

# 1

## Introduction:

# Aboriginal Well-being: Canada's Continuing Challenge

Dan Beavon and Jerry White

### Introduction

Canada was founded on the principles of peace, order, and good government.<sup>1</sup> It would be fair to say that most Canadians view our society as peaceful, civil, and just. As Canadians, we are often shocked or dismayed when we see civil unrest in other countries, particularly when police or military force are used against civil populations in order to quell popular uprisings or to restore order. When we see such events unfolding in the news, we breathe a collective sigh of relief and count our blessings that we live where we do. However, it may be that our collective memories are quite short, and our knowledge of history quite limited, because police forces and the military have intervened thousands of times against many different segments of civil society in Canada. Some of these interventions have been against protestors (e.g., such as the police action during the 1997 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit meeting in Vancouver), unruly sports fans (e.g., the 1955 Rocket Richard riot in Montreal), unions (e.g., the 1919 Winnipeg general strike), and sometimes against Aboriginal peoples.

Some of the more recent and notable police and military interventions against Aboriginal peoples include: Oka (1990), Gustafsen Lake (1995), and Ipperwash (1995). The Oka crisis of 1990<sup>2</sup> is particularly noteworthy because it represents the last time in Canadian history that the military was used against a segment of civil society.<sup>3</sup> The Oka crisis resulted in the death of Sûreté du Québec Corporal Marcel Lemay and it led to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.<sup>4</sup> The Gustafsen Lake seige represented the largest paramilitary operation in the history of British Columbia<sup>5</sup> and the incident at Ipperwash resulted in the death of Aboriginal protestor Dudley George.

Usually these police and military interventions are the result of Aboriginal occupations and protests. As the Ipperwash inquiry noted (Linden, 2007, p.15):

Aboriginal occupations and protests can be large or small, short or long, peaceful or violent. They occur in urban areas, rural areas, and in the remote north ... The immediate catalyst for most major occupations and protests is a dispute over a land claim, a burial site, resource development, or harvesting, hunting and fishing rights. The fundamental conflict, however, is usually about land.

Aboriginal occupations and protests are quite common and the vast majority of these events are resolved peacefully, without violence or property damage.<sup>6</sup> Many of these incidents, however, garner considerable media coverage, especially when these events expose major fault lines within Canadian society. For example, the Burnt Church crisis of 1999 and 2000 resulted in angry non-Aboriginal fishermen damaging and destroying a number of Mi'kmaq lobster traps. The local Mi'kmaq retaliated by destroying non-Aboriginal fishing boats and buildings. The Caledonia dispute (2006 and on-going at press time) has been the catalyst for several confrontations between Aboriginal protestors, local non-Aboriginal residents, and the Ontario Provincial Police. While such incidents make for good news stories, they often expose the underlying racist underbelly that still permeates some segments of Canadian society. While many critics may question the economic effectiveness of Aboriginal occupations and protests, they clearly do not understand the intrinsic value that Aboriginal peoples place on their traditional lands and how this attachment is integral to their culture and identity (Burrows, 2005).

While Aboriginal occupations of land will continue in the foreseeable future, Canadians witnessed an entirely new type of Aboriginal protest on June 29, 2007. On this date, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) organized a National Day of Action. This one day event was part of a broader strategy of the AFN, launched in the fall of 2006 to create awareness of First Nations issues; more specifically, it was a call for action against poverty.<sup>7</sup> This book deals with this same issue, not from an advocacy or political viewpoint, but from an empirical and scientific perspective.

The “Make Poverty History for First Nations” campaign was initiated to highlight the struggles facing First Nations people and communities. The “National Day of Action” was unique for several reasons.

First, the event was one of the largest rallies in Canadian history based on the sheer number of events and locations across the country.

Second, the event was peaceful. There was considerable tension before the event and some in the media and some less sympathetic groups were anticipating confrontations between the Aboriginal peoples and the general public or police. But many of the anticipated tensions were reduced prior to the event through a series of actions. Minister Prentice made a major announcement for an action plan to reform and speed up the specific claims process. The slow pace with which specific claims were resolved has often created tensions between many First Nations and the government. He also defused the threat of blockades at one potential hot spot, by conferring official reserve status to 75 acres of land recently purchased by the Roseau River First Nation in Manitoba. AFN Grand Chief Phil Fontaine also did his part to calm the waters. He repeatedly urged Aboriginal people to make the Day of Action a peaceful demonstration aimed at generating public awareness of, and support for, Aboriginal issues. Chief Fontaine also signed a protocol between the AFN and the RCMP that set out ground rules for

dealing with any crisis that might occur during the Day of Action. In summary, the event was so peaceful that it was anticlimactic.

Third, the event was not an occupation of a specific piece of land. In fact, protest was not really about land at all. What we witnessed was a shift from a *rights-based agenda* (e.g., specific and comprehensive claims, self-determination, self-government, Indian status, membership, citizenship), which have dominated the Aboriginal political landscape over the last thirty years, to a *needs-based agenda*. While all of these latter rights-based issues are important, there is no direct evidence to suggest that the disproportionate attention that has been paid to them has improved the quality of life of Aboriginal people or their communities. That is not to say we will not see improvements coming from these actions, but only that to date such gains have not been measurable (see Chapter 9).

Aboriginal issues will clearly present Canada with some of its most complex challenges in the twenty-first century. Will this century be the one where we finally address the issues of poverty, lack of educational attainment, poor health, and social problems that beset Aboriginal peoples? Or, will it be one that replicates the past, maintains the status quo, and condemns the next generation of Aboriginal children to a life of mediocrity, suicides, substance abuse, and poverty?

The National Day of Action reminded us that there is a growing understanding and impatience with respect to the relative deprivation that Aboriginal peoples face in Canada. The well-being of the general population far exceeds that of its Aboriginal population. Now instead of turning that inequality into despair and internal violence, it is being channelled outward.

We decided to title this book, “Aboriginal Well-being: Canada’s Continuing Challenge.” We had considered calling it, “Canada’s Shameful Legacy”; however, shame is not what is needed. What is needed is better policies developed from solid research evidence created in partnership with the Aboriginal peoples themselves.

In our 2003 book *Aboriginal Conditions*, we said that “we need to develop better measures of the First Nation communities and tailor our programs and policies to match the reality of the country.” In that book we discussed our preliminary attempts to adapt the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) to the First Nations in Canada (Beavon and Cooke 2003). We also presented a “Community Capacity Index” which aimed to assess the relative capacity of Aboriginal communities to accept and handle their socio-economic development. As we have repeatedly argued, we can not download programs to communities that have not got the capacity to take them on. It serves no one’s interests to dump programs as fast as people can fail at managing them (Maxim and White 2003).

