

## Native Workers in Canada and the United States: A Comparative Perspective

During the past two decades there have been an ever increasing number of studies dealing with the historical and contemporary role of Native Peoples in Canada and the United States.<sup>1</sup> The focus of these books, articles and dissertations cover a wide range of themes: Canadian and American Native policies, evolving Aboriginal self-government, land claim settlements, economic activity on Indian reserves/reservations, pan-tribal political organizations, gender relations within Native communities, adjustment problems of urban Indians, and, more recently Indian workers and wage labor.<sup>2</sup> Much of this work is inter-disciplinary, combining the talents of historians, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, linguists, geographers, archaeologists, writers, and creative arts specialists. Unfortunately, despite the many similarities between the experiences of Canadian and American Native peoples, very few of these published works adopt a comparative approach.<sup>3</sup>

Given the diversity of Aboriginal communities in North America, with over 500 Indian federally recognized tribes in the United States, and 600 status Indian bands in Canada, it is difficult to portray Indian workers as a monolithic ethnic entity.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, there is the common historical experience of ultimately all becoming wards of their respective national governments, a situation which greatly affected subsequent tribal economic development, and individual opportunities.<sup>5</sup> As well, the contemporary occupational profile of Aboriginal

- 1 In 1990 the US census indicated that there were approximately 1.9 million Americans of Indian ancestry, an increase over the 1.37 million registered in 1980. One reason for this increase was that in 1990 individuals could identify themselves as single origin Indians, or as Indians of multiple ancestry. In the United States, there are also a variety of terms used to describe First Peoples: with the most popular being American Indian, Native American, and Indigenous Nations. See Peter Iverson, *We are Still Here: American Indians in the Twentieth Century* (Wheeling, Ill., 1998), 176-77; Michael Yellow Bird, "What We want to Be Called: Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives on Racial and Ethnic Identity Labels," *American Indian Quarterly*, 23 (Spring 1999), 2-13.
- 2 In Canada, terminology has been more systematic since the 1982 Constitution, with its Charter of Rights and Freedoms, officially recognized three Aboriginal communities: status Indians, Metis and Inuit. According to the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples the breakdown between the three groups was: Status North American Indians (624,000; 77 % of the total), Metis (152,800; 18.7 %) and Inuit (42,500; 5.2%). Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol.5 (Ottawa, 1996), 25-30.
- 3 American anthropologist John Price, in a 1986 historiographical essay, commented that "about 95% of the books, monographs, and graduate theses produced in Canada are just about Canadian Natives ... (with) exactly the same pattern for the United States." "Native Studies" in Alan Artibise (ed.), *Recent Writing in Canadian History* (Ottawa, 1988), 20-45.
- 4 Alice Littlefield and Martha Knack (eds.), *Native Americans and Wage labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives* (Norman, 1996), 36.
- 5 For an overview of Canadian writing about First Nation peoples see Bruce Trigger, "The Historians' Indian: Native Americans in Canadian Historical Writing from Charlevoix to the Present," *Canadian*

peoples in Canada and the United States shows striking similarities.<sup>6</sup> Most are employed as unskilled or semi-skilled workers, with considerable numbers employed in the resource sector, or as migrant agricultural labour. Traditional activities such as hunting, fishing and trapping have gradually been replaced, although court decisions in both countries during the last twenty years have provided new opportunities in commercial fishing, a development which has often angered white fishers. In summary, Native peoples in North America are overwhelmingly working class—most at the bottom rungs of this category. The following occupational profil of Canadian Native men and women workers demonstrates this fact; and this pattern is quite comparable to the situation in the United States:<sup>7</sup>

	Men	Women
Working Class	84.0 %	71.0 %
White Collar	17.2 %	55.5 %
Blue Collar	66.7 %	15.5 %
Primary	17.9 %	3.0 %
Processing	7.6 %	3.3 %
Fabricating	5.2 %	3.4 %
Construction	19.7 %	1.2 %
Other	16.3 %	4.3 %
Middle Class	16.0 %	29 %
Managerial	7.1 %	5.8 %
Professional	9.0 %	23.2 %
Total:	100.0 %	100.0 % <sup>8</sup>

*Historical Review*, LXV11 (Fall 1986), 387-405. There are a number of books which provide a useful overview of the experience of Canadian Native peoples: Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First People: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto, 1992); J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens* (Toronto, 1989); Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver, 1995); Edward Rogers and Donald Smith (eds), *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations* (Toronto, 1994); Robert Muckle, *The First Nations of British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1998); Daniel Francis, *A History of the Native Peoples of Quebec, 1760-1867* (Ottawa, 1983); H.F. McGee, *The Native Peoples of Atlantic Canada: A History of Indian-European Relations* (Ottawa, 1983); Kenneth Coates, *Best Left as Indians: Native-White Relations in the Yukon Territory, 1840-1973* (Montreal/Kingston, 1991); and Roger Nichols, *Indians in the United States and Canada: A Comparative History* (London, 1998).

6 For an appreciation of recent American scholarship on Aboriginal peoples see Donald Fixico (ed), *Rethinking American Indian History* (Albuquerque, 1997); Albert Hurtado and Peter Iverson (eds.), *Major Problems in American Indian History* (Lexington, 1994); Frederick Hoxie and Harvey Markowitz, *Native Americans: An Annotated Bibliography* (Pasadena, 1991); Dane Morrison (ed.), *American Indian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (New York, 1997).

7 There are numerous surveys of the historical experience of American Indians. Some of the most useful are Robert Berkhofer Jr., *The Whiteman's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1978); Peter Iverson, 'We Are Still Here,' *American Indians in the Twentieth Century* (Wheeling, Illinois, 1998); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, vols. 1 and 2 (London, 1984); Duane Champagne (ed.), *Native America: Portrait of the Peoples* (Detroit, 1994); Mary Davis, (ed.), *Native America in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1994).

8 In terms of women professionals, the study admits that this category includes many rather low paying

Have Native workers adopted class conscious strategies, joined unions, or become involved with socialist organizations? For the most part, the answer is no. There are various explanations for this lack of involvement in working class activism. One relates to the pattern of work and location. Until recently, most Aboriginal workers resided on reserves/ reservations either permanently or for significant portions of the year;<sup>9</sup> they also were employed in non-unionized sectors of the economy. As well, there has been a tendency for white workers to adopt exclusionary policies, often for racist reason and in keeping with “the wages of whiteness” paradigm. There is also the argument that Native workers were more inclined to identify with their tribal or band group identity, rather than with trade unions or left wing political organizations, especially since language barriers, in the past at least, created barriers for effective communication and common action.<sup>10</sup>

The tendency for scholars to dismiss the importance of Native labor is reflected in the fact that most books about Indian peoples rarely even have index entries for wage labor, or occupation; in contrast there are usually many references to unemployment, reflecting a common tendency to emphasize social dysfunctional themes.<sup>11</sup> In their recent book *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives* anthropologists Alice Littlefield and Martha Knack suggest several reasons for this omission. First, there has been the tendency for anthropologists to analyze Indian communities as separate from non-Indian society, an approach that treats “Native life as an isolate.” Another tendency has been the undue emphasis placed on federal Indian policies and political debates over the seizure of Indian lands, while at the same time ignoring the fact that Native peoples were forced into wage employment because of “the degree of resource loss and dependence.”<sup>12</sup> For some groups the transition to industrial capitalism was easier than for others; but the phenomena of low status ‘Indian jobs’ prevailed throughout North America then, and now. Closely related are a number of contemporary questions. Does wage employment undermine or enhance tribal identities? To what extent does the exodus of the most enterprising tribal members to urban centres represent a serious ‘brain drain’ for Indian reservations/reserves, particularly for the minority 20 per cent which have sufficient economic resources? Are Native women workers still adversely affected by the sexual division of labour, both on the reserves, and in the urban labour market? These and other questions will be addressed in this paper.

jobs such as the social workers, non-certified teachers and hospital aides. In addition, many of these positions are associated with the numerous band governments. They also note that by 1990 more than 20% of the employees of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs were of Aboriginal ancestry. Vic Satchewich and Terry Wotherspoon, *First Nations: Race, Class, and Gender Relations* (Toronto, 1993), 54-74.

- 9 In Canada the term **reserve** is used to describe exclusive Indian land, held in common by tribes and bands, under federal government control; the comparable American term is **reservation**.
- 10 See “A guide to Recent Books in Native American History,” compiled by Steven Mintz, “*American Indian Quarterly*,” 19 (Winter, 1995), 91-142.
- 11 The exception is the recent anthology edited by Albert Hurtado and Peter Iverson, *Major Problems in American Indian History* (Lexington, Mass., 1994) which includes a chapter on Native labor by historian Alison Berstein.
- 12 Littlefield and Knack, *Native Americans and Wage Labor*, 42.

## Native Labour and Natural Resource Exploitation

Commercial interaction between Europeans and North American Indian nations go back to the early days of contact and conquest. In the fifteenth century, for instance, there was a thriving trade in fish and furs along the east coast, which was greatly expanded with the creation of the colony of New France in 1608, and its subsequent growth and territorial expansion during the next one hundred and fifty two years. While the 1763 Treaty of Paris transformed New France into a British colony, the fur trade continued as a major source of revenue for British commercial interests such as the Hudson Bay Company and its bitter rival, the Northwest Company—a competitive situation which benefitted male Indian trappers as well as women fur processors.<sup>13</sup>

The economic and social dimensions of the fur trade has received much historical attention, with the most authoritative account being Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade*, published in 1930. A political economist by training, Innis used the trans-Atlantic fur trade to demonstrate that the development of an east-west pattern of trade in staples evolved historically, and that Canada's political boundaries were the logical outcome of Canada's economic history. Although the role of Native workers received little attention, Innis' work inspired a number of other scholars who rectified this imbalance. Geographer Arthur Ray's innovative study *Indians in the Fur Trade* (1974) provided an imaginative revision of unsubstantiated generalizations about the subordinate role Indians assumed in the fur trade, notably the allegation that this enterprise "depended on ruthless exploitation of Indian labor...backed whenever necessary by force or open threats of force."<sup>14</sup> Multi-disciplinary in approach, the book draws on a wide range of sources from anthropology, ecology, geography, economics and history, while showing how a variety of regional tribal groups, notably Cree, Blackfoot, and Assiniboine, adapted to changing environmental and economic conditions over two centuries of contact with European traders.<sup>15</sup> While Ray was primarily concerned with Indians as primary producers of furs and buffalo hides, he does describe the elaborate gendered division of labor which existed within Indian societies. Ultimately, the resource base upon which these specialized economies developed was destroyed by over-exploitation, and by the late nineteenth century the plains Indians way of life was fundamentally changed, and they were relegated to reserves.<sup>16</sup>

Many of these themes are discussed by historian Robin Fisher in his book *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (1977). Here again, the fur trade was of central importance, although in this instance it was the profitable trade in sea ot-

13 See Sylvia Van Kirk, *'Many Tender Ties': Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, 1979); Jennifer Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver, 1980).

