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How Does the New TANF Work Requirement "Work" in Rural Minority Communities? A Case Study of the Northern Cheyenne Nation

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In August of 1996 Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which President Bill Clinton then signed into law, "ending welfare as we know it." For the past thirty years emphasis on work and self-sufficiency has slowly replaced income supports in welfare policy.[1] Politicians assert that the new requirements, most notably the new time limits and work requirements have been a success.[2] Others, however, are concerned by the social and economic implications of these new policies. Given the period of time that these policies have been in effect, we have the opportunity to review the assumptions on which PRWORA has been based and examine the practical consequences of the new welfare system.

Research conducted since the late 1990s has addressed many aspects of the experiences of welfare clients living in urban areas. However, much less of the recent work has dealt with rural areas. Several scholars have examined the early experiences of rural welfare clients, especially minority group members.[3] One such recent research effort focused on services provided under the new welfare policies and their effectiveness in assisting American Indian participants to find employment, leave welfare, and move out of poverty.[4] This report to the National Congress of American Indians calls for additional research on several issues that have become key as the welfare program has matured and its requirements have changed within different state and community contexts.

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In particular, follow-up work is needed to understand the effects of the welfare program work requirement on American Indians living in reservation communities that typically have experienced the highest levels of unemployment and poverty and the lowest levels of economic development in rural areas.[5] Such research would ascertain whether and how American Indian workers in tight labor markets with relatively less human capital benefit from the new work requirement associated with welfare reform.

This 1996 law required data collection, and there is an abundance of information now available. While the findings of our research corroborate the results of other studies of American Indian client experiences with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, our research provides additional information by addressing the experiences of reservation clients served by a state TANF program, as well as the TANF program personnel and the employers who implement and enforce the new work requirement. These findings contribute to new understandings of whether TANF "works" in reservation contexts.

This essay will address the question, how have American Indian reservation residents fared in relation to the new work requirements? We are interested in the consequences of this requirement for all the stakeholders and, therefore, examine the perspectives of clients, employers, and program directors. Additional research questions include, how have these stakeholders adapted to meet the new work requirements, and what are the impacts of their efforts? The research focuses on a specific population, the Northern Cheyenne Nation, located in southeastern Montana, which recently became the poorest of the seven reservations in Montana, with 65 percent of the households living below the poverty level.[6] Therefore, this case study is useful not only in detailing how a particular population has been affected by welfare reform but also in assessing possible implications of welfare work requirements for other reservation communities that may face similar circumstances.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although proponents and critics of the new welfare policy have largely agreed on the value of its emphasis on work, the actual implementation of the work requirement is still very much contested. Supporters of welfare reform point to the benefit of skills training and disincentives for individual dependence on federal assistance. However, critics often complain that there are not enough real economic incentives for individuals to move into work.[7] For example, welfare reform policy assumes adequate and abundant jobs in all regions of the nation to support the transition to self-sufficient work and focuses on the personal characteristics and attributes of the poor.[8] Broughton asserts that "the reigning policy paradigm for understanding the needs of the unemployed poor, therefore, focuses on work enforcement, 'personal responsibility' and 'work habits,' rather than the structural determinants of poverty."[9] Thus, the problem of poverty is really located in individuals who need to be "fixed by programs providing ways to improve skills, habits, attitudes, etc., not their ability to access opportunities for work."[10] Although, according to Piven,

this approach fits nicely into the American psyche, its effectiveness in moving individuals from welfare and poverty into the workforce, and whether the market can even sustain this policy, are important questions.[11]

Interestingly, a substantial body of literature contradicts the assumptions on which the new welfare policy is based. For example, a number of studies have shown that welfare recipients are not averse to work, nor do they necessarily have poor work ethics.[12] The assumptions of PRWORA led us to examine four specific aspects of work in our effort to understand how work figures into welfare reform and who it "works" for.

Availability of Work

In her evaluation of TANF on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Pickering concludes that TANF's ineffectiveness is predominantly due to the scarcity of jobs.[13] Albelda and others document the disconnect between the work requirement and availability of jobs.[14] These researchers point to underdeveloped rural markets that are largely ignored by policy reform. The availability of jobs is tied to larger economic conditions but is usually taken for granted.

Several studies show that decreasing welfare roles provide evidence that welfare reform is in fact moving people into jobs.[15] However, Hansan and Morris argue that "AFDC rolls have always decreased during periods of economic prosperity and low unemployment."[16] Other scholars support this view, arguing that short-term employment gains tend to decrease or disappear with an economic downturn, emphasizing the relationship of markets to welfare-induced employment.[17]

Research on rural poverty also focuses on the structure of rural labor markets. For instance, Harvey and associates concentrate primarily on the effects of underdeveloped labor markets on participants of TANF in "pockets of rural poverty."[18] The authors assert that TANF does not remove people from poverty despite declines in TANF participation. In fact, the declining number of cases can be attributed to low cash-assistance benefits rather than to individuals moving into self-sufficiency through the acquisition of adequate work.