We also argued that there are real differences between Aboriginal communities. Some are thriving and relatively self-reliant, while others are facing or have suffered virtual collapse. Within many communities there are vast differences in the resources that families have available. In *Aboriginal Conditions* we also

presented research on the intra-Aboriginal inequalities that plague the populations. We concluded that we needed better ways of understanding capacity and well-being and that we also needed to develop Canada-wide initiatives that target the intra-Aboriginal differences.

This book is our next generation of models and tools that are developed to give us a better understanding of the levels of development and well-being of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Some might ask why we are doing this (see Salée, 2006). We would argue that it is our responsibility, as social scientists, to try and improve our understanding of the world. That in itself is true. However, we have a selfish reason as well. Our own well-being is tied to the well-being of the others who inhabit this great country. In order to keep the high standards of living, level of prosperity, relative social calm, and exceptional living conditions, we have to recognize that there is an important, on-going disadvantage that is experienced by the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Unless we address this central problem, Aboriginal relative deprivation will lead to the erosion of the well-being of all those living in Canada.

## **What Is at Stake in this Relative Deprivation?**

One of the most powerful of human motivators is relative deprivation. Sociologists, have argued that relative differences in well-being and resources, including wealth, are often more important than the absolute differences in determining the perceived quality of life (Gurr, 1970; Griffin, 1988). This means that policies that increase the societal wealth but leave relative inequalities may not actually increase the overall well-being of a country.

An understanding of deprivation develops as people compare themselves to those around them. If the comparison group is reasonable, then people will react to differences. It is not some absolute level that is used in comparisons. Inequalities that remain even as the absolute levels of prosperity increase still lead to group resistance. If we think of a village of subsistence farmers that has only their crops and a small amount of generated income to live on, it may be that they develop a lifestyle where they are happy despite limited resources. If that village is moved to the outskirts of a big city or is integrated through digital means to the wider world, it will begin to assess its relative position. In this case the villagers will become angry about their circumstances and may begin to protest.

Feeling deprived as an individual differentiates from feeling deprived as a group ... particularly if there are strong identifiers for that group (see Walker and Smith, 2002). We also know that social identity, social comparison, and understandings of distributive justice are involved in relative deprivation (ibid). These are collective or social theories, and when we integrate them with relative deprivation we get what we call integrated relative deprivation theory.

This integrated theory is important because it captures how a group sees itself, how an individual belongs or identifies their place in the group, whether there

is or could be any explanation for their similar treatment and whether there is a measure of fairness or lack of fairness in their deprivation.

We have argued in other works (White and Beavon, 2003) that understanding the collective identity of Aboriginal peoples is important. The world today is composed of peoples bound together in groups that share some characteristics that create bonds between them. These groups coalesce for a variety of reasons. More often than not, these bonds of cohesion have some relationship to cultural and physical similarities. Social scientists have spent countless research hours studying these ethnic and racial ties. Ties that bind groups together also create differences with others. These differences between collectivities can often involve the development of hierarchies and inequalities. Socio-economic conditions, sometimes measured and sometimes assumed, are used to rank peoples. The roots of some of the most complex social problems are the differential development of ethnic groups and the social ranking that comes with these variations. Public policy in this era of human development is confronted by these social problems and the set of questions that issue from them.

If we look at this racialized and ethnicized understanding of differences in resources and resulting hierarchies and overlay this understanding with an appreciation of the integrated relative deprivation theory we can understand the import of the current situation. Aboriginal people, seeing and experiencing the differences in their lives in comparison with other groups in Canada will inevitably draw conclusions about their relative worth. At an individual level this can result in a lack of respect for themselves, which leads to intragroup violence and self-abuse (drugs, alcohol, suicide, marital violence, etc.). The individual might blame society and strike out individually against that society (through crime or violence). Most assuredly, over time, the ties that create the collective identity will assert themselves in a collective understanding. Those who share history, culture, territory, and common understandings, who become bound together in groups that share some characteristics that create bonds between them, will assess that they are not treated fairly. Collective response to relative deprivation can become a challenge to the fabric of a country that has multiple collectivities such as ethnic or racial groups.

This book is about identifying clearly that there is relative deprivation. It is also about wanting to spur us to move forward in dealing with that deprivation.

It was Francis Bacon who argued for an understanding of the world free from theologically distorted realities. We would concur that there should be a drive to develop the most appropriate and accurate assessments of the well-being and development of different peoples as is possible.

## Why Should We Be Developing Well-being Indicators?

There are many reasons why we need to proceed quickly on the development of indicators. If we learn from the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) and our own work on the Registered Indian Development Index we can see there is an important policy relevance. The HDI has been used to:

- stimulate national political debate—often used for advocacy and to hold governments accountable.
- give priority to human development—an analysis of the three components of the HDI can identify areas requiring policy attention.
- highlight disparities within countries—disaggregation by social group or region can enable local community groups to lobby for more resources.
- open new avenues for analysis—allows comparative studies to be undertaken with respect to the testing of development theories and practices.
- stimulate dialogue on aid policy—HDI has been used by some countries as the basis for aid allocations.

There have been debates internationally on a series of issues related to developing well-being indicators as well. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have been grappling with several complex issues. There are some who believe that we should send aid and development dollars to those countries that are, by accepted measures, the worst off. Still others think that we should reward the countries that have shown improvement when they have been assisted. The question is, how can we even determine who is who, without measures to assess them? Measures can therefore allow debates on real conditions and let policy be developed. As well, when a policy is put into place, these measures can track the change over time, allowing us to assess success or failure.

We said in 2003 that we were going to develop better measures of the First Nation communities. The reason was that this could assist us to tailor our programs and policies to match the reality of the country. We believe the Canadian public is concerned and ready to address the kinds of problems and difficulties that face Aboriginal people. However, they also seem to want some assurance that the resources are apportioned where most needed and have some success, given clear policy benchmarks and goals. The most cynical may say this is a demand for a “bang for the buck” while the most optimistic may say they want to see more rapid improvement of the Aboriginal condition.

Another reason for developing these measures relates to international prestige. Canada has relied on its positive image around the world in many ways. It helps us play a greater role than our population size should ever permit. It gains us economic advantage, facilitating our negotiations with those that might otherwise be hostile. Finally, it aids us as Canadians in our international dealings and travel

**Table 1.1: Comparing Levels of Development: Registered Indians in Canada and the Canadian Population**

		1981	1991	2001
Life Expectancy at Birth (years)	Registered Indians	65.7	70.6	72.9
	Canadian Population	75.6	77.9	78.7
Proportion Completed High School or Higher <sup>1</sup>	Registered Indians	0.33	0.55	0.57
	Canadian Population	0.60	0.68	0.75
Proportion Completed Grade 9 or Higher <sup>2</sup>	Registered Indians	0.60	0.72	0.83
	Canadian Population	0.80	0.86	0.90
Average Annual Income (2000\$) <sup>3</sup>	Registered Indians	\$6,840	\$8,243	\$10,094
	Canadian Population	\$16,554	\$20,072	\$22,489

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> The proportion completed high school or higher is estimated by the population with a secondary school graduation certificate, some post-secondary or trades education, or some university with or without degree, divided by the population aged 19 years and over.

