \$1,000 per year difference. We can speculate that Ottawa has the least variation in employment income because of the specifically designated

employment opportunities with the federal government; however this cannot be confirmed.

The variations in this data suggest that when Aboriginal men find employment their wages are better than when Aboriginal women find jobs. This may be for any number of reasons, such as educational attainment, experience, the types of jobs or industries in cities, or the existence of a glass ceiling for women. Regardless, Aboriginal women often face situations of low wages and low income because of barriers that prevent women from finding good employment opportunities, economic stability and upward mobility.

4.4 Government Transfers

The median income across Canada for persons receiving “other government income” is higher for the Aboriginal population, than the non-Aboriginal population (\$601 compared to \$463). Broken down by sex, the median income level is similar for the non-Aboriginal population (\$466 for males, \$452 for females); however, there are noticeable differences by sex for the Aboriginal identity population. Aboriginal males receive a median government income of \$519, while Aboriginal females receive \$677. This trend is similar when examining the average government income as well. Given the similarities in transfer payments by sex for the non-Aboriginal population, this difference in the Aboriginal population suggests that there are broader social and gender factors impacting the Aboriginal population, which may cause Aboriginal women to have a greater reliance on government assistance. See Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

The analysis for government transfers (by city) took into account, both the median income and average income in the category of “other income from

government sources”. While the examination of median income is generally most accurate because it eliminates the effect of outliers on the average, the average income from “other” government transfers tells a very interesting story that is not necessarily captured by simply looking at the median income. For example, in Montreal, the median transfer income is similar for both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, with the only real difference found between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal female population. However, looking at the average government transfer for the Aboriginal population (both male and female) reveals a much higher rate of transfer.

Table 4.1

**Average Other Government Income,
Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal**

Other Government Income \$		
	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Canada	2182	1427
Vancouver	2757	1361
Saskatoon	2716	1272
Regina	2698	1299
Montreal	2427	1595
Winnipeg	2382	1252
Ottawa	2259	1759
Toronto	1879	1297
Halifax	1750	1449
Edmonton	1583	797
Calgary	1041	674

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

Table 4.2

**Average Other Government Income
for Aboriginal Population by Sex**

Other Government Income \$		
	Male	Female
Canada	1893	2462
Vancouver	2470	3017
Saskatoon	1994	3280
Regina	2026	3224
Montreal	2193	2672
Winnipeg	1789	2871
Ottawa	1794	2700
Toronto	1742	2002
Halifax	1450	2091
Edmonton	1314	1795
Calgary	881	1181

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

This trend may indicate a couple of different realities. First, it suggests that there is a larger proportion of Aboriginals who rely on government transfers for at least a portion of their income. Second, it suggests that there is likely a larger variation in the government transfer incomes for Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, with a higher percentage of low income Aboriginals receiving transfers than non-Aboriginals. This certainly appears to be accurate when analyzing the trend in the female population, as the average income reveals large differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations (\$2,672 compared to \$1,657 respectively). Toronto appeared to have similar trends for both the median and average income for other government transfers, and for the male and female populations.

The statistics for the other eight cities examined tell a different story. Unlike Montreal and Toronto, the median for other government income was quite a bit higher for the Aboriginal population than the non-Aboriginal population. In these cities the average income from government transfers was also much higher for the Aboriginal population. The differences between males and females followed similar trends to what was found in Montreal and Toronto. Aboriginal women in all cities were in receipt of government transfers at higher rates, suggesting a greater reliance on the welfare state to meet their basic needs.

4.5 Analysis of Trends

As expected, regardless of the city in which one lives, the Aboriginal population is more likely to experience poverty. The incidence of poverty, or low income, varied by city, with the greatest incidence of poverty experienced in Saskatoon and Regina. This result supports the conclusions drawn previously by

other authors in the literature on Aboriginal social conditions. The urban Aboriginal population is at greater risk of poverty and socioeconomic stress than any other group in Canada. It is also not surprising that Saskatoon and Regina consistently ranked as the cities where the Aboriginal population faces the greatest risk of low income and unemployment, coupled with economic indicators revealing a greater reliance on the state. What is worth emphasizing is the incidence of low income in all of the cities examined.

Much of the urban Aboriginal literature focuses on the West as having high rates of Aboriginal poverty. However, the data here reveal that there are high rates of low income within the urban Aboriginal population across Canada, with even the lowest rates indicating close to one quarter of the population experiencing poverty. In the cities where the Aboriginal population experiences the lowest incidence of low income, this rate is still approximately 10 percentage points higher than the non-Aboriginal population. This figure and the fact that regardless of the city examined the Aboriginal low-income rate is high suggest that there are serious structural barriers or problems affecting urban Aboriginal people.

The data in this chapter support the conclusion that there is a level of social exclusion experienced by the urban Aboriginal population. This is evident by the fact that this population is not only “poor”,¹⁰⁵ but also more often unemployed, and even when employed they have a lower median income than the rest of the population suggesting that they are either in lower paying jobs or not

¹⁰⁵ While the Low Income Cut Off is not an official poverty line, it is a tool used to identify those at greater economic risk than others within the population.

working as often (perhaps in part time positions or not working a full year) as the rest of the population. The much higher average rate of transfer payments also suggests that those who are receiving government transfer payments are financially dependent on this income to meet their basic needs than the rest of the population, particularly in the case of Aboriginal women.

Two non-Western cities – Halifax and Montreal – were in the middle of cities ranked in order of highest to lowest rates of low income. This is noteworthy because the literature often focuses on Western cities experiences with socioeconomic problems faced by the urban Aboriginal population. The findings show there is an economic crisis faced by Aboriginal people in cities across Canada and that this situation needs to be addressed by looking at jurisdictional limitations and policies at all levels of government, starting with the role of the federal government.