14 Arthur Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: their role as trappers, hunters, and middlemen in the lands southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870* (Toronto, 1974), 228.

15 Ibid, passim.

16 See also John Milloy, "Our Country: The Significance of the Buffalo Resources for a Plains Cree Sense of Territory," in Kerry Abel and Jean Frieson, *Aboriginal Resource Use in Canada: Historical and Legal Aspects* (Winnipeg, 1991), 51-70.

ter pelts between the Pacific Northwest and China, a commercial enterprise that benefitted all those involved.<sup>17</sup> In North America the producers were coastal Indian nations—Nootka, Coast Salish, Kwakiutl, Haida, Tsimshian and Tlingit—whose territory extended along the Pacific shoreline from Puget Sound to the British Columbia-Alaskan boundary. Profiting from the rich harvest of the ocean and the lush forests, which supplied most of their material needs, these Indian tribes developed large villages, a sophisticated political system, an elaborate social hierarchy, and an effective trading strategy which allowed them to deal with Europeans as equal partners.<sup>18</sup> But with increased settlement, and the destruction of the sea otter fur trade, this equilibrium in power soon changed. Although Indian peoples represented eighty per cent of the population when the colony of British Columbia joined Canada in 1871, even at this stage they encountered great difficulty in competing effectively with white business interests, which were supported by an increasingly hostile provincial government. This lack of power was reflected in the gradual exclusion of Indians from the rich salmon fisheries and coincided with the seizure of their lands, without even the pretense of formal treaties. For many observers, past and present, by 1900 the economic role of Indian peoples in British Columbia society was “at best, irrelevant.”<sup>19</sup>

This thesis has become a subject of much scholarly debate. One of the earliest challenges came from historian Rolf Knight who, in his pioneering study *Indians At Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labor in British Columbia, 1858-1930* (1978), called for a reassessment of the role Indian wage earners assumed in the industrialization of British Columbia:

“It is time that the generations of Indian loggers, longshoremen, teamsters, cowboys, miners, fishermen, and cannery workers, and others, who laboured in virtually every primary industry in BC were recognized. Wage work in the major industries of this province has been an inanimate feature of Indian lives for five or more generations.”<sup>20</sup>

Knight focused most of his analysis on those industries which most related to the traditional subsistence activities of Native peoples, notably commercial fishing and logging/lumbering; although he also discussed their involvement in other economic activity such as railway construction, coal and gold mining, and longshoreman work on the docks of Vancouver and Victoria.<sup>21</sup> In terms of the lucrative salmon packing industry, he showed that throughout the late nineteenth century Indian workers were the essential source of labour with numerous male fishermen working under contract to the various canneries, while over a thousand Indian women operated the assembly lines, “governed by factory schedules for starting, stop-

17 Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver, 1977).

18 Ibid., xiv.

19 Ibid., 96; see also Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier* (Vancouver, 1981).

20 Rolf Knight, *Indians At Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labor in British Columbia, 1858-1930* (Vancouver, 1978), 7.

21 Ibid., 138-45; 123-30.

ping, resting.”<sup>22</sup> He did concede, however, that by the turn of the century Indians were gradually being replaced by European and Chinese workers in the salmon packing, mining and lumbering industry.<sup>23</sup>

What was the reason for this displacement? For historians such as Martin Robin, it was because they lacked the necessary industrial discipline: “By inclination and habit, the Indian did not fit the industrial mold. His customary and casual and seasonal work schedule hardly prepared him for the discipline, pace and rhythm of industrial employment.”<sup>24</sup> This cultural determinist approach has been challenged not only by Knight, but also by a number of other British Columbia specialists. Historian John Lutz, for instance, describes how the canneries recruited Indian workers during the 1880’s by using tribal leaders and by utilizing traditional “gender-based division of labour which were largely appropriated into the canneries.”<sup>25</sup> He also explores at more depth why British Columbia Native peoples sought wage employment, noting that in addition to improving their standard of living, this income was used to enhance status within the highly ritualized society of the coastal tribes.

Dianne Newell’s economic and legal analysis of the British Columbia salmon industry provides additional insights into the occupational and social experience of Native workers.<sup>26</sup> In her 1989 study, Newell provides a case study of how the salmon canning conglomerate, British Columbia Packers Association, utilized Indian labour in meeting the seasonal and short-term needs of the industry, both in the lucrative Fraser River fishery, where Native families traveled great distances to obtain jobs, and in the northern regions, where canneries were deliberately located near Indian reserves. She also explains, from management’s perspective, why Chinese and Japanese immigrants were substituted for white and Indian fishers and cannery workers, and why this corporate strategy of dividing workers on the basis of race and gender was successful for so long. It is interesting that until the 1940’s fish cannery workers were excluded from provincial laws regulating daily and weekly hours of work, minimum wage and overtime pay; they were also non-unionized.<sup>27</sup> The legal and administrative barriers

22 Ibid., 179.

23 Knight cites figures which show that in 1898 Indian fishermen had 850 gill net licences (out of 3664), while in 1905 some 1,176 Indians worked (26%) in the 67 canneries operating in British Columbia. Ibid, *Indians*, 83, 88.

24 Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933* (Toronto, 1972), 30. For similar arguments see Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in B.C.* (Vancouver, 1967); David McNally, “Political Economy Without a Working Class,” *Labour/Le Travail* 25 (Spring 1990), 215-226.

25 Lutz provides a more recent and sophisticated analysis of the themes originally developed by Rolf Knight. He argues, for instance, that of the 28,000 Aboriginal people in British Columbia in 1885, “over 85 percent belonged to bands that earned substantial incomes through wage labour.” John Lutz, “After the fur trade: the Aboriginal labouring class of British Columbia, 1849-1890,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association: Charlottetown 1992*, New Series, Vol.3, 69-93.

26 On the use of the courts to enforce Anglo-Canadian cultural values see also Sydney Haring, *White Man’s Law: Native People in Nineteenth-Century Canadian Jurisprudence* (Toronto, 1998) and Tina Loo, *Making Law: Order and Authority in British Columbia, 1821-1871* (Toronto, 1994).

27 Dianne Newell (ed), *The Development of the Pacific Salmon-Canning Industry: A Grown Man’s Game* (Montreal/Kingston, 1989), passim.

ers, which until the 1980's excluded British Columbia First Nations from the lucrative salmon fishing industry, is the focus of Newell's subsequent 1993 publication.<sup>28</sup>

Arguments about the continuity of exploitation form the basis of Alicicja Muszynski's book *Cheap Wage Labour* (1996).<sup>29</sup> This ambitious study places the experiences of Indian, Chinese and Japanese workers within Marx's labour theory of value, as well as within a cultural setting which emphasized racism and patrimony.<sup>30</sup> She argues, for instance, that salmon packing companies made great efforts to segregate workers along racial and gender lines, which meant that Indian women workers were the lowest paid group, in part, because they desperately required these jobs in order to sustain their families: using wages "to buy clothing, furniture, stoves, and sewing machines, as well as staples like flour, tea and sugar."<sup>31</sup> According to Muszynski, competition for jobs, "the ability of any one group, or 'race' to survive at the lowest possible wages," increased after the bitter strikes of the 1900s when newly arrived Japanese immigrants were recruited as strikebreakers to replace white and Indian fishers, who had joined forces in a common struggle for their campaign for better wages and working conditions. Unfortunately, this alliance was of short duration, and until the 1940s white fishers and their unions were generally hostile towards all non-white workers, largely because of the deep rooted racism which characterized British Columbia society during these years. On the other hand, many Native groups were also standoffish, viewing collective action primarily "for the survival of their own people ... (seeing) co-workers as hostile to that struggle."<sup>32</sup> These trends are carefully analyzed by Muszynski, particularly in her discussion of how the bi-national union, 'The United Fisherman and Allied Workers', and the 'Native Brotherhood of British Columbia' were able to create a broadly based coalition of white and Aboriginal workers. By the 1950's this partnership had bargained effectively with management for higher wages, better working conditions, and pay equity; the latter benefit greatly assisting the many Indian women cannery workers.<sup>33</sup>

## Native Americans: Industry and Agriculture

As previously mentioned, the recent anthology edited by Alice Littlefield and Martha Knack, *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives* (1996) provides an innovative

28 Dianne Newell, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (Toronto, 1993).

29 Alicicja Muszynski, *Cheap Wage Labour: Race and Gender in the Fisheries of British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1996). See also Patricia Marchak et al (eds.), *Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish Processing Industries in British Columbia* (Agincourt, Ont., 1987).

30 Muszynski, *Cheap Wage Labour*, 98.

31 In many instances Native women worked alongside their children both in the cannery plants, and in the hop fields of Washington state, where many sought jobs after the salmon runs ended. *Ibid.*, 133.

32 *Ibid.*, 171, 22.