<sup>2</sup> The proportion completed grade 9 or higher is the population aged 15 years and over that has completed grade 9 or higher, divided by the total population aged 15 years and over.

<sup>3</sup> The average annual income is the average income from all sources for the year before the Census enumeration, adjusted by the Statistics Canada Consumer Price Index to year 2000 constant Dollars (Statistics Canada 2005b).

**Sources:** Statistics Canada Census Data custom tabulations; Statistics Canada 1984, 1990, 1995, 1998, 2005a; Rowe and Norris, 1995; Nault et al. 1993; Norris, Kerr, and Nault, 1996; DIAND, 1998; Verma, Michalowski, and Gauvin, 2003; authors' calculations.

as individuals. The relative deprivation and disadvantage of the Aboriginal people that live in Canada has come under more and more scrutiny and criticism in recent years.<sup>8</sup> It is in our interest to have a clear, acceptable, and valid set of measures so we can accept or reject such commentaries and most importantly make the changes we need to avoid the criticisms in the first place.

When we are asked why we think we should develop the Community Well-being Index (CWB), we note that such an index will allow us to measure well-being at the community level, identify determinants of well-being problems, and assess well-being trends in First Nations and other Canadian communities across time. This is a critical step in making the lives of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada better.

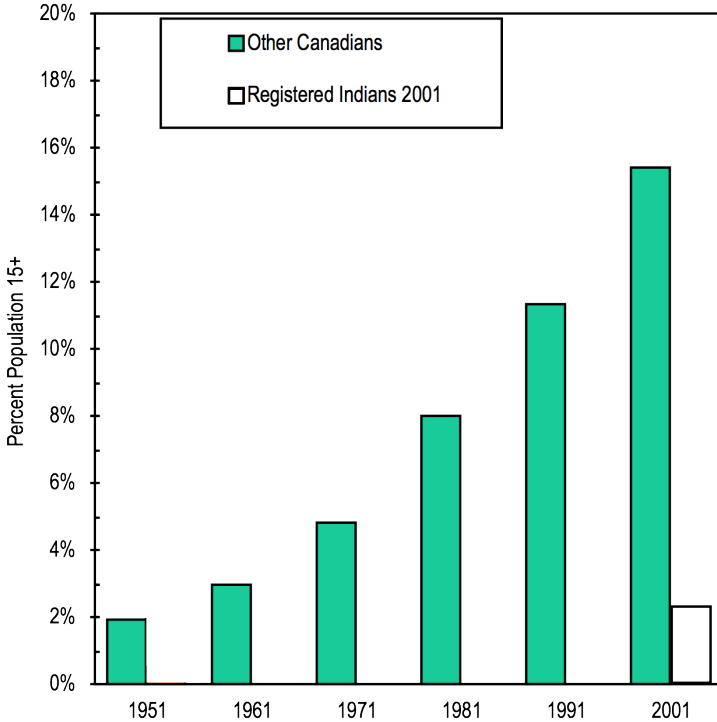
Before we explore how we have proceeded with the development of these indicators and benchmarks, it is important to give an overview of the relative deprivation that exists in Canada for Aboriginal peoples.

**Table 1.2: Key Labour Market Indicators for Aboriginals and Non-Aboriginals in Canada 2001**

	Non-Aboriginal	Registered Indian
Not in the Labour Force	28%	42%
Unemployed	7.6%	22.4%

Based on the 2001 Census Public Use Microdata File

**Figure 1.1: Comparing the Proportion of Aboriginal Population with Post-secondary Education to All Other Canadians**



## Aboriginal Conditions Today

While many Canadians are aware that the First Nations peoples face certain hardships, they are not aware of the extent of the problems nor how persistent these differences are over time. There was a disturbing indication of this in the results of a poll conducted shortly after The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report, which was released in the mid-1990s. In that survey nearly half of the Canadians polled thought that Indian reserves had similar standards of living and well-being as non-Aboriginal communities (Insight Canada 1996). This is a problem for everyone. Unless we understand the real situation we can never confront it and make real improvements.



In **Table 1.1** (page 9), we summarize some trends that we have observed over the 1981 to 2001 period, comparing some basic indicators between Registered Indians and the Canadian population.

Registered Indian life expectancy improved from 65.7 years in 1981 to 72.9 years in 2001, an increase of 7.2 years, compared with an increase of 3.1 years for the Canadian population. This means that there has been a narrowing of the gap; however, the Registered Indian population remains nearly 6 years behind the Canadian population.

We find that educational attainment also lags behind the Canadian population. While we can see overall improvement for Registered Indians between 1981 and 2001, improvement in educational attainment has not been continuous. In the 1981 to 1991 period there was a narrowing of the gap with the Canadian population in terms of the proportion with high school or higher, whereas in the 1991 to 2001 period the gap actually increased.

The average annual income of both the Registered Indian population and the Canadian population increased over the 1981 to 2001 period. In terms of dollars, there was much less improvement in the average annual income of Registered Indians between 1981 and 2001. The income gap between Registered Indians and other Canadians grew over the entire period, from \$9,714 in 1981 to \$12,395 in 2001. It is interesting to note that over the twenty-year period we see a slight improvement in the relative annual income. As a proportion of the Canadian population's average income, the Registered Indian population narrowed the average income gap over the twenty-year period. Registered Indian's average income as a proportion of the Canadian population's average income improved from 41.3% in 1981 to 44.9% in 2001. All of the improvement took place between 1991 and 2001.

If we look at labour force participation, we can see the same patterns of disadvantage.

