

# **Aboriginal Economic Development in Urban Areas: A Framework for Comparative Analysis**

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## *Abstract*

The globalizing and urbanizing contexts of Western societies impact Indigenous communities in a variety of ways. This paper deals with the complex definitions that arise in work with urban Indigenous communities, the historical differences between Indigenous experiences in the United States and Australia, and the interplay between Indigenous cultures and the economy. The final section of the paper draws these themes together through an analysis of Diane Smith's research with the Redfern Aboriginal Corporation in central Sydney, Australia. This comparison of urban Indigenous experiences in Australia and the United States clearly evidences the need for further research in the field of Indigenous economic development in urban areas.

## *Introduction*

Across the globe and throughout the course of history, colonialism has led to the near universal practice of removing economic control of land and resources from Indigenous Peoples. Since the days of Columbus, and later Cook, the struggle for Indigenous self-determination has been inextricably linked to

Indigenous tenure of economic resources. This paper seeks to synthesize past research of Australian Aboriginal economic development and compare and contrast it to events in the United States. Three broad themes will be used to address the relative similarities and differences between the Australian and American experience the complexities involved in defining a community as 'urban' or 'urbanized,' the impact of history in determining differences between North American and Australian experiences, and the interplay between culture and economics that can be seen in urban Indigenous communities. This analysis will provide both the Australian and American reader with a framework for comparative analysis. The paper will also provide a detailed case study of Aboriginal experiences of urban economic development in what has been referred to as "Australia's black capital" – Redfern, Sydney.<sup>1</sup>

Before launching into the details of the three themes and the case study, it seems necessary to lay down some basic information for the benefit of clarity. The research for this paper has been directed by several important concerns and has been undertaken to provide principles that can support economic development in urban Indigenous communities. As the research continues, it will provide an international perspective that offers fresh ideas to urban Indigenous leaders and organizations. These findings can be used to refine current economic development projects and to start new ones. The nature of the research has been determined by a significant point made by Jane Jacobs regarding trends in urban qualitative analysis. She argues that the majority of research done in urban spheres is textual analysis, primarily of media representations.<sup>2</sup> Her advocacy of a return to the "phenomenological/empirical field" is a call this article addresses in this specific area of urban economic development for Indigenous communities.

The current state of research in the field of Indigenous economic development gives further weight to Jacob's analysis. A significant proportion of resources in the United States, along with much of the research in Australia, reveal the field to be peopled primarily by researchers who are business academics first and Indigenous advocates second. While there has been a variety of research undertaken by public policy bodies in both the United States and Australia,<sup>3</sup> it is quite evident that urban focused literature resides almost exclusively with business professors.<sup>4</sup> This raises a significant problem regarding the perspective from which research is pursued. The issue of economic development as assimilation will be addressed in some detail when the third theme is introduced, culture and economics.

The final point that bears consideration when assessing or pursuing work in this field are the obstacles that the researcher faces. Limited access to resources came in two main forms. First, media Government sources offer limited details of actual economic development programs because of privacy concerns. John Allert makes this point in some detail regarding government supported programs in urban centers like Perth, Western Australia. The Office of Aboriginal Economic Development would not release business contacts because all of the businesses

they had on record had applied for financial assistance.<sup>5</sup> This situation raises the problem of 'invisible' economic development in urban areas as it is harder to identify and study than economic development undertaken in rural and remote areas. These introductory points clearly indicate the need for and difficulty of research in this area. Urban economic development is a critical step to greater self-determination for Indigenous Peoples in Australia, the United States, and all over the world.

### ***Complexities of Definition – What Is 'Urban'?***

This study will address three key themes in the context of urban economic development. This section, regarding the complexities of actually defining 'urban' communities, is not simply about semantics, but will actually be the foundation of the remainder of the article.

The Parliament of Australia has, in recent years, put significant resources into the issue of urban dwelling Aboriginal people.<sup>6</sup> In the past decade, two sizeable reports have been produced by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. *Mainly Urban*, the first report, was produced in 1992 under the more liberal Labor government in a context of rapid developments in the area of Aboriginal self-determination. It provides interesting insights into government perspectives on Aboriginal economic development.<sup>7</sup> The second report, *We Can Do It!*, produced under the conservative Coalition government of 2001 bears a striking resemblance to the observations made in 1992.<sup>8</sup> It is indicative of a new policy environment where Aboriginal 'self-sufficiency' is more important to policy makers and hence the importance of economic development has moved up the agenda. Both reports draw together important research into definitions of 'urban' Indigenous communities.