33 On the negative side, the consolidation and centralization of the salmon processing industry, along with increased mechanization and improved refrigeration technology, meant the closing of many of the northern plants which employed the highest percentage of Native workers. *Ibid.*, 181-222.

and important contribution of the role Native workers assumed in the development of the American economy. In a series of articles, it is analyzed how wage labour affected the cultural and economic value system of eight different groups of indigenous peoples across the United States between 1830 and 1980, and several recurring themes emerge. The most important of these are the devastating impact of disease and military defeat on First Nations; how the various groups adjusted to their loss of land and economic independence; why they encountered difficulty adjusting to American capitalism; and what strategies were adopted by American Indians in coping with exploitation and powerlessness.<sup>34</sup>

For the Michigan Ottawa tribes the transition after 1830 meant changing their lives from independent commodity producers on their vast tribal lands, to seasonal wage laborers in the lumbering and agricultural sectors of white society; an arrangement which allowed them to retain their marginal reservation lands.<sup>35</sup> Western tribes such as the Cheyenne were initially more fortunate maintaining a profitable trade in buffalo robes until the 1870s when their nomadic way of life abruptly ended, and they were relegated to small arid reservations. They too were forced into the regional labor force, most as seasonal agricultural workers, at pitiful wages.<sup>36</sup> While the success stories are few in number, there were a few. Some western tribes, such as the Timbisha of Nevada, found better paying jobs in the mining industry;<sup>37</sup> while others, such as the Laguna Pueblo of New Mexico established a long term relationship with the Santa Fe railway company. Under the “sacred” oral covenant of 1880 the Santa Fe, in return for the use of tribal lands, agreed to give preferential treatment in hiring Laguna workers for railway construction and maintenance. In addition, many Laguna workers found employment at the company’s terminal in Richmond California, which allowed them to go back and forth between their New Mexico reservation and their Richmond workplace where “they replicated traditional cultural practices, forming a microcosmic extension of their distant pueblo.” This unique relationship was sustained over several generations, reinforced by the company’s relatively generous wage scale, its willingness to provide apprenticeship training, and its views that “Indians compare very well with white men doing the same class of work.” Since this attitude was the exception rather than the rule, it is not surprising that researchers for the famous 1928 Meriam Report should regard the Laguna-Santa Fe partnership as a model other companies should emulate.<sup>38</sup>

34 Littlefield and Knack, *Native Americans and Wage Labor*, 12-34.

35 James McClurken, “Wage Labor in Two Michigan Ottawa Communities,” *Ibid.*, 66-100.

36 John H. Moore, “The Significance of Cheyenne Work in the History of U.S. Capitalism,” *ibid.*, 122-144; Martha Knack, “Nineteenth Century Great Basin Indian Wage Labor,” *ibid.*, 144-176; Richard Carrico and Florence Shipek, “Indian Labor in San Diego County, California, 1850-1900,” *ibid.*, 198-217.

37 Beth Sennett, “Wage Labor: Survival of the Death Valley Timshisa,” *ibid.*, 218-44.

38 Kurt Peters, “Watering the Flower: Laguna Pueblo and the Santa Fe Railroad, 1880-1943,” *ibid.*, 186,184. The Meriam Report : *The Problem of Indian Administration* (1928 ) did not however mention that the Lagunas had strongly supported the company during the bitter 1922 strike, in part because the railway unions had shown little interest in drawing Indian workers into their ranks. Another example of an Indian tribe supporting the corporation over the union occurred in 1918 when the San Carolos Apaches acted as strikebreakers in the campaign to drive the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) out of Arizona copper mines.

Yet despite these isolated instances of more stable employment patterns, prior to 1940 most Indian workers in the United States and Canada were confined to low paying seasonal jobs, especially in the agricultural sector.<sup>39</sup> This occupational group is the focus of Harold Prims' article on the Mi'Kmaq of the north-eastern seaboard who represent a cross-border tribe with some of its members in northern Maine, and others scattered throughout the Canadian Maritime provinces.<sup>40</sup> In this instance, however, the international border did not present a problem. In 1920 a US federal court ruled that Canadian Mi'Kmaq seeking work in the United States would be categorized as "domestic labor for the purpose of agriculture," a decision that allowed Maine potato producers to obtain an additional supply of cheap Indian harvest labour. This was important for the profitability of the industry since by the 1950s the Mi'Kmaq represented a significant portion of Maine's 40,000 harvest workers; operating in labour gangs which included men, women and children. According to Prims, these work patterns reinforced Mi'Kmaq communal values, particularly since most workers returned to their reserves after the job was completed, a mobility pattern which prevented the Mi'Kmaq from "full-fledged proletarianization... (and) the most dreadful consequences of the cheap labor market."<sup>41</sup>

Seasonal agricultural workers remain one of the most vulnerable occupational groups in North American society, and the subject of numerous books and articles. One important recent study is Cindy Hahamovitch's *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945* (1997) which provides an effective historical analysis of the grim working conditions endured by generations of American farm workers, including low pay, dangerous working conditions and sub-standard accommodation.<sup>42</sup> Similar conditions have prevailed in the agricultural heartland of Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta, often involving Indian workers. Sociologists Ron Laliberte and Vic Satzewich have, in a recent article, examined how Native labour was recruited for the Alberta sugar beet industry since the 1950s. This was done largely through the efforts of federal and provincial officials who used a combination of "paternalistic and coercive measures to initially mobilize Native workers for this industry and to help farmers retain those workers for the duration of the season."<sup>43</sup>

The role of the state to prepare Native peoples for modern employment is another important topic. In Canada, most studies have concentrated on attempts by the Department of Indian Affairs to transform the plains Indians from hunting nomads, into sedentary farmers. Yet ac-

39 The 1950 US census showed that 46 % of employed Indian males were farmers or farm labourers; with another 17% general labourers, 13% factory operatives and only 11% craftsmen.

40 Harald Prims, "Tribal Network and Migrant Labor: M'Kmaq Indians as Seasonal Workers in Arroostook's Potato Fields, 1870-1980," Littlefield and Knack, *Native Americans and Wage Labor*, 45-65.

41 Ibid, 64-65.

42 Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945* (Chapel Hill, 1997). See also C. Thomas-Lycklama a Nijeholt, *On the Road for Work: Migratory Workers on the East Coast of the United States* (Boston, 1980), 11.

43 Ron Laliberte and Vic Satzewich, "Native Migrant Labour in the Southern Alberta Sugar-beet Industry: Coercion and Paternalism in the Recruitment of Labour," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 31 (Spring, 1999), 66-85, 66. See also Satzewich and Wotherspoon, *First Nations*, Steven High, "Native wage labour and independent production during the 'Era of Irrelevance,'" *Labour/Le Travail*, 37 (Spring 1996), 243-66.

ording to historian Sarah Carter, this goal was ultimately sabotaged by federal bureaucrats themselves who undermined reserve agricultural efforts by arbitrarily leasing reserve lands to non-Indians, and by withholding essential farm equipment.<sup>44</sup> Much the same message comes from Helen Buckley's broad analysis of why Indian agriculture has been such a failure during the twentieth century. In her opinion, one of the major problems has been the pervasive paternalism and racism of government officials, which prevented tribal leaders from adopting more constructive economic policies, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty on so many reserves.<sup>45</sup>

A closely related theme was the role of residential schools in preparing Native children for entry into a capitalist society. According to historian J.R. Miller, the Canadian residential system was "systematically flawed" since white society did not expect Indians to succeed, and therefore deprived it of the necessary resources.<sup>46</sup> He also describes how these schools often exposed Native children to serious health and psychological problems because of unsanitary conditions, the suppression of Native cultures, and physical and sexual abuse.<sup>47</sup> Similar conditions also prevailed in the United States, although some of these schools, notably those at Carlisle, Pennsylvania and Mount Pleasant, Michigan, did develop successful vocational educational programs, and helped educate many of the first generation of the American Indian political elite. Overall, the role of these institutions was, however, to channel Indian students into the wage labour force "by imposing the behavioural routines, patterns of social interaction, and personal dispositions necessary for adapting to an industrial economy."<sup>48</sup>

Why did the plains Indians not transfer their skills from the buffalo hunt into cattle ranching? This question has intrigued many Canadian and American historians, and is the focus of Peter Iverson's excellent book *When Indians Became Cowboys* (1994).<sup>49</sup> According to Iverson the American government's decision to herd Indians onto reservations to make way for cowboys and cows was because "they represented a way of life and a culture that could not be tol-

44 Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal/Kingston, 1990), 258. A similar pattern is described by Leonard Carlson, *Indians, Bureaucrats and Land: The Dawes Act and the Decline of Indian Farming* (Westport, Conn., 1981); Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees and Navajos* (Lincoln, 1983); Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U.S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque, 1987).

45 Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces* (Montreal/Kingston, 1992), 58. See also Vic Satezewich and Linda Mahood, "Indian Affairs and Band Governance: Deposing Indian Chiefs in Western Canada, 1886-1911," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XXVI, 1 (1994), 40-58.

46 J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto, 1996), 103.

47 Ibid; see also Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920*, (Lincoln, 1984).

48 Alice Littlefield, "Indian Education and the World of Work in Michigan, 1893-1933," in Littlefield and Knack, *Native Americans and Wage Labor*, 120.

49 The creation of national parks and forests, at the expense of tribal lands, was another aspect of the expansion of the western and northern frontiers. See Mark Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York, 1999).

erated.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, in time, some tribes such as the Navajo, the San Carlos Apache and the Tohono O’odham overcame these discriminatory policies to develop viable ranching enterprises, particularly during the Great Depression when they took advantage of economic assistance through the Indian Reorganization Act. During the past seventy years these tribes have further expanded their herds and reservation lands, developed livestock associations and marketing boards, and used their profits to perpetuate their communal values and identity.<sup>51</sup>

How specific tribal groups carved out specific job niches within the North American economy is another subject which has attracted scholarly attention. As previously mentioned, the Lagunas of New Mexico and the San Carlos Apache of Arizona were able to obtain steady employment in the railway and mining sectors. In Canada, the most celebrated example of job specialisation were the Mohawk high steelworkers from the Kahnawake Reserve (Quebec). These men first became involved with high structural steel work during the railway era (1880-1910) when they helped build a number of iron and steel bridges throughout Quebec and Ontario.<sup>52</sup> During the 1920s these Mohawk bridge men took their unique skills to the United States shifting their specialization to skyscraper framing, as high rise architecture became the hall mark of America’s largest cities. After the Second World War, another generation of Mohawks moved around the continent in search of these high paying but risky high steel jobs, a tradition which continues today. A 1980’s sociological case study showed that over seventy percent of the men of Kahnawake were still in steel construction, both for economic and symbolic reasons: “Ironwork is a formal ‘rite of passage’ that facilitates a young Mohawk’s transition from youth to adulthood. It is also a ritual act that links an individual Mohawk to his past.”<sup>53</sup> This tradition also affects Mohawk women who, in the absence of the men, assume the crucial role of caring for the family, producing handicrafts, and, above all, providing the cultural-psychological bridge between the Kahnawake community and distant workplaces.