There are many political, historical and constitutional factors that may impact the economic status of the Aboriginal population, but one factor that is not often examined is gender. Based on the literature review we could see that socioeconomic stress can play a huge role in economic outcomes for any group in society. For the urban Aboriginal population, the literature suggests that low educational attainment, mobility or transition between communities, such as reserves and the urban areas, and even conflicts with the legal system limiting access to stable employment as likely factors contributing to socioeconomic status. However, there is little research that specifically looks at gender. The

evidence presented here suggests that gender is an important factor: urban Aboriginal women are clearly more at risk of poverty than men.

Women have distinct experiences, particularly when examining poverty. Based on the very simple cross tabulations in this analysis it is evident that Aboriginal women face greater hardships than Aboriginal men, and these experiences are likely to have a long-term impact on family and child poverty. For this reason a complete gendered study of the socioeconomic status of urban Aboriginal women is necessary to identify the depth of poverty and socioeconomic stress and where to focus policies and resources. From a political economy perspective, this type of study will also go a long way in effectively addressing the problems faced by this population because it can identify the structural barriers that oppress this population and look to make changes that will create new opportunities for urban Aboriginal culture to flourish and be successful.

On the whole, however, there is a case to be made that regardless of gender, the entire approach to integrating the urban Aboriginal population into the economic structure of society has not been effective. Based on the indicators in this analysis it appears that there are problems affecting the urban Aboriginal that cannot simply be solved through labour market policies. If it were the case that poverty could be solved simply by getting the Aboriginal workforce working, it seems only logical that in a period of economic growth and prosperity, which has been experienced in Canada since the late 1990s that at some point the Aboriginal population would have the opportunity for gainful employment and make the

choice to work. But this does not appear to be the case. The data shows that there are large numbers of Aboriginal people that cannot find work (evident in the unemployment rate – which suggests that one is actually seeking employment, but cannot find it). And for those who are working, the median employment income suggests that the Aboriginal population continues to struggle in low end or low wage jobs. Based on these findings it is possible that even if labour market policies were developed and enforced, there are obvious underlying issues that are making gainful employment difficult for the Aboriginal population.

One of the barriers that affect the Aboriginal population in finding long term stable employment, particularly in Western cities, is racism. The literature on the social and cultural experiences of the Aboriginal population characterizes racism as an ongoing issue that plagues all Aboriginal people. This racism has been entrenched in Canadian society by government policies and legislation that is based on social exclusion, but perhaps more destructive because it has created a situation where stereotypes of poverty, dependency and abuse have become the unique identifier labeling all Aboriginal people. By taking a step back to examine the situation of Aboriginal poverty one cannot dismiss structural barriers that impact opportunities for employment and economic stability. It is for this reason that labour market policies will not provide a solution to the poverty experienced by the urban Aboriginal population.

4.6 Conclusion

From the evidence presented here the urban Aboriginal population is at greater risk of poverty and economic stress associated with high rates of unemployment, low median incomes, and high levels of government transfer

payments. These factors are also often associated with conditions of socioeconomic stress and social exclusion, which in turn have an impact on a person or family's ability to leave poverty.

In the analysis here, we have identified four key areas of economic stress: the incidence of low income, unemployment, employment income, and income received from government transfer payments. The significance of these factors is not only that the urban Aboriginal population is under greater economic stress than the rest of the population. but also that Aboriginal women are much more likely to be faced with low income, low median wages and a greater reliance on government transfer payments. Using this evidence, the next chapter of this study will draw out the implications of these findings and present some recommendations for government policies that could meet the real needs of this population.

Chapter Five: Critique of the Social Welfare State

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter brought to bear some serious concerns facing the urban Aboriginal population. First, the data indicate that regardless of location, the Aboriginal population in cities is much more likely to fall below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO). Second, Aboriginal women are at much greater risk of poverty than Aboriginal males, which raises other concerns relating to family poverty and social and economic stress that places the family at risk of deterioration and intergenerational poverty. Third, the unemployment rate of the Aboriginal population is significantly higher than the rest of the population in the cities examined. This knowledge raises the question, why? This chapter will respond to the data analysis with a critique of the structural barriers that have contributed to the current state of urban Aboriginal poverty, and pose possible interventions that may assist in the future socioeconomic development of this distressed population.

5.1 State structures and foundations of inequality

There is a long and complex history of Aboriginal or “Indian” policy in Canada that has contributed to the current socioeconomic state of the Aboriginal population in Canada. In fact, it is now commonly understood that the very foundation of Indian policy in Canada is rooted in “a history of paternalistic and disempowering policies that created a high level of dependency on the state, but also a high level of mistrust towards the state within Aboriginal communities.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Martin Papillion and Gina Cosentino, *Lessons from Abroad: Towards a New Social Model for Canada's Aboriginal People*, CPRN Social Architecture Papers, Research Report F/40, Family Network, April 2004; p. v.

This is evident historically in policies that have denied to Aboriginal people basic civil rights and the rights of social citizenship afforded to other Canadians. For example, in many First Nations communities families were destroyed and children were denied their culture and identity with the creation of the residential school system. The Métis were socially excluded and literally forced to the margins of society and denied recognition of their distinct culture because they were not considered “Indian enough”. The promise of a better life was made for any Aboriginal person who gave up their history and status to integrate into mainstream society, only to find that the colour of their skin would pose the greatest challenge to social and economic integration into mainstream society.