Two key points are made by both *Mainly Urban* and *We Can Do It!*: first, that there is some complexity in defining what is actually urban and second that there needs to be a range of definitions applied to 'non-remote' Aboriginal people in order to effectively deal with the diverse issues faced by urban Indigenous people. *Mainly Urban* identifies "gray areas" between those areas that are "clearly urban" (for example, major metropolitan areas) and those "small remote communities [that] are clearly not urban."<sup>9</sup> *We Can Do It!* extends this analysis by incorporating the submission from Professor A. Hamilton from Macquarie University who argued that "[t]here is a continuum rather than an absolute distinction between urban and non urban contexts."<sup>10</sup> This idea of a 'continuum' between urban and remote is the most helpful and broadly applicable principle that the two reports provide. It is actually a principle elucidated by Terry Straus and Debra Valentino when they write that "'[u]rban' is not a kind of American Indian. It is an experience, one that most American Indian people today have had."<sup>11</sup> This shows that in both the United States and Australia there needs to be a reassessment of how the term 'urban' is handled.

In turning to the second issue of providing a range of definitions for urban dwelling Indigenous people, it is clear that some policy and discourse development has occurred in the decade since 1992. The Committee quoted only the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in their 1992 analysis of the definition of urban. That definition provided the following four categories of Aboriginal communities:

- metropolitan urban – those people resident in metropolitan cities
- rural urban – those people living within or adjoining normal residential areas of non-Aboriginal country towns irrespective of size (inclusive of town campers)
- traditional urban – those people associated with towns located in remote areas where traditional attachments are still predominant;
- remote traditional – remote homeland centers.<sup>12</sup>

These definitions are important for subsequent analysis will show the adverse impact of government definitions that distinguished urban communities from 'traditional' Aboriginal society. These definitions can lead to an assumption that urban Aboriginal communities are assimilated. This assumption is both untrue and, when applied to policy development, may eventually be self-fulfilling, against the wishes of urban Indigenous communities and their members. By the time *We can do it!* was handed down in 2001 there was a much more detailed analysis of these complexities. The report examines problems with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition of an urban area as one with a population of more than one-thousand.<sup>13</sup> While *Mainly Urban* does raise the issue, *We Can Do It!* deals with its complexity and points out the fact that "the definition incorporates people living in a wide range of circumstances." It contrasts the experiences of Aboriginal people in "predominantly non-Indigenous communities ranging in size from small country towns to capital cities" with "traditionally oriented Aboriginals living in predominantly Indigenous communities in remote areas, some of which have populations of up to 2,500 people."<sup>14</sup> The later report evidences a greater attention to the complexities involved in urban Aboriginal communities but discourse like 'traditionally oriented' evidences a general approach that denies Indigenous cultural uniqueness in urban Aboriginal peoples.

There is a third point made by the Standing Committee that is only dealt with in *We Can Do It!* It relates to the range of causes that explain Aboriginal presence in urban communities. The report furnishes four categories of urban Indigenous people as submitted by the Northern Territory government, they are:

- long term urban dwellers, sometimes for several generations, including the traditional owners of the land on which the urban center is based;
- those who have permanently relocated from other areas in search of different or better opportunities;

- those (often with their families) forced to relocate to urban centers, often unwillingly, to access specialist services, such as renal dialysis;
- medium and short term visitors who may visit for specific purposes but do not intend to stay permanently.<sup>15</sup>

The Standing Committee identified the diversity of the urban Aboriginal community through this analysis. It will be seen later in the study that a diverse community can still develop significant cultural strength.

The analysis of these government reports followed in the footsteps of significant work done by Australian academics in the field of urban Indigenous studies. In 1988, Ian Keen edited a detailed work examining Aboriginal experiences in urban settings. The book collected several works over a twenty year period that defined Aboriginal experiences in terms of culture rather than numbers.<sup>16</sup> The notion of a 'settled' community was defined in the context of Aboriginal contact (as an individual or a community) with non-Indigenous society rather than in terms of simple numerical population analysis. This is particularly significant to the structure of the Australian population where small "settlements" of only a few hundred can be only miles away from major metropolitan centers.<sup>17</sup> Julie Carter addresses the fraught social identity for Aboriginal people even in a settlement of only two hundred people. She describes Aboriginal people in this settlement as an "outcast group lacking any common ground with either impoverished whites or Aborigines in remote Australia" asking the question of how they can "accommodate the marginalized social identity which wider society accords them."<sup>18</sup> Jerry Schwab supports this analysis by arguing that Aboriginal experience of "settled" Australia is the norm even in places of low actual population.<sup>19</sup> Cultural clash thus provides a deeper level of analysis in identifying urban communities. It will be seen as the study progresses that this situation poses significant obstacles for Aboriginal Australians in urban settings.

