

LESSONS FROM
RESEARCH



Editor's Introduction

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Aboriginal leaders seeking to provide an economic base for community initiatives that include financing some aspects of self-governance or developing the required infrastructure to provide a better standard of living at the community level often turn to gaming as a way of doing this. Despite the immense national growth of gaming and its growing use in financing of public programs, relatively little has been written to date about the issues that accompany the creation of aboriginal gaming establishments and the effect they have upon the people and communities who embrace gaming as a tool of economic enhancement.

This edition of *Lessons from Research* offers selections that deal specifically with the anticipated effects gaming will have upon Aboriginal communities in Canada all the while asking the question, "Is gaming an effective means to build local economies for the purposes of nation building?"

The first piece in this section, by Yale Belanger, details the evolution of aboriginal gaming in Canada with an emphasis on how communities can benefit from the monetary

foundation provided by economies established from gaming revenues. Focussing on the evolution of Ontario's Casino Rama and its effect on the Mnjikaning community's political and economic security, the author argues that the issue of funding self-government through gaming revenues will become an important issue in Ontario in the years to come.

The second section is a legal history of gaming in Canada by Hal Pruden, Counsel in the Criminal Law Policy Section at the Department of Justice (Canada). He describes the contemporary situation of First Nations who fit into an existing legal structure that pledges Canada's responsibility for "Indians and land reserved for Indians" under Sec 91(24) of the BNA Act of 1867 yet guarantees provincial jurisdiction over gaming that many Aboriginal leaders aspire to.

Robin Kelley of the Canada West Foundation in Calgary presents us with a detailed essay summarizing the pitfalls and advantages in adopting gaming to build economies. She argues that the provinces have the opportunity to develop policies that will address many of the concerns she outlines concerns before they develop into future problems.

In the fourth piece, Alison Dubois, John Loxley and Wanda A. Wuttunee of the University of Manitoba, provide a brief overview of the Aboriginal gaming experience in Canada and pose critical questions in ascertaining the viability of opening casinos, a position the authors contend will stimulate additional and much needed research in the field.

Margo Little examines the question as to whether the profits from casinos can ever adequately compensate reserve residents for the social costs associated with gaming enterprises. Utilizing interviews to present a community-based impression about gaming's benefits, Little concludes that "the key to balance is to maintain traditional institutions such as collectivity, respect for family and the role of the Elders. Policies that separate political and economic development from the rest of human experience cannot be tolerated."

Paula Sherman examines the U.S. tribal gaming situation, focussing specifically upon the evolution of the Foxwoods Casino operated by the Mashantucket Pequots considered to be the largest casino in the world. The Pequot view generating revenue as a means of promoting sovereignty whereas the State of Connecticut accepts the compact entered into with the Pequot as extending state sovereignty to the reservation.

The final piece in this section by Yale Belanger brings us back to the question of how useful gaming can be to Aboriginal leaders by reviewing the literature pertaining to Aboriginal gaming in Canada. The author concludes that much work needs to be done on the issue of how gaming benefits Aboriginal people while also investigating the pitfalls involved with adopting gaming.