Historically, Aboriginal groups, regardless of heritage or status, have faced similar social and economic barriers rooted in racism, denial of culture and identity, social exclusion and structural barriers shaped by white, mainstream society. Today there exists a real dilemma because state policies have traditionally focused on the Status First Nations population, which has granted them special rights and retribution for past injustices. However, in recent years Aboriginal peoples on the whole have been identified as facing structural barriers throughout history, but there is no legal or constitutional basis for claims of injustice or reciprocity.

The diverse history of the Aboriginal population and the complexity of Aboriginal politics have created a contemporary dilemma that is not easily resolved. From a political economy perspective, colonial policy shaped the way Aboriginal people of all identities were able to participate in society and the

market. The population has been plagued by a history of exclusion, dependency, abuse and denial of the basic rights of social citizenship entrenched by the state, so is it any wonder that there remain significant social ills affecting the contemporary population? For all of the historical injustices that have occurred, and the social barriers that have been constructed, it is unreasonable to assume that the state has offered a neutral place for equal opportunity for Aboriginal people, nor that the market can enable this population to succeed on their own merits.

The Aboriginal population continues to be affected by a colonial legacy and barriers that are entrenched in Canadian culture, society and the state. The denial of culture and identity entrenched by state policies up until the mid-1980s has created a generation of people who are emotionally and psychologically vulnerable. The creation of a patriarchal system of governance and corruption on reserves has led to a failure for communities to become independent or self-sufficient. The legacy of the residential school system has left an entire generation of people disenchanted, disillusioned, and emotionally and physically scarred. And the exclusion of all non-status Aboriginals including the Métis and Inuit from state recognition of injustice has created a situation whereby the state has no legal responsibility to aide a population who have similar socioeconomic outcomes resulting from a comparable history.

5.2 Social development and the welfare state

In the foreword for a series of policy papers recently published by the Canadian Policy Research Networks, Judith Maxwell articulates the history and motivation behind the development of the Canadian welfare state. Her argument,

describes the political and economic pressures during the 1940s, which prompted action to ensure that Canada would avoid another depression. This account of history is debatable as any significant investment into the welfare state did not occur until the 1960s; still at this time there was a great deal of optimism that created a conducive environment for political leaders to want to create a better life for all Canadians.¹⁰⁷

While the intent of the planners of the welfare state was to create a universal social safety net, in recent years studies such as those cited earlier on poverty suggest that there are many people who have been left behind or even excluded from the social architecture altogether. The failure of the welfare state is perhaps most evident in the growing gap between rich and poor in Canada, and the inequality and disadvantage faced by the Aboriginal population. It is certainly problematic to find that the Aboriginal population, particularly Aboriginal women, remain vulnerable and marginalized by the market. But why is it that the urban Aboriginal population is disproportionately faced with situations of low income, high unemployment, low median wages, and to a certain degree, dependence on the state for income transfers?

The following section will look to answer this question based on the structure of the modern welfare state, as identified by Maxwell in her introduction to the social architecture series. In her summary she articulates four main sources of economic well being for citizens:

- Market income;

¹⁰⁷ Judith Maxwell, *Foreword written for the CPRN Social Architecture Papers*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2004.

- Non-market care and support within the family;
- State-sponsored services and income transfers; and
- Non-governmental community services and supports (i.e. the voluntary sector).¹⁰⁸

The basic claim by Maxwell is that the four pillars of the welfare state hold true today, with some changes stemming from economic, demographic, political and social trends in recent years. However, this structure does not seem to hold true for the Aboriginal population, particularly those living in urban centers. The four sources of well being on which the welfare state is built do not necessarily reflect the social support available to the Aboriginal population. In fact, this political economic analysis of the urban Aboriginal population has found numerous social and economic obstacles in mainstream society. Consequently, a critical look at these four pillars may create a better understanding of whether the welfare state has been successful in addressing the needs of the Aboriginal population, or if they have been marginalized even from what is generally thought to be a universal safety net.

Market income

The ability to meet one's needs through the market is a founding principle of free market capitalism. Market income is certainly the first line of defence for any individual in a capitalist society to maintain personal and family well-being. However, as identified in the data analysis, the urban Aboriginal population is much more likely than the rest of the population to be faced with no, or a significantly smaller market income. The indicators of low income,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

unemployment, and median employment earnings all reveal that the Aboriginal population in the 10 cities examined all face situations where their market income is not creating the same opportunities for economic security and well being as the rest of the population.

Of perhaps greater concern, however, is that Aboriginal women are more often faced with economic stress relating to low income, unemployment and low median income. This implies that there are gendered challenges that exist within the Aboriginal population that do not exist to the same extent in the rest of the population. Referring back to the data, it is clear that many Aboriginal women are not experiencing economic stability through market income. This is a serious concern that suggests that there are systemic barriers faced by Aboriginal women across Canada that inhibit their ability to meet their individual and family needs through the market. If this is in fact true, labour market policies need to adapt to the specific challenges faced by Aboriginal women in order for employment to be a viable method for Aboriginal women to advance their economic status in society.

Non-market care and support within the family

Familial assistance plays a very important role in providing support and well being to individuals in society. This is not limited to monetary support, but rather any kind of assistance that may provide encouragement or opportunities for individual growth and development. However, as the literature suggests and the data from the 2001 census reveal, many people within the urban aboriginal population are not able to provide a stable environment, care or support to their family members. Studies have repeatedly found that the urban Aboriginal

population is often faced with extreme conditions of socioeconomic stress and deterioration within the family unit. It is reported that families are often affected by physical and sexual abuse, dependency on drugs and alcohol, disproportionately high involvement in the criminal justice system, which in turn leads to a high rate of Aboriginal children apprehended by the child welfare system.¹⁰⁹

It is suggested that Aboriginal women have often moved to urban areas in search of a better life for themselves or their children. For some this may be initiated by the impoverished conditions, poor health and social outcomes in smaller Aboriginal communities. Others may have no choice to leave reserve communities as there no matrimonial property rights for women, thus creating a situation where women are forced to leave behind their home and connections to the community if they choose to leave a relationship. Regardless of the motivation, the economic and educational opportunities in cities are certainly greater than in rural and remote areas, in the north and on reserve; however, as the data suggest, these conceptual opportunities do not necessarily translate into a better life for Aboriginal women and families in urban areas.