### ***Differences Between Australia and the United States – the Impact of History***

The key differential between the Australian and the North American experiences comes in the relationship that government policies created between Indigenous governance and Indigenous funding. In the United States and Canada, issues of Indigenous funding have been resolved through different methods of Indigenous governance, indeed the two are inseparable. The consequences of legislative actions such as the Indian Reorganization Act (1934) led to a further cementing of the relationship between Indigenous governance and funding.<sup>20</sup> The situation in Australia is almost the complete opposite. Part of this is because until 1967, the constitution prohibited the federal government from making specific legislation for Aboriginal people. This historical disadvantage means that the development of comparable Indigenous funding regimes did not occur in Australia until the early 1970s. The idea of self-determination developed in Australia at the same time, but actual self-governance

was not initiated in any comprehensive fashion until ATSIC was established in 1991.<sup>21</sup> This beginning, in and of itself, was problematic when it is considered that ATSIC began as an amalgam of the federal government's Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) and the Aboriginal Development Commission. It was essentially a white man's bureaucracy with Aboriginal commissioners at the top with no direct control over the employees of the organization. None of this is to say that ATSIC is a completely useless organization which in fact performs a remarkably similar function to the peak Indigenous funding organizations in Canada and the United States.<sup>22</sup> The key difference is how these organizations are able to affect Indigenous economic development.

This first issue raises the question of creating sustainable Aboriginal enterprise, and eventually a sustainable Aboriginal economy. Greg Crough expresses fear that even in an environment of funding grants there is "the distinct possibility that many Indigenous organizations will not survive in a competitive tendering environment."<sup>23</sup> His analysis shows that eighty percent of ATSIC funds are spent on programs that were established before it came into existence.<sup>24</sup> This highlights the fact that spending priorities have not changed significantly between the DAA and ATSIC administration of Indigenous funding. The current status of funding for Indigenous organizations in Australia indicates that Indigenous communities in remote and urban areas are more reliant on government funds than they are in the United States. With limited mining monies and no casinos, remote and urban communities alike are suffering from a lack of available funds to create sustainable economic enterprise.

The next significant issue in the historical differential is the issue of land. The injustices concerning Aboriginal land title in Australia are worse in comparison to the issues of American Indian land title in the United States. The treaties that were breached by the United States were never signed in Australia. The seemingly conservative decisions of the Marshall Trilogy in the 1830s, regarding Aboriginal title to land found no parallel, or even acknowledgement, in Australian case law until the *Mabo* decision of 1992. Native title has achieved a great deal in a short time in Australia but has not had the benefits of sovereignty and trust status that American Indians have utilized. This means that the struggle of urban American Indian communities in the United States, because of a lack of land and a lack of sovereignty, is the struggle that all Aboriginal communities endure in Australia.

The issues of funding and land provide a natural context for the assumption of urban advantage in Indigenous economic development. The pattern in Australia is thus the inverse of that in the United States. In the United States, the advantages reaped by "casino tribes" in particular, make the discourse assume that urban American Indian people, if they are acknowledged at all, are disadvantaged because of their lack of funding, land, and sovereignty. In Australia, the primary considerations are geographic and cultural. The following quote by Lawrence Udo-Ekpo effectively evidences the Australian attitude:

The traditional land owners may remain covertly and culturally powerful, but it is those educated Aborigines who possess complex problem-solving skills and knowledge of the market who matter now, not the politics of sub-cultural nationalism.<sup>25</sup>

Leaving the Euro-centric discourse to one side, it is clear that some Australian academics view remote Aboriginal people as out of touch and only empowered in an intangible “covert” way. This is a far cry from the empowered American Indian reservations with effective and multi-faceted economic development strategies.<sup>26</sup> Smith gives more detail to these assumptions of the Australian community that urban Aboriginal people are “more attached to the mainstream economy and, therefore, able to establish more ready access to urban labor markets.”<sup>27</sup> This assumption is applied in recommendations by both the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the Standing Committee into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs that “sunset” targets be set for funding support to urban Indigenous enterprises and labor market programs.<sup>28</sup> It is an assumption that does not always fit the reality of the urban Indigenous experience and hence, for the purposes of this article, will be referred to as the “myth of urban advantage.” The paper will also provide a detailed case study of Aboriginal experiences of urban economic development in what has been referred to as “Australia’s black capital” – Redfern, Sydney. This myth is at the heart of the historical differences between Australia and the United States when it comes to urban economic development for Indigenous Peoples.