The Level of Work: Low-Wage Jobs

Welfare reform cannot be considered outside of the larger debate on poverty. Burtless argues that welfare recipients who find jobs often work for very low wages: "this means that, even in the unlikely event that welfare recipients could all find and retain full-time, year-round jobs, many would struggle with annual incomes that remain depressingly low."[19] Additionally, Brown and Venner show that the economic situations for welfare recipient households are not improving since welfare reform, and they assert that economic need is not declining in line with declining case loads.[20] Other research points to changes in the low-wage economy that negatively affect all who compete for jobs in this sector.[21] For example, Bernstein contends that "welfare recipients who must now work will still be poor, and low-wage workers are likely to lose more ground than would

have been the case in the absence of reform. Thus we need to consider steps to bolster earnings in the low-wage labor market."[22]

Piven points to some darker implications of welfare reform: the low-wage government contract opportunities that provide work for many trying to meet the work requirement can easily be exploited by employers.[23] Welfare clients are often assigned degrading work and are subject to humiliating displays, and if nothing else, they are particularly vulnerable to abuses since they have no real alternatives.[24] Thus, current efforts to assess the work requirement need to go beyond the question of whether there is work available. Researchers also need to ask, does it pay a wage that would allow recipients to leave poverty along with welfare? Is the work really helping to build human capital?

Access to Work

Despite the fact that underdeveloped labor markets in many rural communities do not provide enough jobs to utilize fully the existing human capital, policy reform debates cannot avoid questions concerning the adequacy of human capital. The concept of human capital links earnings with experience, such as education, training, work skills, and other credentials.[25] Since minority populations generally possess lower levels of training and education, the human capital perspective has been used to explain the lower earnings and occupational success of minorities. Research on American Indians also shows that human capital is generally lower among reservation populations.[26]

However, as the previous discussion suggests, simply pointing to insufficient human capital is inadequate for understanding unemployment and poverty in reservation communities. Research by Pickering and Ward not only emphasizes the need to address labor market deficiencies but also suggests the usefulness of reconceptualizing the human resources of reservation communities. For example, in the reservation population she studied, Pickering identified among reservation residents a wide range of work experiences and skills that typical analyses do not recognize as relevant to the labor market.[27] Ward's research also asserts that reservation residents frequently draw on a unique set of skills and strategies to support themselves and their families.[28] Among these, social and kin networks, cultural practices, practical knowledge, and particular orientations to work are important factors that structure the meaning of work, the ways people access work opportunities, and the types of work they do.

The findings of these authors suggest that social capital, defined as the supportive relationships of parents, family, and community members, is a valuable part of a range of human resources that reservation residents utilize.[29] Thus, opportunities for work are likely to be facilitated, or obstructed, by family ties on the reservation since employers' hiring criteria may include not only an applicant's qualifications but also friendship or kinship relations. Consequently, the level of social capital is an important factor in accessing available jobs.

Additionally, access to certain kinds of work may be influenced by a person's experiences with traditional cultural practices or other locally valued

expertise. Traditionally, the term *cultural capital* has been used to explain the extent to which a particular group's cultural resources contribute to their location in the middle or upper class. Bourdieu's approach asserts that members of the upper and middle classes are socialized in ways that provide the cultural knowledge and experiences needed to access higher quality education and better paying jobs.[30] Conversely, lower classes and minorities lack consequential cultural resources that can be converted into economic benefits.

Definitions of Work

Interestingly, however, in reservation contexts the cultural resources of individuals and groups also structure the opportunities they access. For example, a necessary element for understanding work in reservation communities involves local cultural conceptions of appropriate work. Culturally valued work may include nonwage labor such as traditional healing, traditional crafts, production of locally valued products, hunting, and other informal subsistence activities. Thus, the widespread use of alternatives to wage labor may represent important cultural values, as well as economic benefits.