For many Aboriginal people, moving to cities means leaving behind a community that traditionally acts as the social and family support for all individuals in the community. For any Aboriginal person choosing to move to an urban area, once in the city social networks are not necessarily present, and even when they are, they may not be able to provide the economic support for the well being of an individual. For single mothers, they may not have stable family or

¹⁰⁹ Clatworthy, 1981.

friends nearby to provide emotional support, financial help or care giving assistance to help them get by, thus leaving them isolated and without a pillar of support that other members of the community may rely on for their improved well being.

While social support certainly exists within urban Aboriginal communities, economic support within the family is likely not as consistent as in other families, communities or cultures. In other words, immediate and extended families are able to provide invaluable cultural support; however, given the incidence of poverty within the community it is probable that there is little financial assistance that can be offered when family members run into hard times.

State-sponsored services and income transfers

The welfare state provides Canadian workers with some protection from social and economic vulnerability due to market fluctuations. Individual income transfers were initiated such as social assistance, Unemployment Insurance (now termed Employment Insurance), the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans, Guaranteed Income Supplement and Old Age Security for low income seniors. The state also began to invest in a broader social safety net through programs like universal health care (1968), post secondary education (1964), affordable housing (extremely limited except between 1965-1971) and other social development programs and services, (post 1971) to ensure that all Canadians were given the opportunity to succeed in life and become productive members of society.

The Aboriginal population is often identified as a group heavily dependent on state-sponsored services and income transfers. While there is a growing urban Aboriginal middle class, there are many that are dependent on the state. Findings

from the 2001 census indicate the Aboriginal population, particularly Aboriginal women, receive a much greater share of transfer payments than the non-Aboriginal population. With an understanding of broader social and cultural issues that contribute to Aboriginal poverty, and knowledge of the historical and structural barriers that exist in society (such as racism, abuse, and social exclusion) it becomes increasingly clear that structure state-sponsored services continue to be an important source of income for many in the community. However, the consequence of this dependency is great, as the stigma and stereotypes of the Aboriginal population as “lazy”, unproductive, and welfare dependent are perpetuated and the cycle of racism and social exclusion is continued.

Community services and supports

Prior to the development of the social welfare state, the church and community played a large role in the delivery of relief to the poor and those in need of assistance. With the development of the welfare state there was a shift to state funded programs and the development of a community infrastructure for support, with the community continuing to play an important role in maintaining a social network for individuals. In recent years, however, the role of the voluntary sector has become increasingly important in the delivery of programs and services as the state has scaled back their role in the delivery of social programs and has identified the importance of community-based assistance.

The voluntary sector is recognized as an important pillar of society, providing social and economic support to those in need. However, given an increased reliance on voluntary sector supports and services in recent years, this

pillar is said to be cracking under the pressure.¹¹⁰ As high rates of poverty and economic stress continue to affect Aboriginals across Canada, the role of the community is certainly vital to building a pride in one's culture and leadership; but, this is largely dependent on funding for programs and services. The Aboriginal population does not have an economic base strong enough to independently fund programs and services, as would other charitable groups targeting a broader or more economically secure population. So, rather than offering another segment or social network for support, this pillar of the welfare state actually presents one more option not necessarily available to the Aboriginal population and creates an additional challenge to self-sufficiency and sustainability that will continue to limit positive change for Aboriginal peoples.

5.3 Beyond the four pillars

There are two broader issues that come into play in this examination of social development and the social welfare state and state sponsored services. The first is that despite the notion that the welfare state creates a level playing field for all Canadians Aboriginal people have not been treated as equal members of society. In fact, it was not until 1960 that status Indians were granted the right to vote in federal elections, being the last group to access this right of social citizenship.¹¹¹ The Inuit were also largely ignored by the state until the 1950s, except where there was federal interest in northern sovereignty or economic development.¹¹² The Métis struggled on the margins of society, unable to fully

¹¹⁰ Katherine Scott, *Funding Matters: The impact of Canada's new funding regime on non-profit and voluntary organizations*, Canadian Council on Social Development and the Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2003.

¹¹¹ Abele, 2004.

¹¹² Ibid.

integrate into mainstream society or negotiate rights as an indigenous group as the First Nations were able to secure, which would grant some historical recognition of their status distinct people or access retribution from the state.¹¹³ And while a great battle was fought to restore equal rights and status for First Nations women in the mid-1980s, gender discrimination continues today as matrimonial property rights continue to be denied to women living on reserve.

The second is that the state has somewhat arbitrarily decided who has access to additional benefits, without recognition that there is great diversity within the indigenous population and a range of social injustices that have created a situation whereby segments of the Aboriginal identity population have faced similar disadvantages and structural barriers, but without any recognition by the state. The consequences of this are an unequal access to not only the rights of social citizenship, but also greater social benefits. This is important to identify in a study of political economy because this inequality and history of social exclusion has created a structure in society where Aboriginal people on the whole have been pushed beyond the pale, or juggled by provincial and federal government departments, which ultimately provide a series of paternalistic policies. Unfortunately in the end it is not clear where the advantages of restructuring funding for the urban Aboriginal population may lie since benefits and services vary by province.