### *Culture and Economics*

Having laid the groundwork, this study turns to what is the most fraught, and intriguing of the three themes drawn out in the literature on Indigenous economic development in urban areas. To paint the full picture of urban Indigenous culture and economics, the diverse literature on many subjects of note in urban American Indian and Aboriginal communities will be addressed first; second, the “Aboriginalization” of the economy in Australia in particular; and finally, the fine-line between community development and assimilation.

Indigenous culture, in a pan-Aboriginal (or American Indian) urban environment, is both dynamic and distinctive. Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike have expressed the view that urban Indigenous people have somehow “lost” their Aboriginal or American Indian identity. Terry Straus and Debra Valentino argue that urban American Indians in the United States “necessarily engaged in the project of acknowledging and creating common ground, common culture, and common identity” because they were, in a sense, “inventing community.”<sup>29</sup> The notion of “inventing community” is also evidenced in the Australian context by Schwab. He points out that “identity among most Aborigines in Adelaide is fundamentally a matter of kinship” but that “the influx

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of Aboriginal people from interstate and distant country areas has created a situation where kinship cannot often provide a ready map of identity."<sup>30</sup> This situation has led to the inventiveness of what he documents as "the Lingo." This language development involves the use of the Kaurna language (the traditional inhabitants of Adelaide) by the entire urban Aboriginal community. Many Aboriginal people in Adelaide see it as a source of pride because it provides an "apparent distinction between the Adelaide urban community and the other urban Aboriginal communities."<sup>31</sup> These two examples document what is a clear pattern in the literature regarding Indigenous communities in both the United States and Australia.<sup>32</sup> Urban Indigenous communities are not the same as non-urban communities, but they are certainly as dynamic and distinctive as their "traditional" counterparts.

This article further addresses the interesting issue of the "Aboriginalization" of the economy. This term is one that needs some explanation and will get a good deal of attention in the next section of this article. Suffice it to say that changes in Australian history of the late 1960s (documented in the previous section) led to an emerging notion of the "Aboriginal economy" in the 1970s and 1980s. This notion allowed for a changed but distinguishable Aboriginal role in the Australian economy. In the next section of this study are ways specific modalities of work were changed through the "Aboriginalization" of work practices through Aboriginal economic development.

Udo-Ekpo has produced significant work on Indigenous economic development in Australia. He refers to two key issues in his analysis; the first is enterprise development and the second is government funded programs and policies. In his work on enterprise development, he decries the "myth of welfare dependency" as the cause of the lack of awareness of Aboriginal economic development in the minds of the broader Australian population. He argues that that view "tends to underestimate (and undervalue) the significant amount of new wealth now evident in the Aboriginal sector of the Australian economy."<sup>33</sup> Udo-Elepo evidences the developments specifically in the arts and crafts industry (\$40 million and more than ten percent of the art auction market) and more broadly in terms of community-based organizations established by Aboriginal entrepreneurs.<sup>34</sup> Udo-Ekpo also deals with the issue of government funded policies and programs referring specifically to the cultural role performed by many Indigenous businesses that receive government funding. One of his most important examples is the Mrangalli Aboriginal Corporation which operates a series of businesses but "is also operating as an employment agency."<sup>35</sup> Udo-Ekpo's analysis of the need for more dynamic funding of Indigenous enterprise points to the neglect of self-employment for Aboriginal people (at one-third of the general population's rate of self-employment).<sup>36</sup> This analysis is consistent with Crough's examination of the funding structures of organizations such as ATSI, which are not sufficiently responsive to the needs of the Indigenous community for effective economic development to take place.<sup>37</sup> The analysis



may, however, forget that Western individualism does not necessarily hold universal appeal. The questions that will be asked here are how much of these differentials are the results of the legacy of colonialism and how many of them are Indigenous resistance to it?

The final issue to be addressed lies at the heart of Indigenous economic development: the distinction between community development and assimilation. In the 1960s “community development was seen as a temporary measure – a means of transition from subsistence to cash economy.”<sup>38</sup> The changes since that time have been significant, but the broader issue, of when economic development becomes assimilation, still remains. Diana Barwick documented the Aboriginal cultural concern with kinship in the 1960s. She showed that this emphasis on “allegiance” to place or community was in sharp distinction to Western identification with what work the individual performed.<sup>39</sup> This analysis shows that it is difficult to conceive of a situation where Aboriginal people fully accept the discourse of Western individualism, successfully “economically develop” and will not, in some senses, be assimilated. Udo-Ekpo’s analysis gives hints of these privileged Western economic values when he argues that:

... the values favorable to economic growth in the new millennium are ricocheting around Aboriginal Australia as the Aboriginal people internalize the spirit of free enterprise and form co-operative partnerships with progressive individuals and organizations.<sup>40</sup>

This value of the “spirit of free enterprise” shows his concern, as a business professor, with the adoption of Western economic principles rather than the maintenance of a unique Aboriginal identity. John Allert provides a certain balance to this analysis with his claim that:

... there is enormous potential for Indigenous people in Australia to continue their economic climb to success, and not at the expense of their culture, either as individuals, community, family or corporate groups and/or in alliances with non-Indigenous peoples.<sup>41</sup>

This argument privileges Aboriginal agency in the control of economic development, and this notion is an essential component of sustainable Indigenous economic development.<sup>42</sup> The successful projects that Allert documents show that this control can have exceptional benefits for protecting and maintaining Indigenous culture.

This section has demonstrated that Aboriginal people in urban centers maintain their cultural distinctiveness in creative and valid ways. The “Aboriginalization” of the economy has shown the success Aboriginal people can have in adapting the cash economy to their own needs. The issue of community development as assimilation shows the need for caution in the pursuit

of economic development but also points to clear methods that can be adopted to prevent cultural disintegration to gain economic success.

### ***Redfern – A Case Study in Urban Economic Development***

Redfern provides a helpful case study that can be used to understand the three themes examined in the previous sections. It is a community that highlights many differences between the experiences of Indigenous people in the United States and Australia and provides helpful evidence for the patterns described earlier in this study. This final section of the article will deal with the historical development of the Redfern Aboriginal community, then turn to the development of economic programs in Redfern, and finally look at the realities in Redfern today that show why some of the assumptions in modern policy making and economic development literature are flawed when applied to Aboriginal people.

One of the most significant differences between Aboriginal people and American Indians is the importance of place in the urban environment. Julie Carter refers to efforts by urban Aboriginal people to “secure social identity.”<sup>43</sup> This security involves, but is not restricted to, the choice to live in close proximity to other Aboriginal people. Carter shows that this community choice is more difficult as the size of the urban center increases.<sup>44</sup> The Aboriginal choice to live in community was upheld by the Australian government in 1972 when it purchased eighty town houses on the area commonly referred to as “the Block” between Caroline, Louis, Eveleigh and Vine streets in Redfern. The Aboriginal Housing Commission has managed the houses since that time and they have been an almost consistent source of controversy in their thirty-year history.<sup>45</sup> This geographic community less than a mile from Sydney’s central business district has led to “a fundamental conflict over Aboriginal entitlement to the sacred spaces of metropolitan capitalism.”<sup>46</sup> The priorities of economic development thus actually seek to exclude Aboriginal people from urban centers. Redfern is a place described by Aboriginal people as “an Aboriginal meeting place,” fundamentally challenging the economic primacy of metropolitan capitalism and the socio-cultural isolation that often results.<sup>47</sup>

The Australian reality is different from the experiences of most American Indians in the United States. American Indians in cities are generally “scattered throughout the population” which translates, for some, into a situation where “there is very little of an American Indian community in most cities. There are American Indians living in cities and there are Indian centers in cities ... and you see some American Indians involved with Indian centers. But they are the minority of the American Indians who live in cities.”<sup>48</sup> This is the reason why Susan Lobo’s analysis of city based relationship communities is so important. The fact she refers to that “American Indian community is not a geographic location with clustered residency or neighborhoods” shows a distinction between Australia and the United States, but it does seem that both these urban Indigenous communities have in common “a widely scattered and frequently

shifting network of relationships with locational nodes found in organizations and activity sites of special significance."<sup>49</sup> This is an interesting and important distinction between the experiences of urban American Indians and that of the Redfern Aboriginal community.

In introducing the detail of the Redfern case study, it is necessary to understand a little of the context for economic development in Redfern.<sup>50</sup> The programs that will be addressed in this section are primarily based on the government funded Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). The programs have expanded considerably both in number and presence in the urban environment. In 1985, there were CDEPs in 38 communities with four-thousand participants at a cost of \$27 million. This constituted approximately nine percent of the total spending of the DAA. Ten years later, the program had expanded to include two-hundred and thirty communities with twenty-five thousand participants at a cost of \$280 million. This constituted approximately one-third of ATSI's spending in 1995. By this point in time, one quarter of CDEP participants were from urban areas, but the scheme was differentiated as being approved on a project basis rather than through the approval of the community (as was the case when remote CDEPs were initiated).<sup>51</sup>