In her research on welfare reform on the Pine Ridge Reservation, Pickering shows that the work requirement is often met through "make work," or specially created jobs.[31] This solution to the limitations of TANF and the labor market reifies certain types of paid labor over other work that is more meaningful and often more economically productive but that is not formally recognized. In other words, TANF rules do not recognize work that lies outside of commodified labor, no matter what the effect on economic and social outcomes. As Pickering shows, "the state is willing to provide money to a woman to take care of someone else's child while it pays someone else to take care of her children, but it will not support her while she cares for her own children."[32] Since there is no advantage of one worker's situation over the other in terms of building skills or long-term economic well-being, the only real effect is to commodify labor.[33] Importantly, this "artificial" work precludes people from fulfilling community responsibilities and/or disrupts systems of adaptation in place before TANF. Additionally, these "artificial forms of community service work eliminate time for critical alternative forms of economic activity."[34]

Research by Brown and associates on welfare reform in American Indian communities indicates that while tribal TANF programs have the flexibility to define work more broadly and approve jobs for clients that more closely fit local cultural norms and social realities, state TANF programs are less able to make such modifications.[35] Even so, participants in tribal TANF programs encounter major obstacles to finding and keeping good jobs after they leave welfare.[36]

In response to Hansan and Morris's assertion of the importance of understanding the experiences of recipients in order to evaluate the assumptions of the new welfare policy, this essay will examine the work requirement component of PRWORA by documenting the experiences of individuals involved in TANF, the "heart" of the 1996 act.[37] Specifically, we are interested in how

the work requirement "works" in this rural community. The findings are unique in addressing the work requirement as viewed from the perspectives of county welfare program personnel, employers, and welfare participants on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

The Northern Cheyenne Reservation represents a rural community context in which we can examine the implications of the new work requirements for communities that are outside of market centers. While the experiences of program directors, employers, and TANF participants on the reservation provide insights into how policies of welfare reform play out for this community, this research has broader implications as well. As we have emphasized previously, PRWORA makes several assumptions about the nature of the unemployment and poverty problem and about how it might be addressed. This case study explores these assumptions in a specific rural, minority context and offers a different view of the effectiveness of welfare program work requirements for this and similar communities. Additionally, the research will help to determine the likelihood that the TANF (in Montana, FAIM) program can lift these families out of poverty or leave them among the poorest people in Northern Cheyenne reservation communities, in the state of Montana, and the United States.

RESEARCH PURPOSES AND METHODS

The research reported here is part of a larger project to assess the effects of recent welfare program changes on reservation residents' access to food assistance and other benefits of the welfare program. This project was conducted with support from the USDA small grants program from 1998 to 2001, which provided several grants to Chief Dull Knife College, the Northern Cheyenne tribal college. Although our research focused on food assistance programs, data were collected on a range of program changes and the experiences of reservation residents with them.

Ethnographic research was conducted to explore in detail the experiences of Northern Cheyenne residents with the TANF program. Given the complexity of welfare program reforms, the qualitative projects were instrumental in identifying important themes and patterns concerning how program participants met the new requirements. Findings presented below concerning the work requirements are based on in-depth interviews with more than one hundred persons, including welfare program directors, employers to which welfare clients are referred, and welfare clients located on the reservation. The number of clients interviewed with direct TANF/FAIM experience totals close to sixty.

The interview guides were developed through collaboration between members of the Northern Cheyenne research team from the tribal college and its partner university. However, interviews with welfare-program clients were conducted entirely by Cheyenne researchers in settings that were conducive to open and free conversation. These clients were identified through advertisements and snowball sampling techniques developed and implemented by Cheyenne researchers. The selection strategy was designed

to maximize the range of participant experiences with the Montana TANF Program and to represent the diversity of program participant characteristics, such as age, education, work experience, marital status, family size, gender, and reservation community (Lame Deer, Busby, Muddy Creek, Birney, and Ashland). All research participants were provided with information about the project purposes and its sponsors, the nature of the research questions, and individuals' rights regarding participation. Additionally, procedures for protecting the confidentiality of interview data were strictly followed. All participants in these research projects received honoraria in the form of gift certificates that could be used in the local grocery store.

CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

The Northern Cheyenne Reservation, established in southeastern Montana in 1884 by an executive order, now includes 447,000 acres spanning thirty-six miles from east to west and twenty-three miles from north to south. It is the home of approximately forty-five hundred people, about 82 percent of whom are Northern Cheyenne, 13 percent members of other tribes, and 6 percent non-Indian.

Northern Cheyenne Context

The social organization of a community reveals its diversity and complexity, outside ties, distribution of resources, coordination and cooperation among residents, and patterns of personal interaction.[38] Of importance in this context is that Northern Cheyenne tribal members have a strong sense of tribal identity based on shared language, culture, history, political organization, social organization, and values, all of which are supported by the physical isolation of the reservation. However, changes in reservation life have also contributed to the increasing diversity of the population. Such changes include improved roads and increased mobility of reservation residents, greater availability of television via satellite and cable, and growth of the regional population. In spite of the increased presence of non-Indians and members of other tribes on the reservation over the last few years, Northern Cheyennes still make up the majority of the reservation population and have more opportunities for interaction with members of their own tribe than do most other tribes.