Research has repeatedly found that the Aboriginal population is falling further behind in social and economic development indicators, despite efforts to improve quality of life through transfer payments and targeted social spending.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Historically, the government has invested in a patchwork of programs and services, which have created complex restrictions and jurisdictional division for funding and failed to adequately address the needs of the population as a whole. At a time where there is discussion from all players on the role of the state and jurisdictional responsibilities, Papillon and Cosentino argue “there may in fact be a timely intersection between the restructuring of post-war social architectures, with policies increasingly aimed at enabling citizens rather than protecting them from market failures, and the overall transformations in Aboriginal-state relations.”¹¹⁴

5.4 A new social architecture for Canada?

Over the past decade there has been a trend towards decentralization of the state and an increasing focus on efficiency of government – meaning a scaling back of state-sponsored social programs. There are certainly some concerns of the impact that this shift to a more neo-liberal approach to policy and social development will have on the most vulnerable in society, but there may also be some room for cautious optimism.

Experiments with new funding models in health and social spending have created opportunities to shift from entitlement-based programs to programs that are accessible to a wider range of Aboriginal people who are in need of assistance to “catch up” to the rest of the population. As Abele describes in her commentary for the Social Architecture Papers series, “if the country’s social architecture is open to revision, so is the potential to create a more acceptable place within it for

¹¹⁴ Papillon and Cosentino, 2004; p. vi.

Aboriginal peoples.”¹¹⁵ And there are some very positive and progressive changes currently underway, particularly for the urban Aboriginal population.

Under a new approach to Aboriginal policy and programming there is an increasing interest to include all Aboriginal people, regardless of their *Indian Act* status or place of residence. This has opened up various opportunities to develop programs based on economic autonomy and self-reliance. For example, there is increasing opportunities for Aboriginal business development through Industry Canada and Human Resources and Social Development Canada. There is also more interest in building a collaborative approach to program delivery, offering opportunities for Aboriginal agencies to control health and social welfare programs and services. This is a very positive change, as historical policies are argued to have fostered disempowerment and mistrust towards the state.¹¹⁶

However, with this shift there may be some cause for concern as to whether there will be long-term meaningful change for those who are most at risk. That is, the reformed funding structure for Aboriginal programs seems to be a patchwork of pilot projects and innovative ideas, but restricted to short-term (five year) funding that is not necessarily renewable. There also appears to be no consistency in programming, communication between programs being funded by the federal, provincial and municipal governments or commitment or guarantee for funding over the long term.¹¹⁷

This presents huge challenges for the Aboriginal population that is in serious need of stable investment to ensure socioeconomic stability and end the

¹¹⁵ Abele, 2004; p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Papillon and Cosentino, 2004.

¹¹⁷ Hanselmann, 2003.

cycle of poverty. Political promises without any structural accountability leaves these programs vulnerable to political change and budget constraints. This was witnessed in 2006 when the federal Conservative Party was elected to form a minority government and quickly revoked on the previous Liberal commitment to the Kelowna Accord. Without any constitutional or formal structural responsibility to these types of funding agreements, the “new social architecture” for Canada is quite weak.

In addition to the questions surrounding the sustainability of investment, one could be very critical of the adequacy of this funding and who is being targeted by this investment. A scan of the programs that are seeing greater investment show that Aboriginal business, labour market adjustment programs and skills and employment programs are being targeted to increase the autonomy of this population. This is certainly a worthwhile investment, but does it offer any meaningful opportunities for those most at risk?

As identified in the literature review, and observed in the data analysis, there are many problems faced by the urban Aboriginal population that cannot be addressed through labour market or free market business ventures. This type of investment will likely offer great opportunities for many Aboriginals that have seen discrimination, but may in reality only widen the gap between the haves and have-nots within the Aboriginal community. This is because these types of programs are targeted to those that are not achieving their full potential, but still have some education, skills, stability and motivation to change their socioeconomic status. The most vulnerable within the Aboriginal population such

as the homeless, those involved in the criminal justice system, those with health, mental health or dependency issues, women, single mothers and at risk youth, will need on-going social investment to make labour market solutions a viable option.

5.5 Recommendations

In his 2005 edition of *Aboriginal Peoples In Canada*, James Frideres identifies one of the problems that urban Aboriginal people have faced is that various levels of government have funded programs but there is no policy to link them to.¹¹⁸ The result is that problems within the community are not systematically addressed, resulting in a patchwork of programs and passing responsibility to other levels of government or the community. For this reason, the ultimate achievement of a new social architecture for the urban Aboriginal population is one that provides dedicated and ongoing funding for programs and services to address the core needs of the population.

The current funding arrangement between the federal government and the provinces for health and social programs takes place in a “differentiated policy environment”, which is made up of inconsistent or unreliable funding that cannot and will not help this community reach its full potential.¹¹⁹ As the current funding structure for Aboriginal people is dated and only acts a temporary solution to extremely complex and historically based problems of poverty and social distress, federal and provincial governments must use the tools at their disposal to influence and support positive policy solutions.

¹¹⁸ James S. Frideres and Rene R. Gadacz, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*, seventh edition, Toronto: Pearson / Prentice Hall: 2005; p. 173.

¹¹⁹ Hanselmann, 2001.

What is needed is a formalized or legislated funding structure between federal, provincial and municipal governments for urban Aboriginal programs and services. Such legislation or agreements should be developed in collaboration with the Aboriginal community and all urban centers with a sizeable Aboriginal population. This new direction will begin to help communities so that they are not left to deal with the high rates of poverty, unemployment and dependency on government transfers without additional support. This is a tall order, but one that is certainly possible if all jurisdictions are willing to work together to invest in a more just and equitable society.