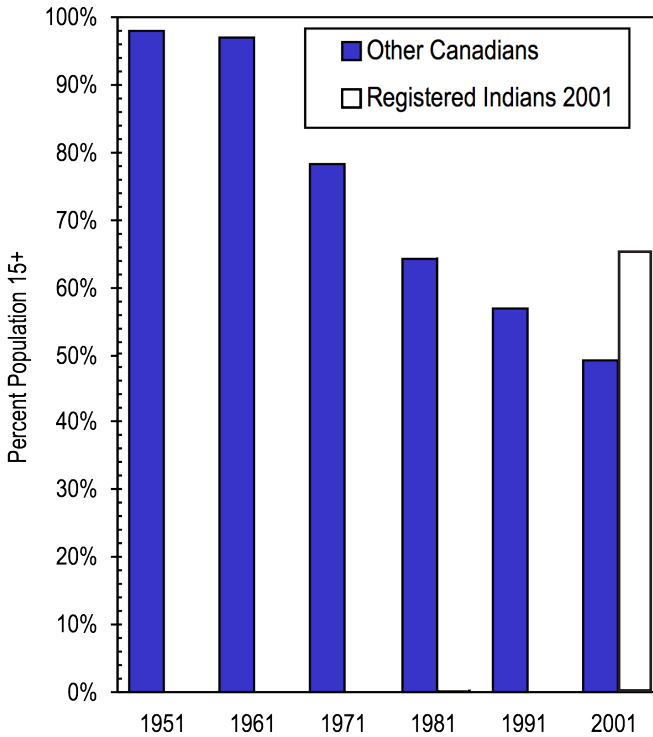
Compared to the non-Aboriginal population, many more Registered Indians have chosen (or been forced) not to seek employment, as reflected in the substantially lower labour force participation rates. As well, of those seeking employment, nearly three times as many Registered Indians are unemployed.

We argued above that there is a relative disadvantage for Aboriginal people compared to the Canadian population, and it would appear to us that the patterns of relative disadvantage extend much further than most people understand. In fact, the disadvantage we note here captures only a portion of the issues. For example, we have seen that there is a serious and on-going problem with potable water (Chapters 8 and 9 in White et al. 2006), higher rates of suicide (Chandler and LaLonde, 2004), and high rates of self-reported health problems (Spence, 2007; Chapter 10).

## **Educational Attainment: A Detailed Perspective**

We generally agree that the development of human capital is very important in the self-actualization of a person. It allows one to choose when and how to integrate

**Figure 1.2: Comparing the High School Graduation Rates of Registered Indians in 2001 to All Other Canadians Over Time**



into the economic enterprise of the country, region, or community in which one lives, and it also contributes to the production of citizenship.

There is a long scientific tradition in sociology and economics that has established that educational attainment, that is, the acquisition of human capital, is highly correlated with income, wealth, occupational diversity, and a host of other positive outcomes (see Becker, 1964 and Coleman, 1988). This relationship has been demonstrated to hold for Aboriginal people as well (Spence et al., 2007; Spence, 2007; White, Maxim, and Spence, 2004; and White, Spence, and Maxim, 2005).

If we look closely at the situation for education, we see two trends. We can see in **Figure 1.2** that the Registered Indian population (measured in 2001) has a high school completion rate roughly equal to the rate of non-Aboriginals in 1981; thus, the former are twenty years behind the latter. When we look at post-secondary education, the story is even less positive. **Figure 1.1** (page 10) shows us that the Aboriginal population are at the same levels as the general population was in the 1950s.

When we look at post-secondary education, the story is even less positive. **Figure 1.2** shows us that the Aboriginal population are at the same levels as the general population was in the 1950s. In fact, we have shown in our research that the gap has been increasing in the last decade (see Hull, 2005). If we examine **Figure 1.4** (page 14), we observe this gap in the younger cohorts. In a knowledge-based economy such as Canada's, this means that the chances for economic integration and higher well-being are going to be reduced as the century moves forward.

We wanted to raise one final disturbing issue. In **Figure 1.3** (page 14) we look at how Aboriginals (white bars), aged 18–29, compare in terms of educational attainment, when compared to a range of other ethnic groups in Canada in 2001. We can see that all Aboriginal groups have much lower rates of high school completion than the other ethnic groups. This indicates to us that there is an exceptional problem facing Aboriginal populations.

This is not the only exceptional problem that faces Aboriginal people. In a study of economic development projects by the Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), it was found that compared to the average, it takes between three and four times as long to get businesses developed on reserves (Fiscal realities 1999).

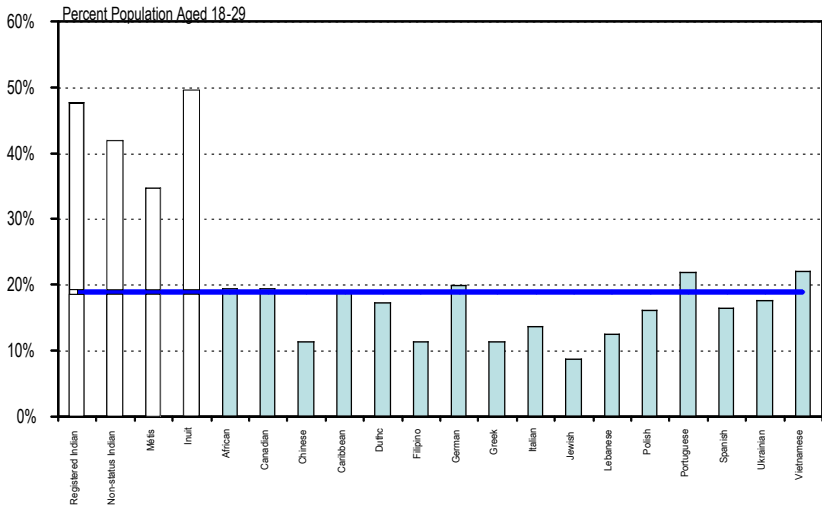
Scientists and policy makers have been faced with the ongoing problem of understanding the relative levels of human development and predicting the capacity of a community (or nation or people) to develop given the resources they have at their disposal. Those interested in development have long sought to discover techniques for measuring social and economic progress. Even more challenging is trying to pinpoint the weaknesses in the mix of resources in order to increase the likelihood of success.

Despite the fact that Canadian social policy has, for the last half-century, focused on reducing inequalities through the removal of economic barriers, First Nations and other Aboriginal people face serious issues, as we noted in our brief description of the relative deprivation facing Aboriginal people in Canada.

## **What Should We Be Learning From this Book?**

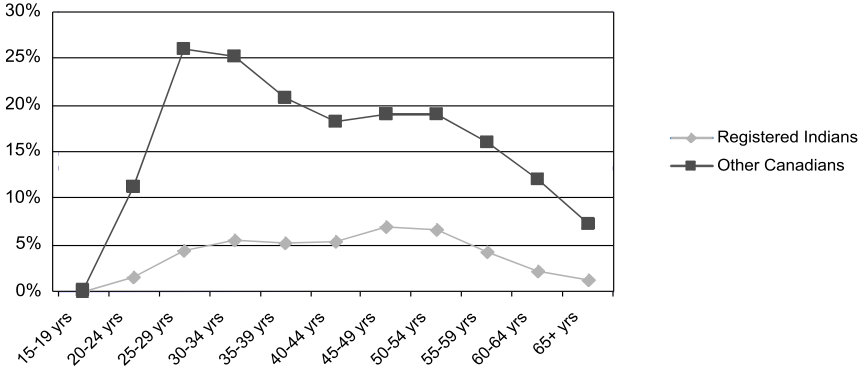
The advances we have made in well-being and development measures for First Nations can give us a better idea of where we ought to be concentrating our policy energies and resources. We remain convinced that the more articulate, clear, and valid understandings we can develop of the true conditions, as well as the causes of those conditions, the closer we will be to find the solutions. We made this argument in *Aboriginal Conditions: Research as a Foundation for Public Policy* (2003) and in our volumes originating from the Aboriginal Policy Research Conferences from 2002 and 2006 (White et al. 2007a, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2002a,