The involvement of Indian women workers in North American economic development has been of increasing interest to scholars in recent years.<sup>54</sup> One of the more useful studies is Nancy Shoemaker’s anthology *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (1995) which examines how different groups of North American Aboriginal women adjusted to social change, with each essay examining how specific Indian communi-

50 Peter Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys: Native People and Cattle Ranching in the American West* (Norman, 1994), xv.

51 Iverson also describes the involvement of Indians in western rodeos; noting the 1957 establishment of the All-Indian Rodeo Cowboys Association. *Ibid.*, 199.

52 Mohawk workers made up their own crews, usually family members, with a division of labour based on age and experience. On 29 August 1907 the Quebec Bridge collapsed during construction; of the 96 workers who died, 33 were Mohawk. David Blanchard “High Steel! The Kahnawake Mohawk and the High Construction Trades,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 11 (1983), 41-60.

53 Rolf Knight, *Indians At Work*, 162-64.

54 For a critical overview see Do von Miheuah, “Commonality of Differences: American Indian Women and History,” *American Indian Quarterly* 20 (Winter 1996), 15-21.

ties were divided along gender lines.<sup>55</sup> Although there is a consensus among the authors that Canadian and American government policies subordinated Native women, there is also agreement that these women were generally successful in adapting their traditional economic and social roles in such ways that allowed them access to the local market economy.<sup>56</sup> Of particular interest are the articles that describe the adaptative strategies adopted by Navajo women in New Mexico, Seminole women in Florida and Yakima women in Washington State.<sup>57</sup> Other historical studies have concentrated on the theme that Indian women were caught between two worlds: their own tribal cultures, and the norms imposed by Euro-American society, particularly by white middle class women. In this regard, the exploitation of Aboriginal domestic workers by white women employers, represents another intriguing and controversial subject.<sup>58</sup> Because of the relative newness of the field, most of the innovative and imaginative studies of Indian women workers are undertaken within the context of specific communities.<sup>59</sup>

### Depression, war, and urbanization

The advent of the Great Depression had a devastating impact on Indian agricultural and industrial workers since they occupied the lowest occupational strata in both Canada and the United States. Falling crop prices, and severe environmental problems in the great plains region, and cut-backs on government support further aggravated a bad situation. The already abysmal level of Native health standards and educational facilities became even worse, particularly in Canada where the federal government basically ignored its Native peoples when it implemented national welfare programs.

In the United States, however, Aboriginal peoples did experience a number of significant improvements in their economic and political status, largely because of legislation such as the

55 Two other useful anthologies are Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (eds.), *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women* (Lanhan, 1983), and Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk (eds.), *Women of First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength: Papers Presented at the National Symposium on Aboriginal Women of Canada, 1989* (Winnipeg, 1997).

56 Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (London, 1995).

57 Carol Sparks, "The Land Incarnate: Navajo Women and the Dialogue of Colonialism, 1821-1870;" Harry Kersey Jr. and Helen Bannan, "Patchwork and Politics: The Evolving Roles of Florida Seminole Women in the Twentieth Century;" Clifford Trafzer, "Horses and cattle, Buggies and Hacks: Purchases by Yakima Indian Women, 1909-1912", all in *ibid*, 135-156, 193-212, 176-192.

58 See Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Femininity in American Indian Traditions* (New York, 1986), Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen M. Sands, *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives* (Lincoln, 1984), and Ruth Landes, *The Objibwa Woman*, reprint (New York, 1997).

59 The following articles represent some of the more interesting thematic case studies: Robert Tennett, "Victorian Morality and the Supervision of Indian Women Working in Phoenix, 1906-1939," *Journal of Social History* 22 (1988), 112-28; Nancy Shoemaker, "The Rise and Fall of Iroquois Women," *Journal of Women's History* 2 (1991), 39-57; and Alison Bernstein, "A Mixed Record: The Political Enfranchisement of American Indian Women During the Indian New Deal," *Journal of the West* 23 (1984), 13-20.

1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), and a range of other New Deal social programs. Much of the initiative for these important changes came from John Collier, newly appointed Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), who was determined to reinforce not destroy tribal cultures through creative government intervention. High on his agenda were measures to prevent further alienation of reservation land, provide financial assistance for reserve economies, and establish manpower training programs and educational support for young Indian men and women. But the most important initiative was the Indian Reorganization Act's provision for federally recognized tribes to achieve limited self government. Members of these tribal councils were to be democratically elected, with formally written constitutions and by-laws; while at the same time being supervised by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to ensure that rational policies were being followed, and that federal laws were being upheld. Not surprisingly there was considerable resistance to Commissioner Collier's policies from non-Indian farm and business groups who resented federal intrusion for economic reasons, while church and educational organizations charged that the programs would permanently ghettoize Native Americans. But the most intense opposition came from large Indian tribes such as the Iroquois and Navajo who regarded the Indian Reorganization Act as a threat to their distinct cultural and political identity and their collective well-being.<sup>60</sup>

One important aspect of the Indian Reorganization Act was its attempt to improve tribal economies through the development of their natural resources. Another was to provide jobs through New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps which by 1942 would hire over 85,000 Indian workers from over 70 reservations. There was also another important Bureau of Indian Affairs' initiative to develop an elaborate irrigation system, intended to enhance the agricultural productivity of western reservations, – projects which were only possible because of the legacy of earlier judicial decisions protecting tribal water rights.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, there were other New Deal public works programs that were not as well received by Indian tribes. These included the expansion of national parks and forests, often at the expense of tribal lands and ranching activities. Even more controversial were the massive hydroelectric projects of the 1930's such as the series of dams on the Columbia and Colorado rivers, and the controversial Kinzua dam in Pennsylvania, which flooded the lands of the Seneca branch of the Iroquois Confederacy.

60 There is a rich body of literature on the Indian New Deal of the 1930s initiated and directed by John Collier. See Kenneth Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson, 1977); Lawrence Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque, 1983); T.Graham Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934-1945* (Lincoln, 1980); Margaret Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination since 1928* (Albuquerque, 1977).

61 Despite the enormous loss of tribal lands after the 1887 Dawes Act (estimated as 2/3 of existing tribal properties), Indian tribes were remarkably successful in protecting their water rights. Much of this success was due to the 1908 *Winters v US* case when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that in establishing reservations Congress had intended for them to be self-sufficient, and therefore to retain sufficient quantities of water. This decision was of immense importance for those tribes located in the semi-arid states. See Lloyd Burton, *American Indian Water Rights and the Limits of Law* (Lawrence, 1991); and David Rich, "Native Americans and the Environment: A Survey of Twentieth Century Issues," *American Indian Quarterly*, 19 (1995), 423-450.

While the above subjects are important, some of the best historical work has focused on how specific tribal groups responded to the impact of the Great Depression.<sup>62</sup> The Navajo have attracted special attention since they were the most populous Native group in North America, and they occupied the largest reservations, 16 million acres spread across three states: Utah, New Mexico and Arizona. In addition, during the previous four decades the Navajos had developed a successful sheep herding industry, that reinforced the goals of tribal economic independence.<sup>63</sup> In his detailed study *The Navajos and the New Deal* (1976) historian Donald Parman provides a vivid account of how the Navajos responded to the challenge of the Indian Reorganization Act, why they initially adopted a negative response towards this form of self government, and how they utilized federal assistance in creating many reservation based jobs. Some of these were in the petroleum and lumber sectors; others were in the cultural/crafts fields through the creation of cooperative ventures such as the Navajo Arts and Craft Guild, which improved the quality of local art forms, and secured wider markets.<sup>64</sup>

Another important case study is Lawrence Hauptman's two volume discussion of how the Iroquois Confederacy responded to the challenges of the New Deal, and the Second World War. Hauptman explains why the Six Nations (Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, Tuscarora) with their rural conservative values and distinct sense of national sovereignty, rebelled against Collier's Indian Reorganization Act, with its liberal civil rights approach. Yet ironically, by accepting federal and state funds that required accountability and supervision by government agencies the six tribes undermined their independence. But did they have any choice? Most of these grants were desperately needed for tribal economic and cultural projects, to create jobs and help revive artistic styles and traditions.<sup>65</sup> The war years presented another set of challenges. First, it drew Iroquois men and women away from the reservations with thousands serving in the American military; others found jobs in war industries in neighboring cities such as Rochester and Buffalo, where they obtained steady work at good wages. Because of their unique legal status, Iroquois workers were also able to move back and forth across the international boundary throughout the war years, a migratory work pattern which was greatly enhanced by the emergence of an integrated Canadian and American military industrial complex.<sup>66</sup>

62 Thomas Biolsi, *Organizing the Lakota: The Political Economy of the New Deal on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations* (Tucson, 1992); Paul Rosier, "The Real Indians, Who Constitute the Real Tribe: Class, Ethnicity and IRA Politics on the Blackfeet Reservation," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, (Summer, 1999), 4-39.

63 According to the 1990 US census the Navajo tribal population exceeds 200,000; this represents nearly two thirds of all Native Americans who live on reservations. Over the years the Navajo tribal council has provided leadership in legal cases advancing tribal sovereignty, cultural preservation, religious freedom and economic independence. Many Navajo tribal leaders have also emerged as national Native American leaders. Scott Russell and Eric Henderson, "The 1994 Navajo Presidential Election," *American Indian Quarterly* 23 (1999), 23-36.

64 Donald Parman, *The Navajos and The New Deal* (New Haven, 1976).

65 See Lawrence Hauptman, *The Iroquois and The New Deal* (Syracuse, 1981) and thereafter Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival: World War II to Red Power* (Syracuse, 1986).