The following three recommendations are based on a legislated funding structure which provides consistent and on-going funding to core areas of need for the urban Aboriginal population. These target areas, I believe, will begin to address the root causes of poverty within the urban Aboriginal population.

Invest in Cities

Traditionally, social services agencies are structured to stave off the immediate effects of poverty, but not the prevention of poverty. In order to limit the cyclical effects of poverty and social exclusion there needs to be a rethinking of the structure and delivery of services. Services need to focus on communities and community development for the Aboriginal population. For example, offering community health centres specifically for the urban aboriginal population and programming targeting women's health issues, investing in Native Friendship Centres to provide cultural centres for the population, and offering settlement programs for Aboriginals to help integrate newcomers to cities, particularly women and single mothers. The first step to achieving such extensive investment

is through the suggested formalized funding agreements with federal and provincial governments.

While the recommendation to invest in cities is gaining recognition as a necessary shift in government policies so that cities can meet the social and economic needs of their population and invest in infrastructure, it is not new to the Aboriginal policy debate. In fact, Frideres notes “when Hawthorn carried out his study of Aboriginal people in the 1960s, he predicted a major influx of reserve Aboriginals into major urban centres. He also went on to point out that when this happened, special facilities would need be needed to deal with the process of social adjustment.”¹²⁰ It is interesting that politicians, policy makers and urban planners are only now beginning to recognize the importance of investing in cities.

Despite the need for change, this recommendation is not without controversy as it would require a re-thinking of jurisdictional spending that is rooted in the constitution. However, change is perhaps inevitable as we face new times and evolving economic circumstances. Programs and services with specific objectives that address the core needs of the urban Aboriginal population in a culturally sensitive way are essential to building sustainable communities with a sense of dignity and pride. The social and physical infrastructure of cities and communities is central to this objective and to the integration of people who have traditionally been socially and economically excluded from mainstream society. Therefore, improving the life chances of the Aboriginal population requires not just investment, but change from the very foundation and working with the

¹²⁰ Frideres, 2005; p. 156.

Aboriginal community to meet new objectives. Doing so will create opportunities to overcome the cyclical effects of poverty and social exclusion that have been experienced by the Aboriginal population for generations.

Invest in Women

Based on the research and data it is clear that meaningful change for the urban Aboriginal community requires investment in programs and services specifically directed at supporting the social needs and economic security of Aboriginal women. Statistics on the male-female ratio in cities suggest that there are about 10 per cent more Aboriginal women than Aboriginal men in cities. Considering this fact, and the disproportionate level of socioeconomic stress faced by Aboriginal women, targeted spending is needed to provide safe and affordable housing, daycare, health and wellness programs, mental health supports, alternative or adult education and training and stable and positive social supports within the community. This funding will go a long way to address the needs of the urban Aboriginal community as a whole, as women (and families) are at present being left behind.

Funding agreements need to go beyond band-aid solutions such as income supplements for childcare. The formalized structure of adequate, predictable funding should provide basic social welfare support and gender-specific programs and services for women to truly become equal members of society. True “investment” in the Aboriginal community must begin with women, because as Clatworthy and Yarnell have reported, this is where the foundation of stable families and community begins. Over time this investment will be a much more

effective way to address the negative outcomes that have plagued this group over generations.

Invest in Skills

While a stable and supportive social safety net is necessary to the overall economic development of the urban Aboriginal community, individuals must be enabled for lasting change. This means that individuals must be equipped with the necessary education and skills to both contribute and benefit from long-term participation in the labour force. To achieve this, there needs to be employment strategies that take into account targeted education, training and skill development to provide a level playing field for Aboriginal people. Such programs should also incorporate job laddering to ensure Aboriginal people are recognized and rewarded when they are in the labour market, as well as mentoring and human resource investment within the workplace to ensure that employment is not jeopardized by life circumstances.

Employment programs should be based on enhanced integration into the labour market. Such programs should take into consideration broader social and cultural supports to ensure long-term goals of labour market participation and economic independence are met. This will require partnerships and investment through government programs such as: Human Resources and Social Development Canada's Workplace Skills Initiative, a partnership program between the federal government and employers to improve the workplace skills of targeted groups; the Aboriginal Workplace Initiative, an initiative to promote Aboriginal hires in private industry; and private partnerships between the Aboriginal community and business or industry to promote employment and

procurement practices. Programs like these, which build on community development and investing in people (not just jobs),⁶ will provide a much more grounded approach to labour market participation and economic security.

5.6 Aboriginal Leadership in the 21st Century

Urban Aboriginal organizations and networks have been very active and successful in recent years developing best practices in community economic development and health and social programming. This leadership and innovation would perhaps not be possible without changes in attitudes. Where Aboriginal people in the past have often faced racism and criticism from their own community, there is a new wave of self-determination hitting communities across Canada. Aboriginal individuals, businesses and bands are investing in industry and themselves and seizing opportunities for economic advancement. The foundation of this movement is rooted in the realization that self-determination comes through economic independence.

By making local capacity building the ultimate focus, community economic development addresses many of the problems experienced by the urban Aboriginal population and provides an effective tool to achieve two fundamental goals of development: first, create an economic base to support self-determination; and second, build the health, knowledge and skills of the people. The following three examples are just a few of the successes worth noting as positive models on which to build recommendations for changes in health, social and economic policy.

Urban Reserves

Urban reserves are an emerging trend in Canada. They began in Saskatchewan as economic development initiatives, and have spread to other cities and provinces thanks to overwhelming success. These reserves are not residential, but rather industrial parks where the land is owned by a First Nations band and run as an economic venture. The example of the Muskeg Lake First Nations urban reserve in Saskatoon is home to nearly 20 businesses, some Aboriginal-owned, and employs 400 people, approximately 300 of which are Aboriginal. The reserve generates about \$4 million a year in revenue, and reinvests those revenues in the development of the industrial park and in housing and a senior's residence in their home community.