**Figure 1.3: Educational Attainment of Youth Proportion With Less Than High School, 2001**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, public use microdata file

**Figure 1.4: Proportion of Registered Indians and Other Canadians With a University Degree, 2001**



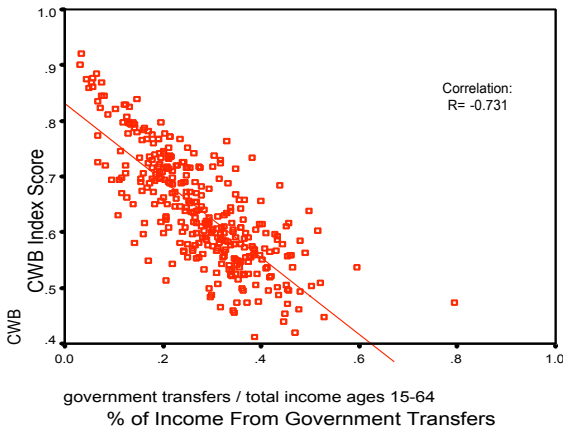
2002b, 2005, 2006, 2007b). This volume on Aboriginal well-being underscores this point as well.

We are calling on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders, policy makers and researchers to make the tough questions part of our dialogue.

Our book raises some very important and controversial issues. Here are a few of them.

We are not saying “spend more” or “spend less.” We have no idea whether \$8 billion or \$16 billion is what is necessary to solve the problems plaguing Aboriginal conditions. We are saying, “let us figure out what is best.” What is the proper

**Figure 1.5: The Relationship Between the Community Well-being Index and Government Transfers**



Preliminary analysis of 2001 data reveals that individuals living in First Nations communities with **higher well-being** are **less dependent** on government transfers.

way to approach the government transfers and claims settlements to communities? We would say that is not clear right now. Our studies of the CWB in this volume indicate that settlements of specific claims do not impact well-being in the short run. Will they or can they impact development and well-being in the long-run? That is to be determined. For example, **Figure 1.5** shows that when we looked at the relationship between transfers and the CWB scores, there is a strong negative relationship between levels of transfer payments and the well-being of a community. Thus, transfers are not, on the surface, creating equality between communities, which is what they are supposed to do. They are supposed to make up for the shortfalls experienced by communities that are suffering some disadvantage. This raises two very complex and controversial questions. Should we be subsidizing the “worst-off” communities or stratifying our transfers to reward those that are making gains? The second question is even more controversial. Are there some communities that are simply not sustainable? As hard a discussion as this would be, it is certainly not one we can avoid forever. The Kashechewan story most certainly raised the spectre of this issue. Indeed, the suggestion was made to move the community.<sup>9</sup>

The demand for tools to be able to assist all of us, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in making these choices is heartbreakingly obvious. It is not that people are incapable in some individual way; instead, it may be that history has passed some communities by. If we think of non-Aboriginal communities where a natural resource is the driving force behind the local economy, there are cases in which this resource becomes exhausted. The result is that these communities may slowly disappear in the absence of the necessary capacity for long-term sustainability. In the face of climate change, cultural change, and the corresponding change in ways of life in some Aboriginal communities, there may be communities that simply cannot be sustainable, productive, successful places to build families and live one’s life.

This whole discussion requires great care. Some Canadians might say, “Why can’t Aboriginal people simply move to another town or city if their home community is not working?” We are well aware that this is not the solution. Aboriginal people have a strong attachment to the land, they desire to have proximity to their families and clans, and many hold to the traditions and cultures of their past. Their home communities are part of their identity. This makes simply dispersing as individuals, when troubles increase, a difficult, if not impossible choice. However, our research indicates that nearly half of all reserve band members (recognized citizens of First Nations communities) live off-reserve in non-Aboriginal towns and cities (see Norris et al. 2003).

We do not know which, if any, of the First Nations and Inuit communities might be unsustainable, but we do know that we have to have the tools to supplement our understanding, so that we can discuss the problem. *This is an issue that must be debated by Aboriginal people themselves. Solutions can never work if they are imposed.* There must be a widespread buy-in to whatever course of action is decided. Intra-Aboriginal debate would be paralleled by dialogue between the Aboriginal people and the Canadian government.

The foundation of such a debate must be empirical evidence, otherwise we rest on nothing but ideologies and pre-conceived ideas, including prejudice. We have consistently identified the need to continue developing measures of well-being so that we can assess the impact of policies, examine human development and well-being over time, and ground the many policy debates that we are having or—in the case of the above questions—should be having.

We have not touched all the issues in our introduction. That would take an entire book in and of itself. We can say that the policy implications are manifold. This book represents the best we have achieved thus far. We welcome the responses we will receive—both positive and negative.

Have we stopped our work? Not at all. Even as this book goes to press our research teams in the First Nations Cohesion Project at The University of Western Ontario and in the Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate at INAC are working on ways to enhance the well-being measure. We believe the next step is to determine whether we can capture culture and intra-Aboriginal inequality in the measure. The hard slogging work is being done to test these assertions. We hope that in the next two years we will make even greater headway. We also continue our work trying to make these measures universally applicable so other countries and other Aboriginal people can utilize them for their benefit.

## **Outline of the Book**

This book is divided into three distinct sections. Section One deals with issues related to measuring well-being. It contains this introductory chapter and one by Martin Cooke. Cooke explores some of the major conceptual and methodological issues that underpin our approach to measuring development and well-being.

In his chapter he describes the rationale behind the development of the Registered Indian Human Development Index (HDI) and the Community Well-being Index (CWB) and how they can be used to assess the well-being of Aboriginal people in Canada. The measures developed by our research teams are compared to other composite indicators of well-being. Cooke carefully outlines that these are relatively simple measures, based on the comparable data currently available, and he concludes that we will be enhancing the measures in the future. He notes a very important caveat that "...these measures do not reflect the totality of well-being, and may particularly omit some aspects that are important to Aboriginal peoples." With these limitations in mind, we can still conclude that "... the dimensions that are captured: overall health, education, and income in the HDI and labour force activity and housing quality in the CWB, are objectively important aspects of quality of life. Improvements in these indicators would reflect unambiguously positive advances in the conditions in which people live, and are worthy goals for policy." Cooke concludes that one of the tremendous advances of this framework is that "these measures do allow comparison between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations and communities and the construction of reasonably reliable time series," and this "allows us to address one of our main questions, which is whether social and economic conditions have been improving for Aboriginal people in Canada. They will also allow us to undertake more analytic research, in order to identify the specific factors that influence well-being, and to identify 'what works'."