The specific CDEP, on which this study focuses, grew out of a youth action group that was active in the late 1980s. The Redfern Aboriginal Corporation (RAC) was established in 1991 and was granted funding to begin a thirty-five place CDEP that was later expanded in 1992 to have seventy available places. The mission statement of the CDEP is:

To work toward a self-determining community contributing by our own endeavor to a better Redfern where our people can grow up free from prejudice, confident, and secure in our culture and proud of our history as the Indigenous people of Australia.<sup>52</sup>

This is indicative of the RAC's Aboriginalization of the urban economy where broad goals are pursued for the Redfern community not just focusing on the economic outcomes of the program. The commitment of a holistic approach to Aboriginal economic development is shown in the objectives of the RAC that are set down in three categories of cultural, environmental, and economic goals.<sup>53</sup> This shows a clear distinctiveness of approach by Aboriginal enterprise.

The Aboriginalization itself is evidenced in both the type of work and the working conditions enjoyed by the RAC's CDEP participants. The range of employment includes the Koorie Kafe, clothing retail, market gardening, street scaping, and office work to name a few.<sup>54</sup> It is noteworthy that the CDEP scheme itself actually incorporates significant Aboriginalization of work including home duties and culturally-based activities as valid work under certain CDEPs.<sup>55</sup> The RAC's approach to Aboriginalization of the economy is to focus on the conditions of employment. They offer a greater flexibility for bereavement leave so that cultural requirements to attend funerals of extended kin can be accommodated.<sup>56</sup>

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There is also a clear commitment to rehabilitation as an aim of the RAC. This is a marked distinction from non-Indigenous economic development. Smith points to the RAC's support of an "Aboriginal night patrol of Redfern streets" (to reduce crime rates in the Aboriginal community) and the credit systems established for both vacation time and buying food at the Koorie Kafe.<sup>57</sup> This clearly supports Smith's contention that "when the RAC takes on a participant, it effectively takes on issues to do with how the whole Redfern community operates."<sup>58</sup> This cultural commitment to community members shows that assumptions of an individually focused Indigenous urban environment are flawed, if not completely false.

The "myth of urban advantage" receives a significant blow by the realities of Redfern experience. Geographic access to the economy is presumed by the "myth" to translate to economic empowerment, but the facts of labor market participation tell a very different story. This most geographically advantaged of urban Aboriginal groups has lower employment rates and lower participation rates than Aboriginal residents of metropolitan urban centers anywhere else in Australia. The rates of employment and participation are the most telling with a discrepancy as high as 20 percent between the rates experienced in other urban communities in Sydney and nearby urban communities in the cities of Wollongong and Newcastle.<sup>59</sup> The labor force participation rate is actually only one percentage point higher than the Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory that is considered by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) to be the most remote in all of Australia.<sup>60</sup> This shows that Indigenous economic development is about much more than geography.

The Redfern case also reveals that access to the mainstream labor market does not necessarily lead to participation within it. Two issues complicate that assumption in the case of Redfern – the first is the high mobility of the Aboriginal community, and the second is the cultural preferences of CDEP participants. The 1996 census revealed that 62 percent of Redfern residents reported a different address than they had had ten years before. This reveals the difficult task facing the RAC to promote sustainable economic development particularly in a context where there are "substantial structural barriers limiting Redfern Aboriginal access to mainstream jobs."<sup>61</sup> Mobility cannot be the sole determinant of problems with economic development particularly when there are long-term residents and families "providing support networks and a strong sense of attachment to a Redfern Aboriginal identity."<sup>62</sup> The importance of this identity is the other side of the economic development coin in the Redfern context. On one side, there is a highly mobile population that cannot or does not have the desire to attach itself to the mainstream labor market, and on the other side, there is a strong Aboriginal community that would prefer to minimize external interference and maintain the distinctiveness of urban Aboriginal culture. As Smith points out: "there is a culturally-based work environment operating within the CDEP that creates ... a 'comfort zone' out of which many participants are

reluctant to exit.”<sup>63</sup> This supports the conclusion that policy and funding realism needs to acknowledge that “while urban CDEP schemes are ostensibly situated within the wider Australian economy, in many important respects, they are still establishing a distinctly Aboriginal labor market.”<sup>64</sup> This cultural preference reveals the clear Aboriginalized nature of the urban Indigenous economy and reveals that cultural clashes between capitalism and Indigenous culture are still significant in urban centers.