Social diversity now characterizes the reservation population more than ever as a result of influences such as greater experience off the reservation and changes in organizations and institutions located on the reservation. This can be seen in the various degrees of attachment to traditional institutions such as ceremonies, tribal social events, and use of traditional medicine, as well as new institutions such as government education and the labor market.[39] To help resolve disputes and change behaviors, tribal members often rely on new community institutions, such as social services and the tribal court, rather than traditional sanctions. There are various social groups to which people may belong, based on their interests and desire to participate in traditional or nontraditional activities, including warrior societies, churches

on the reservation, or other groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and business, professional, and farm or ranch organizations. Kinship, however, remains a major force shaping the status and social relationships of Northern Cheyenne tribal members.[40]

Socioeconomic Context: Work and Poverty

Among the seven reservations in Montana, the Northern Cheyenne Reservation had the highest percentage of persons and families below the poverty level in 1990, with 48 percent of adults and 44 percent of families living in poverty. The Northern Cheyenne Reservation ranked fifth among Montana reservations in per capita income and sixth in household income.[41] Bureau of Indian Affairs reports indicate that the Northern Cheyenne tribe had an unemployment rate of 65 percent in 1996 and that the seven reservations in the Billings area had an average unemployment rate of 68 percent in 1999.[42]

Data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis show changes in employment by industry for both Rosebud and Big Horn counties, the two counties on which the Northern Cheyenne Nation is located, from 1980 to 1999.[43] These data demonstrate the availability of jobs for each year, suggesting the extent to which welfare program participants may meet the new work requirement. From 1980 to 1990, declines occurred in jobs in agricultural, forestry, and fishing industries among both whites and Indian workers. These declines were experienced to a much larger extent by Indian workers than whites, a pattern also seen in manufacturing. Other changes included a substantial decrease in public administration jobs among Indian workers along with moderate increases in professional positions, construction jobs, and positions in communications and retail trade. These patterns generally continued in the 1990s with a few exceptions; for example, small increases occurred in agricultural, forestry, fishing, and mining jobs. However, jobs in manufacturing, transportation, and wholesale trade continued to decline. Similarly, government jobs generally declined, although there was a very slight increase in federal jobs. In contrast, jobs in retail trade, finance, insurance, and real estate, as well as services, saw sizable increases.

These data help to clarify the context in which TANF clients and other reservation residents confront the realities of work: job increases in the service occupations and retail trade; fewer jobs overall in the public sector; and substantial job losses in manufacturing, farming, and forestry jobs mean that Indian workers are more concentrated in low-paying jobs than ever before.[44] Such changes have contributed to growing proportions of American Indians among the working poor, the unemployed, and those in poverty.

Results from a survey of almost five hundred reservation residents in 2000 provide useful information concerning the allocation of members of the workforce to jobs.[45] When asked about employment during the previous six months, about 36 percent of respondents reported they work full time, 17 percent part time, and 15 percent seasonally or via contract. Twenty-five percent reported being unemployed, and 8 percent reported being retired. A much smaller proportion of males (31 percent) reported working full time

than females (40 percent), and about half as many women (10 percent) reported seasonal or contract work as men (20 percent). Similar proportions of men and women, however, reported working part time (17 percent), being unemployed (25 percent), and being retired (8 percent). In contrast to the proportions of persons reporting full- and part-time work, a much larger percentage, about 56 percent, reported that they work up to thirty hours per week, while 36 percent work from thirty-one to forty hours per week. Another 8 percent reported working more than forty-one hours per week. Males and females reported similar numbers of hours worked.

Recent research also shows that nearly 70 percent of Northern Cheyenne residents experience some form of food insecurity, while 35 percent experience food insecurity associated with persistent hunger.[46] These rates represent a dramatic difference from the national average of about 10 to 11 percent.[47] Data on food programs shows that the number of American Indians in Rosebud County participating in the food stamps program declined after 1996, but the number of Cheyenne served by tribal food programs (both commodities and emergency food sources) steadily increased during the same period. These data demonstrate that food assistance and household support needs remain high among the poorest reservation residents.

Data from the Northern Cheyenne USDA research project conducted in 2000 with a representative sample of reservation households explored food acquisition strategies and the range of resources that local residents use to ensure survival.[48] Participants were asked how often each of sixteen sources was used to obtain food for their households. While the most widely used resource for obtaining food is wages (64 percent), the next most frequently used sources are local food programs (food distribution, food stamps, and WIC), family, the tribe's food voucher program, and odd jobs (cleaning, babysitting, or various types of physical jobs such as ranch work). Fairly substantial proportions also use alternative means, such as hunting, pawning items, selling crafts, Social Security, and food banks.