In Section Two of the book, we assess and report our work on the Human Development Index (HDI). It begins with a chapter by Martin Cooke and Dan Beavon in which they outline how the United Nations HDI has been applied to First Nations communities. They set out to create a picture of how the health, educational attainment, and income of the Registered Indian population has changed over time using the Registered Indian Human Development Index (HDI). The analysis spans a twenty-year period from 1981 to 2001, comparing Registered Indians to the general population of Canada and documenting differences by on- and off-reserve residence, region and province.

Beavon and Cooke find that the Human Development Index scores for Registered Indians and the general Canadian population improved over the 1981–2001 period; the improvements occurred at a faster rate for the former than the latter, but important gaps still remain. Also, they reveal important differences by province with notable problems in the Prairie region. They conclude, however, that the "general picture painted by these measures is therefore one of inconsistent and uneven progress, both in terms of the temporal trends and regional variation." They caution us that "although the general improvement in these measures of economic, social, and physical well-being is clearly good news, these results also show that future improvement should not be taken for granted." We will have to work hard to be able make headway in the future if we want the gaps to narrow.

Chapter 4, by Martin Cooke and Kate Hano, examines gender equality and well-being. They examine a range of issues related to the HDI and beyond, such as occupational distributions. The chapter provides an examination of First Nation women in comparison to men and other women, as well as tracks changes over time.

They conclude that there is evidence of improving gender equality, but the situation is somewhat mixed. They find that "... women's scores have improved on nearly all of the indicators, including income, education, and representation in management and professional and technical occupations, for both the Registered Indian and reference populations. On several of these measures, this resulted in women narrowing the gap with men, particularly in representation among management occupations." However, they note that the gap between men and women changed with respect to life expectancy. Historically, men experience lower life expectancy than women, but in recent years men have gained ground.

Finally, there are many implications for policy that are outlined. One particular issue raised is the increasing advantage that Registered Indian women have in primary and secondary education, compared to Registered Indian men. This stands out as a growing problem for men that we must explore.

In Chapter 5, Martin Cooke, Francis Mitrou, David Lawrence, Éric Guimond, and Dan Beavon develop an international comparison of the application of the United Nations Human Development Index to Aboriginal people in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. Cooke et al. analyze the countries to determine if there have been improvements in terms of the gaps between Aboriginal people and the non-Aboriginal populations during the decade 1990–2000. The team uses the same methodology as in the Canadian studies reported in this book. The countries make good comparators given their origins as mainly British colonies, their shared language, and the presence of sizeable indigenous populations.

The conclusions they draw are complex given the many elements compared across the four countries. Overall well-being, measured using the HDI methodology, improved for all Aboriginal people in these four countries. That said, across the sub indices, such as education, income, life expectancy, and others, there was great variation. For example, life expectancy rose in all countries but Australia.

The researchers write that "despite some improvements, the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on several of these indicators increased." They find that Aboriginal people in Canada and the United States had higher levels of overall well-being than did Australian Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders or the Maori of New Zealand. However, "in Canada, the gap in well-being was particularly large between Registered Indians and other Canadians, although the total Canadian Aboriginal population had higher levels of human development." They note that "New Zealand stands out for the rapid improvement in the well-being of the Maori, particularly on educational and income measures ... characterized as poor but improving ... [T]he US had consistently high levels of human



development among the Aboriginal population, and small gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are generally the largest in Australia, and may be growing wider.”

The chapter gives us important insights into patterns that exist across the four countries and also where we might learn from the practices of others. It also demonstrates that our work can be applied in the international scene, allowing interesting comparisons and enabling us to understand the particular situations of indigenous people globally.

Part Three is an exploration of the Community Well-being Index. There are five chapters that look at a wide range of issues and report substantial research findings.

The opening Chapter, “The Community Well-being Index (CWB): Well-being in First Nations Communities, Present, Past, and Future,” prepared by Erin O’Sullivan and Mindy McHardy, explains the genesis of the measure, details the methodologies employed, and reports the results of the investigation of First Nation communities. This chapter represents a summary of many teams’ research efforts. It is a single source for many studies that went into the development of the CWB and contains results of many applied research projects.

The chapter reports many key findings. A national overview comparing First Nation communities with non-Aboriginal communities across all of the components of the CWB—income, housing, labour force participation, and education—is provided. Regional differences and temporal changes from 1981–2001 are also given strict attention. The detailed presentation of methods and data analysis leads to the following conclusion: while there have been improvements in the well-being of First Nations over the last two decades, there remains a major gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal well-being.

O’Sullivan and McHardy conclude that we cannot assume the gap will gradually disappear. Importantly, they note that this is not the entire story concerning well-being. They point out that while we are confident that this represents an accurate assessment of the conditions, there is much more sophistication to be developed. Indeed, we are getting closer to being able to understand the dynamics at play in the process of well-being development and will continue to improve our capacity.

We note that even as we publish this book, we are already examining whether intra-community inequality might have an effect we can measure, and if it would be wise to integrate an inequality component into the CWB measure.

In Chapter 7, Senécal, O’Sullivan, Guimond, and Uppal use the HDI and the CWB to assess the well-being of the Inuit people of Canada. Inuit communities are compared to all First Nations and all other Canadian communities, regardless of size and location. Senécal et al., illustrate the marked disparity in socio-economic well-being between Inuit communities and Other Canadian communities. Their analysis also highlights the great disparities that exist between different

Inuit communities; that is, some communities experience relatively high levels of well-being while others are facing serious difficulties.

In Chapter 8, White and Maxim utilize their matching communities analysis, which involves matching each reserve (First Nation communities) with its best matched non-Aboriginal community, to develop a pairwise comparison between reserves and the matched non-reserve communities across four zones of remoteness. The CWB reveals a disparity in well-being between First Nations communities and other Canadian communities. This study examines the degree to which that disparity is a function of the small size and remote locations of many First Nations communities, as opposed to the fact that they are reserves.

Overall, they found that only a small portion of the disparity between reserves and other communities can be attributed to either location or population size. Once gross geography is taken into account, they notice that reserve communities closer to urban areas are more similar to their non-reserve matched community than are reserves in more isolated parts of the country. With few notable exceptions, the disparities between reserves and their non-reserve community matches increase with geographic isolation.