66 The largest Iroquois community in Canada is the Six Nations reserve near Brantford, Ontario which

Indian men and women were well represented in the armed forces of the two nations: 25,000 served in the United States and 4,000 in Canada. This subject has produced a considerable number of books and articles, almost all commending the warrior virtues.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, the involvement of Indians in the North American war economy is less well understood, despite the fact that it drew thousands of Indian workers from the reservations into skilled jobs in war industries. In the case of the Navajo, for example, Donald Harman shows that initially most employment opportunities occurred locally, when companies such as the Santa Fe railway were forced to replace white servicemen with Indian workers. But as the war progressed, many Navajo men and women traveled great distances to work in the defence plants of southern California, with the largest number gravitating towards Los Angeles.<sup>68</sup> During the four years of war over 40,000 Native American men and women participated in the US wartime economy. They came from a diversity of linguistic and tribal backgrounds, but they all shared the same experience: an opportunity to participate in full time, high paying industrial jobs in a challenging new urban environment.<sup>69</sup> Historian Alison Bernstein provides an excellent summary of this phenomena in her book *American Indians and World War II*:

"The war unlocked the reservation and introduced thousands of Indians, voluntarily and involuntarily, to the world beyond. As a result Indians were forced to reconsider whether they wished to maintain their isolation from the rest of America. Many more learned English, changed their dress, their hair styles, even their cultural traditions."<sup>70</sup>

Most authors agree with Bernstein that the war years benefitted Native workers individually, even if it weakened their tribal governments.<sup>71</sup> Although the question of First Nation sovereignty disturbed many tribal groups, none were as concerned as the Iroquois Confederacy who saw themselves as allies not subjects of the American and Canadian governments.<sup>72</sup> Closely related was their determination to prevent Iroquois lands from being expropriated for national defence purposes without their consent.<sup>73</sup> By 1945, there was also great apprehension that wartime promises of improvements in the economic and social condition of Na-

was granted a large homeland in 1784 as allies of the British government during the American War of Independence.

67 Fred Gaffen, *Forgotten soldiers: an illustrated history of Canada's native peoples in both World Wars* (Penticton, B.C., 1985); Tom Holm, "Fighting a White Man's War: The Extent and Legacy of American Indian Participation in World War II," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 9, (1981); Jere Franco, "Publicity, Persuasion, and Propaganda: Stereotyping the Native American in World War II," *Military History of the Southwest*, 22,2 (1992), 165-180.

68 Harman, *Navajos*, 264-85. See also Broderick Johnson, *Navajos and World War II* (Tsai, 1977).

69 See Gerald Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington, 1988).

70 Alison Bernstein, *American Indians and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs* (Norman, 1991), 87.

71 See Michael Stevenson, "The Mobilization of Native Canadians during the Second World War," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 7 (1996), 203-12.

72 Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival*, 1-42.

73 Helen Roos, "It Happened as if Overnight: The Expropriation and Relocation of the Stoney Point Reserve #43," (M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario 1998).

tive peoples, and the settlement of Indian land claims, would be conveniently forgotten.<sup>74</sup>

Did the gains derived from the war economy, and the educational and economic benefits provided to Indian veterans, substantially improve the status of North American Native peoples? On balance the answer is no. In the United States, for example, one 1949 study found that the median income of urban Indians was \$1,198 compared with \$950 for those still living on reservations—a group who also benefitted from cheap housing and federal social assistance. This same study also reported that among American ethnic communities Native Americans were ranked the lowest in terms of standard of living, with Black workers having an average income almost double that of Indians.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the problems associated with urban relocation, the percentage of American Indians living in cities continued to expand. By 1977 half of the total Native American population were residing in urban centres with the greatest concentrations in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis, Chicago, and the major regional cities of the American Southwest: Phoenix, Albuquerque, Dallas and Oklahoma City. Part of the reason for this demographic change was the increased availability of industrial jobs for Native workers, even if they tended to be primarily unskilled or semi-skilled. Another important factor was the demise of the Indian Reorganization Act, with its reservation first policy and its commitment to nurturing tribal identities. Instead, the post-war years witnessed the ascendancy of assimilationist programs designed to force Native peoples into the mainstream of American society. Between 1946 and 1966 Congress passed a series of laws terminating the tribal status of 109 Native communities who were deemed economically capable of supporting themselves. Despite the opposition of local Indian leaders and the National Congress of American Indians, by the 1960s over 13,000 reservation residents had lost their Indian status, and about 1.3 million acres of Indian communal land had been privatized.<sup>76</sup> Termination of tribal status was also linked with an extensive system of relocating enterprising young Indian men and women from the reservation to the urban labour markets through a variety of incentives: transportation vouchers, subsidized housing and vocational training.<sup>77</sup> It is estimated that over 100,000 Indians participated in this program, many of them “the young, better educated males ... the elite that might have provided leadership for successful reservation growth.”<sup>78</sup>

This period of occupational and geographical transition for American Indians has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Patricia Kasari argues in her book, *The Impact of Occupational Dislocation: The American Indian Labor Force At the Close of the Twentieth Century* (1999), that termination and relocation created more problems than it solved since many

74 The wartime experiences of Native American women is discussed in Grace Mary Gouveia, “Uncle Sam’s ‘Priceless Daughters’: American Indian Women during the Great Depression, World War II and the Post-War Era,” (Ph.D. thesis, Purdue University, 1994).

75 Cited in Bernstein, *American Indians*, 149.

76 Thomas Cowger, *The National Congress of American Indians* (Lincoln, 1999), 106-120.

77 Larry Burt, *Tribalism in Crisis: Federal Indian Policy, 1953-1961* (Albuquerque, 1982), 49-75; Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy 1945-1960* (Albuquerque, 1986), 134-157.

78 Littlefield and Knack, *Native Americans and Wage Labor*, 34.

tribes quickly lost their prosperous status once they were exposed to the full range of federal and state taxes, and the serious reduction of their land base. At the same time, she grudgingly acknowledges that the standard of living of urban Indian workers was, by the 1970s, considerably better than those who remained on the reservation where high levels of unemployment prevailed due to the scarcity of good jobs “and guaranteed government aid lowered motivation to work.”<sup>79</sup> Alan Sorkin supports this thesis in his two books *American Indians and Federal Aid* (Washington, 1971) and *The Urban American Indian* (Lexington, Mass., 1978). The first study provides an effective analysis of how Bureau of Indian Affairs and other federal agencies, through a series of manpower programs, attempted to upgrade education and job skills on the reservation, and improve the deplorable living standards which prevailed. But was urban relocation the answer? This is the focus of Sorkin’s second book which presents a wealth of socio-economic data on the condition of American urban Indians, many of whom were part of the relocation process, yet continued to maintain close kinship ties with those who remained on the reservation. In terms of comparative income levels, Sorkin also found that by the 1970’s urban Indians were about twice as well off than those living on reservations, with much lower unemployment levels, greater access to better jobs and adequate housing.<sup>80</sup> Particularly useful was Sorkin’s case study of Native workers in Chicago, which he shows as a community basically divided into two groups: those moving back and forth between the reservation and the city who he describes as “an unstable lower working class group ... marginal to the economy and social structure of the metropolis;” and a more permanent group of working class Indians “employed in semiskilled jobs such as welding, factory assembly, stockroom, and clerical office work.”<sup>81</sup>

Sorkin’s model of analyzing how Native workers function within the context of a specific urban environment has been adopted by a number of other scholars.<sup>82</sup> These studies deal with a wide variety of Indian urban communities, but the most popular focus has been Los Angeles. The reasons are obvious! Los Angeles contains the largest urban Indian population in the United States, with great diversity in tribal background, and with the most extensive system of pan-Indian social organizations.<sup>83</sup> Cultural anthropologist Joan Weibel-Orlando exam-

79 Patricia Kasari, *The Impact of Occupational Dislocation: The American Indian Labor Force At the Close of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1999), 54.

80 Sorkin does, however, qualify his analysis by pointing out Indian workers fared much better in Californian cities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco than they did in either Phoenix or Tucson Arizona. In 1969, for example, male Indians in Los Angeles and San Francisco earned an average annual salary of \$5,922, and \$6,503 respectively; while in the other two cities they made \$3,786 and \$2,731. Sorkin, *Urban American Indian*, 22.

81 Ibid., 12.

82 See Russell Thornton, Gary Sandefur and Harold Grasmick, *The Urbanization of American Indians: A Critical Bibliography* (Bloomington, 1982); O. Michael Watson (ed.), *The American Indians in Urban Society* (Boston, 1971).

83 In 1960 Los Angeles’ Indian population was 23,908, almost double its nearest competitor. By 1980 it had expanded to about 50,000. The top ten tribal groups in numerical order were Navajo, Sioux, Cherokee, Creek, Pueblo, Choctaw, Seminole, Cheyenne, Apache and Chippewa. Joan Weibel-Orlando, *Indian Country, L.A.: Maintaining Ethnic Community in Complex Society* (Urbana, Ill., 1991) 11.

ines all these various aspects in *Indian Country, L.A.* (1991). She is, however, particularly interested in how working class Indians, who were part of the 1960s relocation movement, adjusted to L.A.'s urban environment during the subsequent twenty years. Her conclusions are rather pessimistic. Despite federal expenditures of more than twenty million dollars annually, most Indian newcomers to Los Angeles were ill prepared for modern city life where "marketable work skills, inculcation of the American work ethic and ethos, and basic survival and coping strategies ... were called for."<sup>84</sup> As a result, almost fifty percent of those receiving vocational training returned to the reservation, and many of those who remained occupied the city's lowest occupational positions. On the positive side, she does credit L.A. Indian community leaders for developing a range of institutional structures and self-help programs which enabled many Native workers to avoid the worst aspects of the unskilled capitalist labour market.

Although the Canadian government did not formally implement termination and relocation programs during the post-war years, most of the policies of the Indian Affairs Branch remained overtly assimilationist. For these bureaucrats the reserve system was an anachronism, and they provided a range of incentives to convince young Indian men and women to seek urban jobs, and forget their tribal backgrounds. And these policies seemed to work. By the 1970s half of the country's status Indians and Metis were located in urban centres, with the highest concentrations in Western Canada. Edgar Dorsman's *Indians: the Urban Dilemma* (1972) was one of the first scholarly studies to examine this demographic trend, and it provides many interesting insights into how different groups of Native workers adjusted to city life. Because Dorsman views this demographic change as inevitable, he roundly criticizes Indian Affairs for not implementing more effective programs for the ever increasing numbers of Aboriginal peoples seeking urban jobs. He is particularly critical of the federal government's occupational training efforts, the degree of favouritism in the distribution of social assistance, and the destructive "infighting" between different tribal factions and competing elites.<sup>85</sup> *Government Programs for Urban Indians*, (1985) edited by Raymond Breton and Gail Grant, examines these same themes for later years. Its primary concern is explaining why the vast amount of money, spent by federal, provincial and municipal governments during the previous decade, had not substantially reduced the unemployment and social deprivation of western urban Indians. They conclude that most Native workers find it extremely difficult to escape from the cycle of poverty and welfare dependence because of inadequate education, low skill level, poor self-esteem, inadequate job training programs, and discriminatory practices of both employers and trade unions.<sup>86</sup> More recent studies have shown that the life of urban Indians has not greatly improved during the past fifteen years, despite the legal, political and constitutional success of major national Native organizations such as the Assembly of

84 Weibel-Orlando, *Indian Country, L.A.* 14-15.

85 Edgar Dorsman's *Indians: the Urban Dilemma* (Toronto, 1972). See also W.T. Stanbury, *Success and Failure: Indians in Urban Society* (Vancouver, 1975).