Supplementary client interview data revealed that most cannot make it for a whole month on food stamps.[49] Therefore, they use such strategies as shopping and cooking more efficiently, getting help from family and friends, and accessing emergency food banks. Almost a third of the clients reported that they pawn household items to get money for groceries while other clients make money for groceries by selling homemade food (such as fry bread), traditional beadwork, or other craft items. Despite having insufficient food to meet the needs of their families, most clients also reported that they help others in need whenever they can.

Of particular relevance to this study is the fact that the data indicate a substantial use of subsistence and informal economic strategies to support household needs. Forms of work important in this context, such as making and selling beadwork and fry bread, as well as ranch work and hunting, however, are often treated negatively when TANF clients use them. For example, clients reported that when they are "caught" doing these activities, they receive sanctions that decrease their program benefits (even though some clients would not need to use secondary sources of income if program

benefits were sufficient to meet their families' needs). Because these informal work activities are often associated with exchange and not wages, they do not meet the state TANF program work guideline and are not accepted as either legitimate work or indications of skills (even though they are both meaningful and useful in the local economy).

Those participating in the new TANF program, called Families Achieving Independence in Montana (FAIM), must now meet a work requirement in order to obtain benefits. This requirement essentially "pays" for the labor that workers perform in approved training and work sites. The new regulations also provide that food stamps are a supplemental benefit, not income; only cash assistance is considered income. State welfare regulations provide each family with specified benefits (cash assistance, food stamps, and other benefits) based on the family's needs, which are determined by considering income and assets, household expenses (such as rent and utility costs), number in the household, and other needs. FAIM clients receiving cash assistance must work a required number of hours at an approved work site (single parents must work up to thirty hours per week, while married couples with two or more children work up to thirty-five hours per week). In addition to the hours at their work sites clients must complete reports for their caseworkers, employers, and other supervisors and arrange for child care and transportation—costs that clients must also pay.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research findings are presented below for the three groups of persons interviewed: program directors, employers, and clients. For each group central themes and patterns found in the interview data are discussed as they relate to experiences with meeting the new TANF work requirements. It is important to note that all of the clients and most of the employers are American Indians and residents of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, and although the county program directors are not, they have had experience working with this community for a number of years. Selected quotes from the interviews illustrate key themes for each group. Where needed to facilitate understanding of the respondents' circumstances, some additional background information is provided.

FAIM Program Directors

Welfare assistance program directors identified changes they made in their programs and discussed situations of their clients related to welfare reform in Montana. Several changes have made it easier for clients to participate in programs. However, it is clear that problems continue to hinder progress toward meeting the program goals and to facilitate economic security and independence for clients. The new work requirement is an important part of this effort.

One county program representative summed up the struggle between providing the assistance to help people to eat and survive and providing

services that might lead to increased dependence on welfare or reduce a client's ability to achieve their goals for independence:

> The whole philosophy of welfare reform in Montana, and I think for the nation, was to help parents become self-sufficient, and we did that by making them accountable—giving them goals to achieve and making them accountable if they don't. And I think that there's been a real major outcry in Montana, and I assume in other states, by client advocates who say we are being mean and unfair and asking too much, and I think that because of that, the sanctions and closures have been so limited that it almost takes a client requesting to be closed now to be able to terminate the benefits. And I think that puts them right back into the entitlement mentality where they feel like they deserve all these benefits and that they don't have to work to do that. . . . We have seen so many successes with people that didn't believe that they could work, didn't believe they had skills, or whatever it took to be successful. . . . I don't think it's fair to the clients to be doing some of the babysitting things that we're doing again.[50]

Program directors also expressed frustration with providing adequate opportunities and resources for their clients. A common frustration, especially at the county level, involves adapting their programs as welfare reforms rapidly evolve:

> And then we still keep getting more [changes], and we have to change what we're doing to accommodate either, uh, the reporting requirements or eligibility requirements, our own extra work requirements. If we could ever get, just get a set of rules and just stick by it and not have to be adjusted. I think that our clients really lose out because of our frustrations. Because we do have the three different programs administered by three different departments, it means that we have three different sets of rules, and I think that for eligibility and for the clients, we need one universal set of rules for eligibility, and they need to stay constant.

In addition to rule changes, program directors identified problems arising from the many programs serving the same population with different eligibility requirements and rules. For example, insufficient communication between programs results in some clients with real needs being unable to access resources. Several of the program directors wanted greater communication among the programs, which they believe could increase benefits to clients:

> So we don't even know how many of these people go through the charity program. But, you know, there's some that know the system. They know where to go. They go to charity, they go to [a Catholic

> program], they go to the churches, they go to the food bank. I mean, they know how to hustle. And there is a percentage of them who know how to hustle and know how to get money like that.
>
> I just think that we have got to have not necessarily more flexibility, but more similarity in what we are doing so that we can work on these programs together for the client's benefit instead of whatever the priorities are at the national level. The client should be the priority, and I don't think they are.