The Redfern case reveals clear problems with the assumptions of policy makers and the analyses of business professors because they fail to adequately acknowledge the cultural distinctiveness of urban Aboriginal people. The assumptions at the heart of government and ATSIC policies are shown by the Redfern experience to be flawed in their assumptions about the assimilation of urban Aboriginal people. The application of a project-based rather than community-based test to urban CDEPs is shown to be difficult when “organizations like the RAC ... find that every aspect of their operation is immediately locked into wider Aboriginal community dynamics.”<sup>65</sup> This reveals that recommendations of the Standing Committee into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (referred to in section one) missed the mark in their recommendations of “sunset” clauses on urban economic development. These policies fail to recognize urban Indigenous communities and fail to see that economic development in places like Redfern “operates within an essentially Aboriginal domain, where participants and management remain enmeshed within, and dependent upon, a collective sense of Aboriginal identity.”<sup>66</sup>

This case study has shown that generalizations regarding economic development in urban Indigenous communities regularly simplify the diversity and complexity of urban Aboriginal experiences. Issues of cultural economics and the complexities of historical experience lead to a depth and diversity that is hard for policy makers and business leaders to fully comprehend.

### ***Conclusion***

This study has identified commonalities and differences between the experiences of urban Indigenous Peoples in both Australia and the United States. Its focus on Australia has shown the slight differentials between definitions of urban and the differential development of the population in both nation states. The historical differences provided a framework to explain and then deal with the “myth of urban advantage,” a myth that is much less prevalent in the United States than it is in Australia. The interplay of culture and economy was shown to be underestimated in both the United States and Australia. The concept of a specific and distinct urban Indigenous economy needs to be incorporated into the analysis of policy makers and enterprise analysts. Redfern was a helpful case study in its revelations about all of these themes. It was also invaluable as a microcosm for analysis of the similarities and differences between urban

Indigenous experiences in the United States and Australia. This research has established a foundation for further analysis of this critical and often misunderstood area. The quality of this research field will affect an increasing number of Indigenous people with the passing of every day.

### Notes

1. Kay Anderson, "Reflections on Redfern," in *Urban Life, Urban Culture – Aboriginal/Indigenous Experiences*, ed. George Morgan (Sydney: University of Western Sydney, Goolangullia Centre, 1998), 203.

2. Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire – Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge Press, 1996), 3-5, 13.

3. Some very helpful research has been done over the past ten or more years by both the Harvard Project for Indian Economic Development in the United States and the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. The work of these research units has assisted the development of this comparative framework.

4. Examples can be found in John Allert, "Aboriginal Business Structures: Comparison of Remote Area and Urban Initiatives" in *Urban Life, Urban Culture – Aboriginal/Indigenous Experiences*, ed. George Morgan (Sydney: University of Western Sydney, Goolangullia Centre, 1998), 78-79, and Lawrence T. Udo-Ekpo, *The Aboriginal Economy in Transition – Inspiring Visions of the Future* (Henley Beach, SA: Seaview Press, 2001), 120.

5. John Allert, "Aboriginal Business Structures: Comparison of Remote Area and Urban Initiatives" in *Urban Life, Urban Culture – Aboriginal/Indigenous Experiences*, ed. George Morgan (Sydney: University of Western Sydney, Goolangullia Centre, 1998), 78-79.

6. Within this analysis, and at most points in this paper, the term 'Aboriginal' is used to refer to both Aboriginal people and those Indigenous Australians from the Torres Strait Islands.

7. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Mainly Urban: Report of the Inquiry into the Needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1992).

8. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *We Can Do It! The Needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001).

9. Standing Committee, *Mainly Urban*, 3-4.

10. Standing Committee, *We Can Do It!*, 3.

11. Terry Straus and Debra Valentino, "Retribalization in Urban Indian Communities," in *American Indians and the Urban Experience*, Susan Lobo and Kurt Peters (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 2001), 86.

12. Standing Committee, *Mainly Urban*, 3.

13. This is the same problem that has been pointed to in the United States under the Census Bureau's definition of urban as communities of more than two-thousand people.

14. Standing Committee, *We Can Do It!*, 3.

15. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

16. Ian Keen, ed., *Being Black – Aboriginal cultures in 'settled' Australia* (Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988).

17. 84 percent of the Australian population lives in the most populous 1 percent of a continent the size of the continental United States (see Australian Bureau of Statistics for more details).

18. Julie D. Carter, "Am I too black to go with you?," in *Being Black – Aboriginal cultures in 'settled' Australia*, ed. Ian Keen (Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988), 65-66.

19. Jerry Schwab, "Ambiguity, style and kinship in Adelaide Aboriginal identity," in *Being Black – Aboriginal cultures in 'settled' Australia*, ed. Ian Keen (Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988), 77.