86 Raymond Breton and Gail Grant, *Government Programs for Urban Indians* (Toronto, 1985), XXIII-IV.

First Nations.<sup>87</sup> Most of these victories have, however, been in the areas of land rights and tribal sovereignty, while the plight of urban Indians unfortunately remains a low priority for the Indian elite and Canadian politicians.<sup>88</sup>

## Occupational opportunities on tribal lands

The economic potential of reservations/reserves, and their relative ability to provide employment, has long been a subject of interest for American and Canadian scholars. In the case of the United States, where the literature is more abundant and sophisticated, several themes have emerged, particularly in response to the debate over Indian self-determination. While the loss of sovereignty has never been forgotten by Native American communities, the campaign to regain these political rights began in earnest after the 1968 Indian Civil Rights Act, the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act. At issue in all these disputes were several key questions. Would greater tribal self-government enhance the economic performance of the country's many reservations, particularly those with abundant natural resources? And were the job prospects of Native workers on reservations improving or worsening?

Terry Anderson in his book *Sovereign Nations or Reservations? An Economic History of American Indians* (1995) provides one of the most provocative responses to these questions. First, he argues that between 1979 and 1989 “the unemployment rate on reservations rose from 27 percent to 40 percent while the unemployment rate for the nation as a whole hovered between 5 and 7 percent.”<sup>89</sup> In analyzing this worsening of the Indian poverty cycle, Anderson submits three possible explanations: that underdevelopment is associated with dependency and powerlessness; that success or failure is directly associated with human and physical capital and natural resources; and that Indian cultural difference prevents successful capitalist activity. While granting that each of these theories has some validity, Anderson opts for the “institutional approach to Indian economic development.” Here the key factors are the dynamics of tribal government, its ability to control reserve resources, and the level of dependency on the federal government. He notes, for instance, that although the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) channeled more than three billion dollars annually into the reservations during the

87 Larry Krotz, *Indian Country: Inside Another Canada* (Toronto, 1990); Alan Cairns, *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State* (Vancouver, 2000); Tom Flanagan, *First Nations? Second Thoughts* (Montreal/Kingston, 2000).

88 One attempt to analyze how Canadian Native groups were affected by federal, provincial and municipal government programs and taxation policies was made by economists D.B. Fields and W.T. Stanbury, *The Economic Impact of the Public Sector Upon the Indians of British Columbia: An Examination of the Incidence of Taxation and Expenditure of Three Levels of Government* (Vancouver, 1973).

89 Terry Anderson, *Sovereign Nations or Reservations? An Economic History of American Indians* (San Francisco, 1995), 1. For an earlier study, which adopted a positive assessment of the economic assets of American Indians, see Henry Hough, *Development of Indian Resources* (Denver, 1967).

1980s, most of these funds were used either for subsistence welfare, or for awarding 'loyal' tribal members with government jobs. In contrast, local economic activity languished.<sup>90</sup>

An even more devastating critique comes from the work of Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt. In a series of articles they argue that "BIA controlled economic development has been a marked failure in the past and provides no hope for the future."<sup>91</sup> But there is now a glimmer of hope: increased self-determination means "that the transfer of property rights towards tribes ... is transforming tribes into firms insofar as their economic relationship with outside parties is concerned."<sup>92</sup> To prove their point, they provide a number of case studies, demonstrating how different tribes, each with rich natural resources, have responded to the new economic and social challenges. On the positive side of the ledger are groups such as the White Mountain Apache and Cochiti Pueblo of Arizona, the Northern Cheyenne of Wyoming, the Salish and Kootenai (Flathead) of Montana, and the Yakima of Washington. In 1989 all of these groups had employment levels above 50%, with at least 35% of these jobs linked to reservation enterprises. On the negative side are tribes such as the Rosebud Sioux and Crow of South Dakota having employment levels under 20%, with most of these jobs being tribal bureaucratic positions, distributed on the basis of patronage not merit. In the opinion of Cornell and Kalt, economic diversification and effective political leadership are the two essential ingredients for successful reservation enterprise.<sup>93</sup> They note, for instance, that all the successful tribes had various forms of economic activity ranging from resource management—lumbering, farming, grazing, mining- to eco-tourism, as well as the operation of ski-complexes, golf courses, and more recently gambling casinos.<sup>94</sup> Their leaders also adopted 'the tribe-as firm' approach, reinvesting profits into other reservation enterprises,

90 See also George Pierre Castile and Robert Bee (eds.), *State and Reservation: New Perspectives on Federal Indian Policies* (Tucson, 1992); Susan Guyette, *Planning for Balanced Development: A Guide for Native Americans and Rural Communities* (Santa Fe, 1996); Elizabeth Segal and Keith Kilty (eds.), *Pressing Issues of Inequality and American Indian Communities* (New York, 1998).

91 Joseph Kalt and Stephen Cornell, "The Redefinition of Property Rights in American Indian Reservations: A Comparative Analysis of Native American Economic Development," in Lyman Legters and Fremont Lyden (eds.), *American Indian Policy: Self-Government and Economic Development* (Westport, Conn., 1994), 129.

92 Ibid., 133.

93 Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt, "Culture and Institutions as Public Goods: American Indian Economic Development as a Problem of Collective Action," in Terry Anderson (ed.), *Property Rights and Indian Economies: The Political Economy Forum* (Boston, 1992), 246. The experiences of White Mountain, Mescalero and San Carlos Apache are discussed in Richard Perry, *Apache Reservation: Indigenous Peoples and the American State* (Austin, 1993).

94 In 1979 the Seminoles of Florida were the first American Indian tribe to establish high stakes bingo gambling on their reservations. In 1982 and again 1987 the Supreme Court upheld tribal sovereignty in this economic area. This, in turn, resulted in the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988. By the late 1990s over 23 states had passed laws legalizing reservation casinos which resulted in over 184 tribes operating 281 gaming facilities, many being huge operations. For example, the two casinos on the Gila reservation near Phoenix, Arizona have 1300 employees (90% being Indian); while the Oneida reservation in the State of New York employs over 1500 members of the tribe. See Elisabeth Segal and Keith Kilty (eds.), *Pressing Issues of Inequality and American Indian Communities* (New York, 1998), 22-48.

while avoiding political factionalism, reckless patronage, and irresponsible decision making. The authors do admit, however, that these business strategies must conform with the cultural values of the particular tribe: “the Apache route to success will not be likely to resemble the Navajo route, (or) the Sioux route.”<sup>95</sup> In their conclusion, the authors have one message for Washington: grant more tribal sovereignty, “it increases the chances that tribes can find their own pathways out of poverty.”<sup>96</sup>

An even more strident critique of federal government paternalism comes from the Native American historian Donald Fixico in his controversial book *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century* (1998).<sup>97</sup> Fixico’s central thesis is the existence of a fundamental tension between Anglo-American culture “driven by capitalistic ambitions to acquire wealth,” and “tribal nations whose philosophy stress a kinship and interrelatedness with all creation.” While the early chapters provide a series of historical case studies of how tribes such as the Osage, Klamath and Sioux have been victimized by rapacious American corporations, the most interesting sections of the book deal with more contemporary Indian resistance strategies such as the creation of the Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT) in 1975.<sup>98</sup> Composed of 25 tribes, the CERT had two major goals: help its members secure greater returns from their mineral assets; and forcing the large resource companies to hire more tribal workers, and training the more qualified for managerial positions. But first on CERT’s agenda was the re-negotiation of the ‘sweetheart’ Bureau of Indian Affairs contracts signed on behalf of the tribes, whereby the reservation only received a pittance for its valuable coal, petroleum, natural gas, and uranium resources, while the companies enjoyed huge profits.<sup>99</sup> While Fixico is clearly sympathetic to the assertiveness of the new tribal elites, “who are adamant in their demands and cognizant of white ways of dealing with land,” he does acknowledge the continuing influence of traditional tribal elders who oppose all mining activity as a threat to Indian traditions and culture, and destruction of mother earth.<sup>100</sup>

95 In their article Cornell and Kalt prepared a breakdown of successful reserve enterprises across the United States. These include an electronics manufacturing plant operated by the Cherokees of Oklahoma; the nation’s largest cement plant operated by the Passamoquoddy of Maine; fish plants operated by the Quinault and Lummi of the Pacific Northwest; operation of industrial parks by the Oneidas of Wisconsin and the Gilas of Arizona; an auto electrical appliance plant operated by the Choctaw of Mississippi; and the large lumber industries, ski resorts and hunting/fishing operations of the Mescalero Apaches of New Mexico and the White Mountain Apaches of Arizona. Cornell and Kalt, “Culture and Institutions,” 122.

96 Ibid., 146.

97 Donald Fixico, *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources* (Denver, 1998).

98 Ibid, 143: In a 1990 survey it was estimated that one half of the US coal reserves were west of the Mississippi, and that one third of these resources were on Indian lands. In the case of uranium, approximately 37% of the total reserves were on Indian land; with another 3% of known oil and gas reserves.

99 In the case of the Crow tribe of South Dakota, they received only 17 cents royalty per ton of coal, while the company received more than \$10 a ton when sold on the local market. Ibid., 151.

100 Ibid, 157. For a similar line of argument see Robert McPherson and David Wolff, “Poverty, Politics and Petroleum: The Utah Navajo and the Aneth Oil Field,” *American Indian Quarterly*, 21 (Summer 1997), 451-471.