The large number of cases carried by FAIM case managers is a source of frustration for program directors who lack the funding to hire more caseworkers to handle the large workload. The lack of funding is also reported by tribal program directors, again reflecting the strain on these programs created by welfare changes: "Another thing that is frustrating sometimes is, um, not having enough resources that you'd like to have to be able to help people. We have some resources here and we are able to help a lot of people, but you know, there's times when you'd like to be able to do more, and you can't."

Another problem described by one director is clients' difficulty in meeting the work requirement in this rural area:

> Single parents have to do thirty hours. Two parents have to do thirty-five hours, and sometimes that's kind of hard to [do], you know. You've got to really be creative, so . . . so for the rural areas . . . sometimes it is really a problem to meet those hours. And for the case managers, as it is, they have big caseloads, and then they have to take time to find things for their participants to do to meet those hours.

Generally, program directors recognize that the rural, reservation setting lacks sufficient work opportunities for clients to fulfill their work requirements. Some remain optimistic, but most are concerned about the unemployment rates and lack of job opportunities:

> We have a real high unemployment rate. Uh, and we don't have any jobs. Mostly the jobs here are seasonal. And just the regular ones are, uh, the government programs here. The IHS, the BIA, and the tribe and [the Catholic Mission] are the main employers, and we don't have any outside industry. . . . They have to leave the reservation in order to find work. That's a big problem—finding jobs for people—even ones that are on the work programs for welfare and other agencies. They can't find meaningful jobs for them.
>
> Maybe the federal government needs to take a more active role in equalizing the employment opportunities or making different kinds of opportunities available and especially in our rural area.

> I think that we need to look more at the [cottage] industries and maybe . . . there are a lot of opportunities through computers to work from home that would be an option for people that don't live in larger towns.

Employers at FAIM Work Sites

The work requirement is intended to benefit both clients and employers. In theory workers can learn skills to move into a permanent position at the work site and become economically independent, while employers benefit from the labor of FAIM workers compensated through welfare. As program directors indicated, however, opportunities for work are severely limited on the reservation. This constraint dramatically complicates the implementation of the work requirement. Nevertheless, employers indicate that their experiences are largely positive, although they also identify some problems with the program.

Among the work sites the FAIM clients reported were households that needed child care or cleaning, the Boys and Girls Club, the Senior Citizens' Center, the Recovery Center, tribal or BIA offices, Chief Dull Knife College, local churches, and local ranches. Other work opportunities included tribal health programs, the Family Literacy Program, and caring for elderly family members at the Elderly Complex. Typical kinds of work were cleaning, cooking, and child care, but other jobs included clerical or administrative assistance and various types of physical labor, such as ranch work. Most employers report that they use one or two FAIM workers a month. Table 1 indicates the types of jobs that are advertised for FAIM workers. Secretarial or office work is the most commonly advertised type of work, followed by janitorial work. Work is differentiated for men and women, with men generally working as laborers or in maintenance and women as secretaries, cooks, and caretakers. Most employers report that they provide little training on the job because of the simple tasks involved in most jobs, such as cooking, cleaning, gardening, and maintenance work.

Table 1
Type of Jobs Listed for FAIM Workers

Position	Federal	State	Tribal	Churches	Private	Total
Office/Receptionist	2	8	8	1	1	20
Janitorial	2	1	5	0	1	9
Food	0	0	4	0	1	5
Child care	0	0	2	0	0	2
School aid	0	3	1	0	0	4
Laborer	1	0	1	0	1	3
Surveying aid	1	0	0	0	0	1
Dispatcher	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	6	12	22	1	4	45

Of all the employers interviewed, only one reported ever hiring FAIM workers for a paid position. The most commonly reported reasons that employers did not hire FAIM workers were lack of funding and that no position was available. One employer lamented that "there's no positions open and we got a budget that, you know, gets filled year after year" (Cheyenne, male).[51] Another employer cited "lack of funding, mainly. And then, um, the process. It takes around thirty days to hire somebody for two weeks if you're gonna do it part time. We can't hire them through our system unless they go through Billings, and we have to advertise" (Cheyenne, female).

For some employers more information is needed in order to more productively use FAIM workers. For example, one employer felt that her lack of information about the program kept her from taking on more FAIM workers and from hiring them for paid work: "I think a lack of understanding of the program and how we can work them—how many hours they can truly be committed to us . . . [so] we can actually determine where to start them, where they would like to pick up knowledge . . . to me it is a lack of understanding the program" (Cheyenne, female).