Chapter 9 tries to unravel an extremely important complex and difficult problem. Jerry White, Nicholas Spence, and Paul Maxim pose the question, "Does the settlement of specific claims have a direct effect on the well-being of First Nation communities?" Trying to assess this is difficult because change takes place over time and the data are not easily found nor analyzed. They conclude that there is little evidence to support that settling claims leads to improvements in well-being. However, they note that there may be many explanations for this result. First, the settlement of a claim today may not result in the flow of resources for some time. Second, those resources need to be invested, and seeing a return from those investments could take an extended period of time. Also, there is the issue of how the claim is settled. For example, if the claim results in a cash settlement that flows to individuals, it may have only a temporary impact; whereas, if the First Nations community invests in business development, there could be long term employment, which would increase income and the measures would reflect that change.

The lack of a significant positive relationship between specific claims settlement and increases in well-being is troubling, but the researchers state that they will continue to monitor this relationship and develop more sophisticated approaches for future assessments.

The last chapter is by Susan Wingert, who uses the EKOS research firm's First Nation community survey data to assess the well-being of those communities and compare it to the CWB analysis. Working with the First Nations Cohesion Project at Western, Wingert sets out to examine the relationship between objective measures of community well-being and the subjective assessments of residents who live in those First Nations communities. Wingert notes that "we are interested in determining whether there are patterns in residents' responses depending

on whether they live in a below-average, average, or above-average CWB community.” She addresses three research questions: “1) What do residents of First Nations communities identify as the top priorities for their communities, and do they vary by CWB scores? 2) Is there an association between residents’ subjective assessments of their community and its CWB score? 3) Is there a relationship between community well-being, as measured by the CWB, and subjective dimensions of individual well-being?” She was looking for any correspondence between the self-reported health indicators and the CWB. This would give us confidence that the CWB is in part a proxy measure of community well-being. In the case of discrepancies, it calls on us to find explanations, and increase our understanding of the interaction of external conditions and the individual assessments.

She concludes that the CWB captures key issues for community residents. Among many assessments that she makes, Wingert reports that “in general, we find the expected pattern with above average CWB community respondents providing more favorable assessments, with the exception of education. Further investigation is needed to uncover whether the quality of education is relatively poor in high CWB communities or whether there are higher expectations.”

One of many interesting findings is that respondents in higher CWB categories report more positive perceptions of themselves and their lives. This gives us another indication of the validity of the CWB.

## Endnotes

- 1 This phrase is often abbreviated as “POGG.” These principles are from the introduction to section 91 of the *Constitution Act*, 1867.
- 2 The Oka crisis was the result of a land dispute between the Mohawk community of Kanésatake and the town of Oka, in Quebec during the summer of 1990. This crisis was sparked by a Municipality of Oka decision to extend a nine-hole golf course on land that the Mohawks claimed was, and had always been, theirs. The 39 hectares of land in question included a Native cemetery and parts of a pine forest. Several books provide detailed accounts of the Oka crisis (e.g., MacLaine et al., 1991; Alfred, 1995).
- 3 During the 65-year period following confederation (1867–1933), Canada’s military was engaged 132 times in law enforcement activities in order to restore civil order (Pariseau, 1973; Haslip, 2006). However, since 1933, Canada’s military has been used only twice to restore civil order: the October crisis of 1970 and the Oka crisis of 1990. It is interesting to note that the Canadian Army mobilized over 2,000 troops to restore order in Oka, yet during that same summer in 1990, Canada sent slightly less than 1,000 soldiers to fight in Iraq. The Oka crisis drew worldwide attention, catapulting native land rights into the spotlight.
- 4 This royal commission was established in 1991 to address many of the Aboriginal issues that had come to light as a result of the Oka crisis and the failed Meech Lake Accord. The Commission culminated in a final report published in 1996. The final report consisted of five volumes and the 4,000 pages represent the most in-depth study ever undertaken of the historical relations between the Canadian government and Aboriginal peoples.
- 5 After failed negotiations, 400 tactical assault members of the RCMP, backed by helicopters and armored personnel carriers supplied by the military, were deployed against the Aboriginal occupants and their supporters. In one particularly tense moment, the RCMP fired thousands of rounds during a 45-minute blaze of gunfire (Steele, 1997).
- 6 Wilkes (2004) analyzed media reports and noted that there were roughly 100 Aboriginal occupations or protests between 1968 and 2000. Using the same methodology, but different criteria, Clairmont and Potts (2006) found 616 incidents between 1951 and 2000. Chapter two of the Ipperwash Inquiry provides an excellent primer on Aboriginal occupations (Linden, 2007).
- 7 In some respects, this call for action against poverty was probably an off-shoot of the Kelowna Accord. The Kelowna Accord is the common name given to a working paper entitled “Strengthening Relationships and Closing the Gap” which resulted from 18 months of roundtable consultations culminating at the First Ministers’ Meeting in Kelowna in November, 2005. This working paper established targets to improve the education, employment, and living conditions for Aboriginal peoples through additional governmental funding. This accord was never signed, nor were monies ever budgeted for it, before the minority government of Paul Martin fell. The subsequent minority government of Steven Harper identified different priorities with respect to Aboriginal affairs. While the Kelowna Accord is clearly a political hot potato, Wikipedia provided a brief, but balanced discussion of it at press time.
- 8 See for example: Amnesty International’s criticism of Aboriginal womens’ treatment in Canada <[www.carleton.ca/jmc/cnews/27012006/n3.shtml](http://www.carleton.ca/jmc/cnews/27012006/n3.shtml)>; the United Nations Human Rights Commission’s criticisms of Canada over serious concerns about human rights performance with regards to Aboriginal peoples <[www.prisonjustice.ca/starkravenarticles/UNhuman-rights\\_1105.html](http://www.prisonjustice.ca/starkravenarticles/UNhuman-rights_1105.html)>; and accusations of self-interest in blocking UN human rights for indigenous peoples. <[www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20070606/indigenous\\_rights\\_070606/20070606?hub=Canada](http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20070606/indigenous_rights_070606/20070606?hub=Canada)>. Given our treatment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada some see it to our advantage to mute the UN.
- 9 This has unsuccessfully been tried in the past. See White (2003) for a discussion of the Davis Inlet and Port Harrison relocations.