The concerns of the traditionalists are widespread among First Nation peoples in the United States and Canada. All too often they have seen their lands subjected to serious environmental devastation because of corporate greed or government mega-projects. High on the list are the many environmental problems and social dislocation associated with massive hydro-electric developments; notably the 1950s Kinzua dam project in Pennsylvania and the 1970s James Bay project in Quebec.<sup>101</sup> A related problem has been industrial pollution which has destroyed Native commercial fishing and threatened the existence of tribal communities.<sup>102</sup> Industrial disease has also affected many North American Native workers, particularly those involved with mining uranium, gold, and coal.<sup>103</sup> One well documented case was the experiences of about 3,000 Navajo workers, employed between 1950 and 1980, in the many uranium mines of Arizona and New Mexico, and their related uranium mills. There is a consensus among scholars who have analyzed this situation: over three decades, Navajo mine workers and their families were callously subjected to unsafe levels of radiation.<sup>104</sup> The United States government is held particularly culpable for not informing these men about health risks associated with uranium mining; for not providing adequate compensation to the afflicted workers; and for ignoring the long term ecological damage to 'sacred' Navajo lands.<sup>105</sup> Sadly, a similar situation developed in Canada during this same time period. In this instance, the crown corporation Eldorado Nuclear Limited, hired hundreds of Cree and Dene workers at its vast Great Bear Lake uranium mines in the Northwest Territories; they too were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation.<sup>106</sup>

While First Nation peoples have often been victims of outside forces, there are a number of instances when Indian tribes, because of their desperate need for immediate cash and jobs, have themselves adopted policies which violate environmental standards. In 1990, for in-

101 The Kinzua dam forced the relocation of over 600 members of the Seneca Allegany reservation. See Joy Billharz, *The Allegany Senecas and Kinzua Dam: Two generations* (Lincoln, 1998), 62-98.

102 One of the more infamous environmental cases was the 1970s mercury pollution at Grassy Narrows, Ontario. See Anastasia Shkilnyk, *A Poison Stronger Than Love: The Destruction of an Objibwa Community* (New Haven, 1985).

103 For a general overview see Peter Eichstaedt, *If You Poison Us: Uranium and Native Americans* (Santa Fe, 1994). The occupational disease and environmental problems encountered by the Lakota (Sioux) have been discussed by a number of authors. See Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills: White Justice: The Sioux Nation versus the United States, 1775 to the Present* (New York, 1991); Raymond De Mallie, "Pine Ridge Economy: Cultural and Historical Perspectives," in Sam Stanley (ed.), *American Indian Economic Development* (The Hague, 1978), 237-312.; and Amelia Irvin, "Energy Development and the Effects of Mining on the Lakota Nation," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 10 (1982), 89-101.

104 Susan Dawson, "Navajo Uranium Workers and the Effects of Occupational Illness: A Case Study," *Human Organization*, 51 (Winter, 1992), 389-97; Becky Miles Viers, "Environmental Law: Uranium Mines on the Navajo Reservation," *American Indian Law Review* 7 (1979), 115-24.

105 According to Dawson, the Navajo situation was a common problem for many tribes where "jobs are often pitted against the health of the workers." She also notes that although hundreds of Navajo families experienced unsafe levels of radiation they were reluctant to relocate "even in the face of community environmental contamination because of the consequences, such as losing one's birthright to Navajo land." In 1990 the US government belatedly provided assistance with the passage of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act. *Ibid.*, 390, 396.

106 Dan O'Neill, "H-Bombs and Eskimos: The Story of Project Chariot," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 85 (1994), 25-34; Robert Bothwell, *Eldorado: Canada's National Uranium Company* (Toronto, 1984), 322-25.

stance, it was estimated that there were over 1,200 hazardous waste sites located on Native American reservations, with the Department of Energy and industrial corporations working with tribal leaders to increase the total.<sup>107</sup> In addition, in 1990 the national forestry service reported that in the southwest region of the United States upwards of 50% of all reservation forest lands had disappeared because of excessive harvesting. There has been an on-going battle between federal authorities responsible for national parks, and many western tribal governments over how to reconcile conservation practices and tribal efforts to engage in commercial tourism and resource extraction.<sup>108</sup> This problem will undoubtedly become more difficult as more and more tribes acquire administrative sovereignty.<sup>109</sup>

But for some Native American writers the existing self-governance mechanisms in the United States are an illusion, a ploy to convince Aboriginal peoples “to abandon their own traditions and concern with sovereignty, instead adhering to federal definitions of Indian identity and thus imposing the burden of stark racism upon *themselves*.”<sup>110</sup> Many of these critics point to the successful strategies Canadian status Indians and Inuit have adopted; particularly because of their emphasis on the *inherent*, as compared to the *conferred*, right of self-government. To some extent this praise is warranted. During the past two decades Canada’s First Nations have achieved many of their constitutional, political and legal goals. These include being formally recognized in the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms, having their national organizations (Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapirisat) officially participate in the 1992 Charlottetown constitutional deliberations, and having achieved a range of comprehensive land settlement agreements. These include the James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement of 1974, the creation of the new territory of Nunavut in April 1999, and the Nisga’a Agreement of February 2000.<sup>111</sup> Another important development was the appointment of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples which throughout the 1990s carried out an extensive analysis of the socio-economic status of Canada’s status Indians, non-status Indians, Metis

107 Fixico, *Invasion of Indian Country*, 189-204.

108 Robert Keller and Michael Turek, *American Indians and National Parks* (Tucson, 1998), xiv. According to them “the list of Indian/Park Service conflicts and disputes is long: boundary lines, land claims, rights-of-way, hunting and wildlife management, grazing permits, water rights, employment preference, craft sales, cultural interpretation, sacred sites and the disposition of cultural artifacts, entrance fees, dams, the promotion of tourism, commercial regulation, ‘squatting in parks, relations with tribal parks, and resentment over past injustice.”

109 For the social problems prevalent on many US reservations see Ronet Bachman, *Death and Violence, and Suicide in American Indian Populations* (New York, 1992).

110 Ward Churchill, “American Indian Self-Governance: Fact, Fantasy, and Prospects for the Future,” in Legters and Lyden, *American Indian Policy*, 42. In another critical article, “Indian Policy at the Beginning of the 1990s: The Trivialization of Struggle,” Russel Lawrence Barsh denounced the willingness of Native American leaders to allow the Bureau of Indian Affairs to declare certain tribes “insufficiently Indian” and therefore non-federally recognized; as well as denying recognition to some Native artists on the basis of a strictly applied blood-quantum. *Ibid.*, 55-69.

111 In Canada there are presently 12 comprehensive land claims in the final stages of negotiations which could cost the federal government \$742 million. In addition, there are a number of specific land claims also in the final stages: possibly costing \$1.4 billion. See Melvin H. Smith, *Our Home or Native Land? What Governments Aboriginal Policy Is Doing to Canada* (Toronto, 1996), 11-15; Toronto Globe and Mail, 15 November 1999.

and Inuit. In its final 1996 report, the Commission recommended sweeping changes in how the federal and provincial governments, and Canadian society in general, should deal with Native peoples.

The five volumes produced by the Royal Commission also provide a wealth of information about the present problems Aboriginal workers encounter. The most serious is the continuing high level of unemployment which is three times the national average in most regions, and the poor quality of jobs which are mostly unskilled and seasonal. Although urban Indians were somewhat better off than their counterparts on the reserve, in part because of their higher level of education and availability of employment, the Royal Commission Report deplored "the poverty, high dependency ratios and disadvantaged labour market position of urban Aboriginal residents and the particular plight of Aboriginal women living in urban areas."<sup>112</sup> Discrimination remains another serious problem faced by Native workers both in urban centres, and in labour markets adjoining reserves.<sup>113</sup> In calling for more effective educational and job training programs, and employment equity opportunities, the Report emphasized the long term advantages such policies would bring to Canadian society: "every year that the social and economic circumstances of Aboriginal people remain as they are, it costs the country \$7.5 billion ... the equivalent of nearly one per cent of Canada's GDP."<sup>114</sup>

Many of these themes raised by the Royal Commission are also discussed in *First Nations: Race, Class, and Gender Relations* (1993) by sociologists Vic Satzewich and Terry Wotherspoon. Using a political economy model, which allowed them to analyze "native people's struggles for subsistence and survival under changing material circumstances," the authors provide an overview of historical and contemporary problems facing Canada's First Peoples.<sup>115</sup> They note, for instance, that although more urban Indians are employed in white collar and professional jobs, the vast majority are still concentrated in low status blue collar jobs; while on the reserve 63% made a living from public sector employment, mostly in carrying out functions in the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. On the other hand, there was a substantial increase in Indian-owned businesses, mostly reserve based, with the most common being fishing, farming, hunting and wild rice production.<sup>116</sup> The exception were the few resource rich bands, most located in Western Canada, particularly in the Alberta 'oil patch.'<sup>117</sup> Another useful analytical approach are studies that have investigated how particular First Nations have been affected by major state sponsored resource projects. Of particular note is Richard Salisbury's, *A Homeland for the Cree* (1986) which pro-

112 Among status Indians 56 % of urban residents were women, who had higher levels of education than the overall Aboriginal population. They still, however, had unemployment levels double that of non-Indian women. Canada, Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Ottawa, 1996); vol.4, "Perspectives and Realities," 577, 570.

113 Ibid., vol.2, ch.: "Restructuring the Relationship," 930-950.

114 Ibid., vol.2, ch.: "Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment," 140.

115 Satzewich and Wotherspoon, *First Nations*, 55.

116 Barry Barton, "Defending World Markets for Furs: Aboriginal Trapping, the Anti-Harvest Movement and International Trade Law," in Abel and Frieson (eds.), *Aboriginal Resources*, 317-40.

117 Ibid., 55-70.

vides a longitudinal analysis of what the James Bay mega-project meant for the local Quebec Native workers.<sup>118</sup> Although he concedes that there were serious environmental and social problems connected with the hydroelectric complex, he argues that the creation of construction jobs and funds to develop some local enterprises more than offset the disadvantages.<sup>119</sup> Another good case study of corporate developmental policies in specific Indian communities is provided by *The Temagami Experience* (1989). In this instance, it is the powerful Ontario lumber industry which threatens traditional Native activities like hunting, fishing and trapping; while at the same time providing local benefits through employment opportunities for the Ojibwa, such as cutting logs, and working in the lumber mills.<sup>120</sup>

The rights of Native fishermen has in recent years become an issue of considerable economic and political importance. On the Pacific coast, after almost a hundred years of being excluded, the Nisga'a, Haida and other coastal tribes have regained a role in the lucrative salmon fishing industry, largely through treaty negotiations. Of these the recent Nisga'a Agreement is the most comprehensive since it guarantees a number of deep sea fishing licences, and gives the Nisga'a exclusive fishing privileges in the Nass River region.<sup>121</sup> A similar situation has emerged in New Brunswick after the Supreme Court of Canada in 1999 upheld Mi'kmaq claims that they had been granted perpetual fishing rights under an eighteenth century treaty. Almost immediately after the decision local Mi'kmaq rushed to enter the industry, despite attempts by the federal Department of Fisheries to gradually increase their level of participation. Unfortunately, white fishermen in the Atlantic region have reacted badly to Indian competition, as have their counterparts on the Pacific coast.