Another employer expressed a desire to see more information about each participant so that she could effectively use FAIM workers to help her in her work and also provide a more positive experience for them: "I could use a worker to do filing or whatever, but what I would like to see is something where they go over, like, what is this person about, because people aren't zero—they're about personalities, and to see something like that would give me [a] better understanding of where I could put her, where she's gonna feel comfortable and where she's gonna work" (Cheyenne, female).

The real and perceived skills, abilities, and work ethic of FAIM workers are an important part of the experience for both employers and workers. All but one of the employers interviewed indicated that the FAIM participants' work ethic was strong. Most indicated that they found workers to have a high level of reliability and willingness to learn and be trained. In fact, many employers commented on the competence and productivity of the workers.

> They never refuse any work. I just tell them once what to do and then they are on their own. . . . They are on time and they do their work. (Cheyenne, female)

> They have been willing to learn. And they were actually very good workers. Once you told them, showed them a certain task, you usually didn't have to go back and show them again. You could just tell them what to do and they would go out on their own and they would do it. You didn't have to constantly be there and look over their back. They were willing to work. (Cheyenne, female)

One employer recognized the difference in work ethic between two of her workers and was able to determine that the difference was almost entirely due to the added barriers that one of the workers had to face in order to fulfill the hours required:

> I think, uh, the younger girl had more . . . she had younger children, and from my impression, the father wasn't with them. She didn't have a car and she was maybe five miles out of town, and sometimes she would come in the next day—I didn't know where she was—and she said, "Well, I broke down"—they don't have phones and I was like, "Wow, you know, I have a car. I don't have to go through that kind of thing." Or, "My babysitter didn't show up." (Cheyenne, female)

In contrast, an employer in a more isolated community on the reservation reported more negative experiences with FAIM workers. She described workers as having a very poor work ethic and low commitment to working at all:

> Just that they don't want to work the hours. I mean they figure that they should get the GA [General Assistance] or whatever, and they should just be signed off.
>
> There's a few of them that said, "Well, can I work?" And I said, "Yes, we'll find something for you to do, like paint or . . ." "Well, I don't like to paint." "Well, you can scrub floors." "I don't like to scrub floors, I don't like to clean cupboards, I don't like to mow lawns, I don't like, I don't like, I don't like." Well, you know, it's a small area. You about have to take what you can get. (white, female)

Because this is a small community within the reservation, there are very few opportunities for work nearby. This severely limits the selection of work sites for FAIM participants, as acknowledged by this employer. Although the employer felt the workers were resisting any kind of work, in fact, their resistance may have been related to the type of work offered. Participants may respond to work with less opposition and more effort if work is challenging, meaningful, and relevant to future job placement. In fact, this is exactly what other employers reported: when workers liked their work and the tasks were interesting, there was no evidence of resistance to the work assignments.

The more negative employer quoted above is also pessimistic about workers' general life skills, failing to recognize their special circumstances or other factors that may affect FAIM workers' attitudes and work skills:

> They don't have any learning skills—the majority of them . . . they don't have any pride in what they do. . . . One woman said, "My mother died when I was two," and another one said, "I can remember my mom taking all of us kids and hiding from my dad when he was drunk, and we'd go out to the shed. The snow would be to our waist, and we'd sit there all night, hiding from him." Another said, "My mother was an alcoholic, and she used to beat us," and it just went on and on and they have no role model as to what [they are] supposed to do." (white, female)

The primary goal of the work requirement is to help FAIM participants gain the experience and skills in a work setting that will allow them to be more prepared to secure full-time work. Most employers sympathized with workers, recognizing the difficulty in finding long-term work that is in accordance with their needs: "They need jobs, but minimum wage is not enough to pay bills and support a family. It may sound good, but it isn't" (white, female).

However, when employers were asked about their roles in this process, most felt that the responsibility to help is limited to training and job experience: "You know, we're taking them in our programs and we're supposed to be helping them, you know, training them. But I don't think that we should be forced to hire them . . . because you can have somebody that is more qualified for that position that is not in this program, and that kind of knocks them out. But I think, you know, they should help them get jobs" (Cheyenne, female).

FAIM Clients

Previous research indicates that the vast majority of clients have serious barriers to overcome in order to complete their required work hours. Most FAIM clients report working up to thirty-five hours per week in order to receive cash assistance from the FAIM program. Other clients worked ten hours or less in order to receive cash assistance from the General Assistance program of the tribe. As mentioned earlier, typical kinds of work were cleaning, cooking, and child care, but other jobs included clerical or administrative assistance, general physical labor, and ranch work.