While the success of urban reserves has been great, the concept is not without controversy. Many concerns have been raised by community groups, politicians and citizens regarding a perceived unfair competitive advantage. This is because the tax system in Canada is structured in a way that First Nations reserves are exempt from various taxes; thus urban reserves are not required to pay municipal taxes. However, urban reserves have entered into service agreements with the municipality in which they are located, whereby they pay the City an amount equivalent to property and other municipal taxes. In return, the City provides the urban reserve all the services it would normally provide to businesses within the city limits.¹²¹

The money for the service agreement is levied on reserve, as the reserve imposes its own property tax on the businesses. The taxes are the same for

¹²¹ Errol Black and Jim Silver, "Urban Reserves Have a Place in Winnipeg's Aboriginal Strategy", in *Fast Facts*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba, September 19, 2003.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal businesses to ensure a level playing field.

Industrial parks under the control of an urban reserve are comparable to industrial areas in most cities. There is no competitive advantage for business, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, therefore public criticism of this method of economic development is unwarranted. The only added value for the Aboriginal population is that the profits from an urban reserve are reinvested in the band that governs the reserve.

Other concerns related to a fear of an influx of poverty and dependency often associated with the Aboriginal population, are also unjust. Urban reserves are industrial hubs, not residential reserves. They are a means to economic development, thus, concerns such as this simply reflect the racism and ignorance that the Aboriginal population has faced for generations. These opinions or fears are precipitated by stereotypes and represent the structural barriers that have limited the economic independence and autonomy of Aboriginal groups throughout history. Ultimately, urban reserves are an economic success story for the Aboriginal population and need to be supported as viable options for urban Aboriginal development strategies across Canada.

Friendship Centres

While a strong economic base is the foundation of self-determination, the policy framework must look beyond economic development to support the social needs of the community. Friendship Centres are a solid example of the success of urban programming developed for all Aboriginal people. The Friendship Centre Movement originated approximately 50 years ago in response to the needs of Aboriginal peoples who were migrating to urban areas in search of

a better life.¹²² Today, there are 117 Friendship Centres at the local community level, situated in every region in Canada. While funding and investment from various levels of government have ensured sustainability, these centres remain strong thanks to a commitment to volunteerism from the community and grassroots support. The success of this movement is perhaps attributed to the “people-first” approach to community economic development and the ability of the leadership within the Friendship Centre Movement to act as champions for the urban Aboriginal population. This leadership supports a wide range of programs and services within the community and works to promote Aboriginal health and social policy at the provincial and federal levels.

Aboriginal Human Resources Development

There are many examples today of investment in human resources and workplace skills for the Aboriginal population. The Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) is one such example that has been active in trying to address the needs of the Métis workforce through their Human Resources Development and Training Department. This department, established under the Métis Human Resources Development Agreement (MHRDA), works to design, deliver and evaluate human resource development programs and services to meet the employability needs of the Métis, Non-Status and Inuit people.¹²³ Since its inception, the department has been actively working to deliver a variety of local labour market

¹²² Alfred Gay, “Urban Aboriginal Peoples: A Challenge to the National Charter”, in *Social Inclusion: Canadian Perspectives*, Ted Richmond and Anver Saloojee (eds.). Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005; p. 215.

¹²³ Manitoba Métis Federation, *Human Resources Development and Training*, cited on-line June 16, 2007 at http://mmf.mb.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=137&Itemid=47.

programs to meet the employability improvement needs of its members and targeted population.

At present, there are five areas of programs and services to assist in preparing for, obtaining and maintaining employment, and in making successful transition into the local labour market. These include:

- **Targeted wage subsidy** – Provides employers with a subsidy to hire employees that are experiencing difficulty obtaining employment
- **Job opportunity program** – Provides participants with the opportunity to receive valuable insight and work experience related to their occupation goal.
- **Summer career placement** – A Youth Employment Program delivered by the MMF-HRDT Department. The program has been developed to provide students with work experience in preparation for entry into the labour force.
- **Single Seats** – Assists individuals in accessing training leading to employment through a cost sharing arrangement.
- **Project-based training** – A labour market program delivered by MMF-HRDT through developing external partnerships with training institutions.

Through programs such as these, the MMF is an organization leading the way to address the human resources and skill development needs of the Métis, non-status and Inuit population of Manitoba. The programs and services under their leadership offer a model of other Aboriginal workplace essential skills development in Canada. The outcomes of these programs provide many benefits for the community and also work creates a sustainable workforce that is competitive and increases the productivity of the labour market in general.

5.7 Conclusion

Community economic development integrates many aspects of community building that can benefit all members of society. It develops and strengthens community-based organizations, targets and invests in businesses to increase the level of Aboriginal ownership in the economy, works to improve the local development environment for business, such as the skills, attitudes, organizations and services that support business investment and operations, encourages the creation of jobs and businesses, which improve local productivity and which reduce dependency on governments and/or single industries, it respects cultural values when shaping community direction and recognizes that social and economic development go hand in hand.

These examples identified are just a few of the many best practices across Canada representing positive solutions for change. While they support the recommendations presented, the challenging next step is developing a policy framework that will reflect and enable more creative solutions and opportunities for empowering urban Aboriginal communities by providing stable funding for solutions that work.