Equally controversial is the Nunavut Agreement, negotiated in April 1993 and implemented six years later. This unique document, which carves out an Arctic homeland for Canada's Inuit peoples, was the product of 25 years of negotiations, and two regional referendums. In return for surrendering their Aboriginal rights, the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut received title to approximately 350,000 sq. km, including mineral rights (i.e. one fourth of the new Nunavut Territory), the right to harvest wildlife throughout the entire territory, received payment of 1.148 billion over the next fourteen years, and the right to negotiate directly with any resource company.<sup>122</sup> In addition, there was the guarantee that the Inuit

118 Richard Salisbury, *A Homeland for the Cree: Regional Development in James Bay 1971-1981* (Montreal, 1986).

119 A much more critical portrayal of the James Bay project is provided by the Grand Council of the Cree, *Never Without Consent: James Bay Crees' Stand Against Forced Inclusion into an Independent Quebec* (Toronto, 1998).

120 Bruce Hodgins and Jamie Benedickson, *The Temagami Experience: Recreation, Resources, and Aboriginal Rights in the Northern Ontario Wilderness* (Toronto, 1989).

121 Daniel Raunet, *Without Surrender Without Consent: A History of the Nisga'a Land Claims* (Vancouver, 1996). Under the Agreement the Nisga'a community of 6,000 obtained 772 square miles of the Nass Valley as their homeland; a cash settlement of \$190 million; the right to establish their own court system and police forces; and a guaranteed share of the British Columbia commercial coastal fishery.

122 Anthropologist Peter Usher argues that with self government Inuit communities of the Arctic regions could have their fur, fish and game rights recognized as profitable enterprises. This would, in turn, allow them to seek compensation for damages caused by federal government interference, or the actions of

would have equal membership in all governmental bodies, and employment equity in all major projects.<sup>123</sup> To its critics, and there are many, Nunavut is nothing more than a misguided boondoggle which will stifle legitimate resource investment, and be a permanent drain on the federal treasury. Some have also claimed that the Inuit are singularly ill suited for skilled jobs and administrative positions since they are poorly educated, and still committed to a nomadic way of life.<sup>124</sup> But despite the nay sayers, there are good reasons to be optimistic about this unique form of Aboriginal self-government.

## Native workers and immigrant workers

On the surface, little similarity between immigrant and Native workers seems to exist. First, Natives were members of Indian nations who negotiated treaties with the American and Canadian governments, and who thought of themselves as members of distinct nations. Second, as part of the process of westward expansion and social control the various tribes were placed on reservations/reserves, treated as wards of the federal government, and subjected to a variety of assimilationist programs. Third, most Natives remained on the reserves at least until the Second World War, despite the difficulty of obtaining good jobs and improving their individual standard of living. On the other hand, as many of the authors have shown, Indian workers did assume an important role in labour intensive resource industries, and in providing a pool of seasonal labour. Indeed, there are many similarities between the kinds of jobs European immigrant workers often obtained prior to the 1930s, and the jobs allocated to Native workers: they were unskilled, they were seasonal, and they were low paying. Yet there are fundamental differences between the two groups. White immigrant workers gradually gained acceptance into Canadian and American society, usually within an urban context, and with time improved their occupational status and social condition.

The same was not true for Asian immigrants, however. Prior to 1950 Chinese, Japanese, and East Indian newcomers were among the most victimized workers in Canada and the United States. Their hardship was compounded by their virtual exclusion from the trade union movements, and by racist laws directed against them. As such, they encountered many situations which were similar to those experienced by Native workers, particularly on the Pacific coast, a situation which Rolf Knight, John Lutz and Alicicja Muszynski discuss in their books on the salmon packing industry in British Columbia. But there were also important differences between the two groups. Chinese cannery labour was usually supplied by Chinese bosses, part of an intricate labour migration arrangement. In contrast, Native workers were rarely part of a coercive “padrone”, or ethnically brokered system, and jealously defended their individual independence, in part because they could always return to their reservation.

private resource companies. “Property as the Basis of Inuit Hunting Rights,” in Anderson, *Property Rights and Indian Economies*, 41-66.

123 John Merritt, *Nunavut: Canada turns a new page in the Arctic* (Ottawa, 1993).

124 Melvin H. Smith, *Our Home or Native Land?*, 17-54.

As a result, prior to 1970 most Native workers were rural based. In contrast, the vast majority of Chinese workers resided in urban ethnic enclaves, Chinatowns, where they had the opportunity of developing various ethnic enterprises and thereby an eventual escape from grinding unskilled labour. This option was rarely available for urban Native workers. Was this because, as some authors have claimed, Asian workers were culturally more likely to adjust to American capitalism than were their Aboriginal counterparts?

While this assumption has been put forth, it has also been challenged by a number of Canadian and American scholars, with some of the most innovative approaches coming from urban historians. This is particularly true of Arthur Margon's important 1976 article "Indians and Immigrants: A Comparison of Groups New to the City," which sets forth a number of interesting arguments. First, that Native workers, depending upon their tribal background, have a long experience with urban employment, and even during the 1950s took up urban residence "sometimes at a rate of four times that of the Black population." Second, that with the exception of the 1950s termination and relocation programs, most Native workers made a gradual transition from the reserve to the larger urban centres: "Chicago Indians, for example, often reported that they had made repeated visits to the small towns and regional centres near the reservations." Nor, in his opinion, were Indians less likely than many European immigrant sojourners to move back and forth from their urban workplace to their 'cultural' homeland: "Native Americans are not exceptionally unstable immigrants whose inability to cope with urban life drives them, in disproportionate numbers, to return to the reservations." To prove this point, Margon cites the experience of the Caughnawaga Mohawk steelworkers, "well-employed urban Indians still in close contact with the reservation, still migrating back frequently, surviving by integrating new lives into the old ways."<sup>125</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to analyze how Native workers have been affected by structural changes in the North American economic system during the nineteenth and twentieth century, and how they responded to the many challenges associated with wage labor. While there are some problems in adopting a comparative framework, since Canadian and American governmental policies towards Native peoples often differed, there are also many advantages in considering the similarities and differences in these experiences. In the first place, the various Aboriginal nations, numbering in the thousands, faced similar problems in dealing with the arrival of Europeans: unequal technological resources; an inability to cope with the 'white man's diseases; and a gradual loss of their lands and sovereignty. A second common theme was the late nineteenth century governmental policies of containment and assimilation, where the reservation became the focus of a variety of social engineering programs designed to destroy Native cultures and traditional economic activity, in order to transform Native

125 Arthur Margon, "Indians and Immigrants: A Comparison of Groups New to the City," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 4 (1976), 18, 21, 23, 22.

peoples into hard working, sedentary, Christian yeoman farmers. The fact that Aboriginal societies proved surprisingly resilient to this cultural assault, does not alter the destructive impact that many of these policies, particularly residential schools, had on the lives of many young Indian men and women. A third major trend has been the gradual emergence of pan-tribal Native political organizations, that have, ironically, often drawn their leadership from the ranks of the so-called assimilated Indians. While there were isolated instances of collective protest throughout the early part of the twentieth century, the Red Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s was unique in several ways. It represented Indians as a national ethnic group, while at the same time drawing its support from traditional elites on the reservations; combining, therefore, a sense of uplift for Indians as an ethnic category, and emphasizing their distinctive status as sovereign nations. During the last two decades, Canadian Native organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapirisat,<sup>126</sup> and the Nisga'a Nation have been remarkably successful in negotiating a number of extensive agreements, which have advanced Aboriginal self government well beyond the rights enjoyed by American First Nations.

While these gains for First Nations communities are impressive, they should not overshadow the realities that over fifty per cent of Native peoples in North America now live and work in urban centers. In Canada, the major concentrations are in Iqaluit (62%), capital of the new territory of Nunavut, Regina (7%) and Winnipeg (6.9%), while in the United States the highest ratios were in Los Angeles, Oklahoma City, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Chicago, Seattle, and Buffalo. In terms of overall population, the numbers of Aboriginal peoples in both countries is rapidly increasing, in part, because of high birth rates, and because more and more North Americans are claiming Indian ancestry.<sup>127</sup> Another major similarity between Canada and the United States is that Native peoples are the most disadvantaged ethnic group, or population category. Not only do they have the highest levels of unemployment and under-employment, they also continue to hold the worst-paying and most dangerous jobs.

What is the point of analyzing the experiences of Native workers, who are few in number, fragmented between reservation and city, and generally marginal to the North American labour movement? At first glance this question may seem reasonable. But it is well to remember that this same question was once asked about other groups of non-Anglo-Saxon workers. Indeed, not until the 1970's did Canadian and American labour historians broaden their scholarly focus to include European immigrant workers. And it took another decade before

126 Price notes that "in per capita terms more has been written on the Eskimos (Inuit) than on any other society in the world. There is some truth in the old joke that the normal Eskimo family is husband, wife, two children and an anthropologist."

127 In Canada, the 1996 census showed that there were about 800,000 people designated as Aboriginal (2.8 % of the national population), with about 1,102,000 (3.8%) claiming Aboriginal ancestry. In the United States the 1990 census showed over 1.9 million Americans of Native Indian ancestry, less than one percent of the population. Canada, *Census Tracts, 1996 Census* (Ottawa, 1997), cited in Iverson, 'We are still here', 177.

the academic community began to analyze the involvement of Asian or Mexican American workers in North American labour movements; or began to compare their experiences with 'white' workers. So, rather than viewing this subject as "exotic," it could be argued that the historical study of the work experience of Native men and women is long overdue. That is not to say that traditional research strategies in analyzing trade unions, workplace militancy and urban labour culture can easily be transferred to this field of inquiry. Yet, as this article has demonstrated, there are alternative approaches that labour historians can adopt so that the experiences of Native workers can be viewed, not as an isolate, but, "as part of the web of dynamic historical relations that have inextricably linked Indian to non-Indian society."<sup>128</sup>

128 Littlefield and Knack, *Native Americans and Wage Labor*, 43.