20. The Indian Reorganization Act was US federal legislation offering tribes federal funding in exchange for the formation of tribal governments that were approved by the Secretary of the Interior. Despite the obviously fraught aspects of this policy, it is a clear connection of funding with self-governance. For more details see Ward Churchill, "The Crucible of American Indian Identity: Native Tradition versus Colonial Imposition in Post-Conquest North America," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23 (1999): 39-67.

21. Greg Crough, *Indigenous Organisations, Funding and Accountability – Comparative Reforms in Canada and Australia* (Darwin: North Australia Research Unit, 1997), 4-6.

22. *Ibid.*, 9.

23. *Ibid.*, 59.

24. *Ibid.*, 53-54.

25. Lawrence T. Udo-Ekpo, *The Aboriginal Economy in Transition – Inspiring Visions of the Future* (Henley Beach, SA: Seaview Press, 2001), 120.

26. Extensive pertinent examples can be found in the broad work of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development and specifically in Stephen Cornell and Joseph P. Kalt, *What Can Tribes Do? Strategies and Institutions in American Indian Economic Development* (Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1992).

27. For details of this argument see Diane E. Smith, *Redfern Works, Discussion Paper 99* (Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 1996), 3-4. This paper will be used in detail to explain the urban Aboriginal experiences in Redfern within the case study presented later in this work.

28. Commissioner Elliot Johnston, *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody - Volume 4* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1991), 439, and Standing Committee, *Mainly Urban*, 119-120.

29. Straus and Valentino, "Retribalization," 87-88.

30. Schwab, "Ambiguity," 78.

31. *Ibid.*, 84.

32. Books such as Lobo and Peters, *American Indians*, and Donald L. Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), among others, evidence many facets of this distinctive urban American Indian culture that can not be addressed in detail in this paper due to space constraints. Similar texts exist in Australia that provide the same kind of details but in a more piecemeal fashion. These extend as far back as 1972, when Fay Gale published *Urban Aborigines* (Canberra: Australian National University, Social Research Council of Australia) to the work of academics such as Diane Smith and Tim Rowse in recent times.

33. Udo-Ekpo, *Aboriginal Economy*, V.

34. *Ibid.*, V, 52-54.

35. *Ibid.*, 57. This holistic approach to economic development by Indigenous enterprises will be evidenced in more details through Smith's analysis of Redfern in the following section of this paper.

36. *Ibid.*, 104.

37. Crough, "Indigenous Organisations," 54-55.

38. Udo-Ekpo, *Aboriginal Economy*, 10.

39. Barwick, Diana, "Aborigines of Victoria," originally written in 1967, republished in *Being Black – Aboriginal cultures in 'settled' Australia*, ed. Ian Keen, Ian (Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988), 27-28.

40. Udo-Ekpo, *Aboriginal Economy*, 47.

41. Allert, 'Aboriginal Business', 100-101.

42. Allert's analysis provides an Australian perspective on the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development's model emphasizing sovereignty, culture, and institutions, as the key features of sustainable and authentic Indigenous economic development.

43. Carter, 'Too Black', 67.

44. *Ibid.*, 69.

45. Anderson, "Reflections," 200-202.

46. *Ibid.*, 200.

47. *Ibid.*, 209.

48. Robert K. Thomas, "New Sacred Nationalism," paper held in archives at Native American Educational Services College, Chicago, Illinois Archives, 22, 3, quoted in Straus and Valentino, "Retribalization," 85.

49. Susan Lobo, "Is urban a person or a place?," in *American Indians and the Urban Experience*, Susan Lobo and Kurt Peters (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001), 74-75.

50. The data in this case study involves personal perspectives, but it is based on an analysis of Diane Smith's *Redfern Works, Discussion Paper 99* (Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 1996).

51. Smith, "Redfern," 2-3.

52. *Ibid.*, 7.

53. *Ibid.*, 7-8.

54. *Ibid.*, 8.

55. *Ibid.*, 5-6.

56. *Ibid.*, 8-9.

57. *Ibid.*, 12.

58. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

59. Smith, "Redfern," 10, shows that employment in Redfern is 32 percent as compared to 46 percent in other centers, and labor force participation is 44 percent as compared to 64 percent in other centers.

60. Standing Committee, *We Can Do It!*, 3, and Smith, "Redfern," 10-11.

61. Smith, "Redfern," 11.

62. *Ibid.*, 11.

62. *Ibid.*, 11.

63. *Ibid.*, 15-16.

64. *Ibid.*, 14.

65. *Ibid.*, 14. See also note 27 for more details on the recommendations made by recent policy makers.