There is no doubt that the ultimate goal of social investment is to offer opportunities to citizens so that in the future they are no longer reliant on the system for assistance. Thus, a shift to a new and stable funding for programs and services that will empower the Aboriginal population is a worthwhile endeavor. However, this shift cannot rely on the good will of governments. It requires a formalized or legislated funding structure to guarantee funding for communities to adequately address the socioeconomic challenges faced by the urban Aboriginal

population. No doubt, the timing must be right to support such a change. Ultimately, it will require a commitment to and support by all levels of government for substantive political autonomy and capacity building to ensure that the objectives of greater self-reliance and the reshaping of Aboriginal peoples' welfare away from state dependency are met with success.¹²⁴ Otherwise those most at risk, particularly women, will continue in a cycle of socioeconomic distress.

¹²⁴ Papillon and Cosentino, 2004.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This study has explored both literature and statistics relating to the economic conditions of the urban Aboriginal population in Canada. Findings from the analysis of 2001 census data are clear; this group, particularly women, is at greater risk of poverty than the rest of the population; they are more likely to be unemployed and receive income through government transfers than the rest of the population; and even when working, the median income of the Aboriginal population is much lower than the non-Aboriginal population.

The values or bias brought to this investigation is no doubt rooted in concerns relating power relationships and the ability of the labour market to effectively address poverty. In fact, the overarching theme of this research is to go beyond the traditional understanding of poverty as being a class or market issue and realize that economic relations may be the result of social divisions created by unequal power relationships in society, which limit the social and economic development of the Aboriginal population. It is hoped that this type of analysis will create a better understanding of the issues of Aboriginal poverty and push for more appropriate research methods to understand the causes or nature of poverty, inequality or socioeconomic stress. It is also hoped that the outcome of this research will avoid placing stigma or blame on a population that has been deprived of social and economic opportunities and subjected to a wide range of government policies and programs which aimed to assimilate Aboriginal people into the mainstream market. But where do we go from here?

This research is only the beginning of what could be a long investigation of the root causes of poverty among the Aboriginal population. Future research is certainly warranted to examine the experiences of poverty within sub-groups of the Aboriginal population, particularly women. From this research it appears that this group has been neglected on the whole, both in terms of research and in policy making. Perhaps future research should begin with an investigation of the role of matrimonial property rights in women's decisions to move to cities from reserve, especially as decisions may relate to physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

There is also a disturbing silence in policy around Aboriginal women and the dangers of the sex trade. The serial murder of female sex trade workers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, a large proportion of which were Aboriginal, brought headlines to the reality facing many women on the street. While this example made headlines, it is not uncommon for Aboriginal women to go missing or be found murdered. Therefore, this example should be recognized as an illustration of the outcomes of poverty when women are faced with abuse, addiction, mental health issues, homelessness and social exclusion.

Can we find solutions to poverty outside of the labour market? Overall, it can be said that the methods of addressing socioeconomic problems within the urban Aboriginal population have been less than successful, as demonstrated by the literature findings on intergenerational socioeconomic distress, as well as by the clear levels of unemployment, high rates of government transfers and economic stress experienced by the Aboriginal population in all cities in Canada. Thus, enforcing labour market solutions such as workfare (as proposed by John

Richards in the literature) is not an effective solution. In fact, one could argue that it is simply a repressive way of trying to assimilate a population that has never fit the mold of the mainstream economic structure of society. However, this is not to say that labour market participation in and of itself is not desirable. Rather, labour market policies must focus on developing the necessary education and skills, as well as broader social supports such as mentoring for Aboriginal workers to ensure that Aboriginal people are able to find meaningful and long-term employment.

Any solution, whether it is rooted in stable funding for supports and services, or labour market integration programs, it has to fit the population's needs. This may mean a basic income structure, more tailored social services such as universal access to childcare, or community development initiatives that come through ongoing or permanent funding to urban Aboriginal programs. Regardless, solutions require a commitment by all levels of government and need to go beyond what has already been done.

The final question to ask is: can there be meaningful change if this research is juxtaposed with jurisdictional limitations and the decreasing investment in the welfare state? Greater intergovernmental collaboration in policies and programs for the urban Aboriginal population are perhaps the most crucial change that needs to occur in order to create meaningful change. Given the constitutional issues relating to this population, potential solutions need to be creative. Western cities have begun to address these concerns through Memorandums of Understanding between cities, provincial, and federal

governments, as well as drawing attention to the need for governments to be more actively involved in addressing the issues, rather than leaving solutions to the individual who is trapped in a cycle of poverty.

Participation in the free market economy is necessary in today's society, so governments need to think about how we as a society can move past these injustices to develop a system that meets the needs of a population that has continually been left out of the economic structure of society. There has no doubt been some success in integrating the Aboriginal population into the mainstream economy (a necessary outcome of any advanced capitalist society) and this has contributed to a growing Aboriginal middle class in cities. However, the evidence suggests that the labour market and labour market solutions to poverty will perhaps never be able to "catch" those most at risk of extreme poverty and social exclusion such as single mothers, the homeless, transient populations (those traveling from urban area to reserve), or those caught in the criminal justice system. The Aboriginal population is certainly among the ones most at risk and those who will continue in a cycle of poverty if progressive solutions are not tried. The answers are not necessarily easy or clear, but something more needs to be done so that this population is not left behind.

This thesis is perhaps a starting point for future investigation. The economic indicators used in this study may best be used to benchmark the economic status of the Aboriginal population, with future research building on this knowledge and measuring progress for men and women based on low income status, employment income and receipt of transfer payments. Future analysis of

quantitative measures should also attempt to link policy changes as they relate to the social architecture of Canada to identify if the changing welfare state is in fact benefiting the most vulnerable in Canadian society, society as a whole, or contributing to a growing gap between the upper class and the under privileged.

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