## References

- Alfred, G.R. 1995. *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Beavon, D. and Cook, M. 2003. "An Application of the United Nations Human Development Index to Registered Indians in Canada, 1996." In White, J.P., Maxim, P., and Beavon, D. (Eds.). *Aboriginal Conditions: Research as a Foundation for Public Policy*. Vancouver: UBC Press. 201–221.
- Becker, G. 1964. *Human Capital*. New York: The National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Burrows, J. 2005. "Crown and Aboriginal Occupations of Land: A History & Comparison," background paper prepared for the Ipperwash Inquiry, October, 2005.
- Clairmont, D. and Potts, J. 2006. "For the Nonce: Policing and Aboriginal Occupations and Protests," background paper prepared for the Ipperwash Inquiry, May, 2006.
- Chandler, M. and Lalonde, C. 2004. "Transforming Whose Knowledge? Exchanging Whose Best Practices? On Knowing about Indigenous Knowledge and Aboriginal Suicide." In White, J.P., Maxim, P., and Beavon, D. *Aboriginal Policy Research: Setting the Agenda for Change, Vol. 2*, edited by Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc. 111–124.
- Coleman, J. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology*. 94 Supplement.
- Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. 1998. *Population Projections of Registered Indians, 1996–2021*. Ottawa: DIAND.
- Fiscal Realities. 1999. "Expanding Commercial Activity on First Nations Land: Getting First Nation Land Development Regulations Right." Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
- Griffin, D. (Ed.). 1988. *Spirituality and Society: Postmodern Visions*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Gurr T.R. 1970. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Haslip, S. 2002. "The Bisons Now Hunt the Indians: A Critical Consideration of Contemporary Provisions Providing for the Use of Military Force Against Aboriginal Peoples (in Canada)." LL.M., University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law.
- Hull, J. 2005. *Post-secondary Education and Labor Market Outcomes: Canada, 2001*. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
- Insight Canada Research Inc. 1996. *Perspectives Canada*. 5(1).
- Linden, S.B. 2007. *Report of the Ipperwash Inquiry*. Toronto: Publications Ontario.
- MacLaine, C. and Boxendale, M.S. 1991. *This Land Is Our Land: The Mohawk Revolt at Oka*. Montreal: Optimum Publishing International.
- Maxim, P. and White, J.P. 2003. "Toward an Index of Community Capacity: Predicting Community Potential for Successful Program Transfer." In White, J.P., Maxim, P., and Beavon, D. (Eds.). *Aboriginal Conditions: Research as a Foundation for Public Policy*, Vancouver: UBC Press. 248–263.
- Maxim, P., White, J.P., and Beavon, D. "Dispersion and Polarization of Income among Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal Canadians." In *Aboriginal Conditions: The Research Foundations for Public Policy*. Vancouver: UBC Press. 2003. 222–247
- Nault, F., Chen, J., George, M.V., and Norris, M.J. 1993. *Population Projections of Registered Indians, 1991–2016*. Report prepared by the Population Projections Section, Demography Division, Statistics Canada. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
- Norris, M.J., Cooke, M., and Clatworthy, S. 2003. "Aboriginal Mobility and Migration Patterns and the Policy Implications." In White, J.P., Maxim, P., and Beavon, D. (Eds.). *Aboriginal Conditions: Research as a Foundation for Public Policy*, Vancouver: UBC Press. 108–130.
- Norris, M.J., Kerr, D., and Nault, F. 1995. *Projections of the Population with Aboriginal Identity in Canada, 1991–2016*. Report prepared by the Population Projections Section, Demography Division, Statistics Canada, for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.
- Pariseau, Major J.J.B. 1973. *Disorders, Strikes and Disasters: Military Aid to the Civil Power in Canada, 1867–1933*. Ottawa: Directorate of History.

- Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Canada Communication Group Publishing, Ottawa, Ontario, 1996.
- Rowe, G. and Norris, M.J. 1995. *Mortality Predictions of Registered Indians, 1982 to 1996*. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
- Sallee, D. 2006. "Quality of Life of Aboriginal People in Canada." *IRPP Choices*. 12(6).
- Spence, N. 2007. *New Vistas on the Income Inequality–Health Debate: The Case of Canada’s First Nations Reserve Population*. PhD Dissertation. Department of Sociology. London: The University of Western Ontario.
- Spence, N., White, J.P., and Maxim, P. 2007. "Modeling Community Determinants of Canada’s First Nation’s Educational Outcomes." *Canadian Ethnic Studies*. (Forthcoming).
- Statistics Canada. 1984. *Life Tables, Canada and Provinces 1980–82*. Catalogue no. 84-532. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Statistics Canada. 1990. *Life Tables, Canada and Provinces, 1985–87*. Health Reports Supplement 13. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Statistics Canada. 1995. *Life Tables, Canada and Provinces, 1990–92*. Catalogue no. 84-537. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Statistics Canada. 1998. *Life Expectancy Abridged Life Tables, at Birth and Age 65, by Sex, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, and Health Regions*. CANISM Table 102-0016. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Statistics Canada. 2000. *The Consumer Price Index*. Catalogue no. 62-010-X1B. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Verma, R., Michalowski, M., and Gauvin, R.P. 2003. *Abridged Life Tables for Registered Indians in Canada, 1976–80 to 1996–2000*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, May 1–3, Minneapolis.
- Statistics Canada Census Data custom tabulations; Statistics Canada 1984, 1990, 1995, 1998, 2005a.
- Steele, S. "Gustafsen Lake Standoff: 15 Charged." *Maclean’s Magazine*, June 2, 1997.
- Walker, I. and Smith, H. (Eds.). 2002. *Relative Deprivation: Development, Specification and Integration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- White, J.P., Anderson, E., Cornett, W., and Beavon, D. (Eds.). 2007a. *Aboriginal Policy Research: Moving Forward, Making a Difference*. Vol. 5. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- White, J.P., Beavon, D., and Maxim, P. 2003. *Aboriginal Conditions: The Research Foundations for Public Policy*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- White, J.P., Maxim, P., and Spence, N. 2004a. *Permission to Develop: Aboriginal Treaties, Case Law and Regulations*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- White, J.P., Maxim, P., and Spence, N. 2004b. "Educational Attainment of Aboriginal Canadians." In White, J.P., Maxim, P., and Beavon, D. (Eds.). 2004. *Aboriginal Policy Research: Setting the Agenda for Change*. Vol. 1. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- White, J.P., Maxim, P., and Beavon, D. (Eds.). 2002a. *Aboriginal Policy Research: Setting the Agenda for Change*. Volume I. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- White, J.P., Maxim, P., and Beavon, D. (Eds.). 2002b. *Aboriginal Policy Research: Setting the Agenda for Change*. Volume 2. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- White, J.P., Spence, N., and P. Maxim. 2005. "Social capital and educational attainment among Aboriginal peoples: Canada, Australia and New Zealand." In *Policy Research Initiative Social Capital Project Series, Social Capital in Action: Thematic Studies*. Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, Government of Canada. 66–81.
- White, J.P., Wingert, S., Beavon, D., and Maxim, P. (Eds.). 2006. *Aboriginal Policy Research: Moving Forward, Making a Difference*. Volume 3. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- White, J.P., Wingert, S., Beavon, D., and Maxim, P. (Eds.). 2007b. *Aboriginal Policy Research: Moving Forward, Making a Difference*. Volume 4. Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.