Most clients reported problems with finding a work site. However, several identified their own lack of skills as contributing to the problem. The following quotes reveal the range of training needs among the clients interviewed, from getting a GED to obtaining college or specialized training certification, all of which are needed to compete for jobs.

> Our coach would help look for, like, jobs. She would see some job announcements, and there were some that I was really interested in, but it always required college, mostly computer skills. I don't have any computer skills. (divorced mother, four children)

> I'd eventually like to go into the nursing field. (married mother, two children)

> I want to be a nurse. But I also want to be a supervisor. (single mother, one child)

> I'm a certified nurse's aide, but my certification ran out, and that's what I need to look into is recertifying. (married mother, five children)

> I'm trying to get into college here, you know. Maybe [I can get] financial aid, or whatever, to get into college in the fall. I need to get my GED and just apply for college. (single mother, three children)

> I don't really have any problems with the skills because I don't have anything to do besides putting all the files together. And once she showed me how to do it, and I just did it. . . . I'd be all right if I like found a job as a secretary. (single mother, two children)[52]

Other clients had problems meeting the number of work hours required at their work sites. Reasons included both employers' lack of work tasks and the clients' inability to get to work because of transportation or child-care problems. A number of FAIM clients experienced problems with transportation and child care: almost half of the clients interviewed reported that transportation to their work sites is a major problem, and about the same proportion reported that their need for child care is a serious obstacle to doing their required work hours. For about half of this group of clients, the difficulties resulted in failing to complete their required number of hours. Consequently, they were sanctioned by the FAIM program, which meant their cash assistance and their food stamps were reduced for a designated period.

As the following quotes suggest, however, many clients tried a variety of strategies to overcome the difficulties they encountered in addressing their transportation and child-care needs. Others face problems that are more pressing and for which solutions are more difficult to find.

> Yeah, I used to start hitchhiking early, catch the eight o'clock workers, early morning people [driving to Lame Deer]. Just about every winter my car breaks down, so this last income tax [return] I got smart and bought two cars, so if one breaks down, I have the other one. Well, I bought one for my daughter, and so if mine breaks down, we have hers. If hers breaks down, we have mine. (single mother, three children)

> I tried to get my kids into the day care here, and I couldn't. And I kept, you know, I really did have a hard time, and I did miss classes because I didn't have a babysitter because I have a four-year-old daughter and a one-year-old son. . . . And I just kept coming back and coming back to the JTPA and finally this year I got, I was able to get my son into the day care. So that really helped.

> I have to do like forty hours, and that's kind of like having a job. . . . And that's the only other problem we have with that is getting our hours in because if we don't get them in on time, they'll sanction us. It will chop your cash assistance and your food stamps. The only ones that will receive it is the children. (married mother, two children)

> And if there's anything else, it would be my alcoholism. (single mother, disabled)

Clients also discussed their attitudes toward the work requirement and the effects of the work requirement on their ability to access a desired job or to improve their work skills and obtain a better job. In this area the interview data indicate that the majority of clients who are required to complete work hours understand and approve of this requirement. While a few clients expressed resentment and did not believe work should be required for receiving benefits, most clients evaluated their work site and work tasks as good, even when they had problems meeting the work requirement. In other words the problems expressed by clients were not related to the work requirement but rather to the obstacles to completing the work requirement. Even so, not many believed that the kinds of work they did (typically low-level clerical tasks or physical labor) would sufficiently improve their work skills and help them land a better job. Thus, while some clients mentioned that they do receive some satisfaction from "working," were able to list their FAIM or GA jobs on their resume, and often enjoyed the work, most did not expect it to lead to a regular job with these employers or to a better job.

These responses present a sharp contrast to client interests in taking a local job if it were offered to them: the vast majority (63 percent) responded that they would take any job offered if it paid minimum wage. The only exceptions were clients with special trade or technical skills (such as electricians) or college degrees, who desired at least $7.50 to $12 an hour in order to take a local job. In part, clients' pessimism about obtaining a job, much less a better local job, is based on their perceptions of the local job market. They correctly believed that good-paying jobs were scarce, and most believed they lacked the education or skill level to compete for these jobs. Consequently, many clients wanted to go back to school to obtain a GED, college degree, or advanced training in order to become more competitive.

Other reasons for clients believing that it will be difficult to obtain a job locally were related to features of the local cultural and social setting. Because these clients live in rural communities where most people know each other, reputations play a large role in accessing the opportunity structure. Additionally, in reservation communities like Northern Cheyenne, kinship and family connections are important social resources for gaining access to job opportunities and surviving on welfare benefits.

In essence, an individual's reputation and his or her family's credentials and connections are as important as human capital considerations in being accepted by local employers into FAIM work sites. For example, positive family attitudes, education, and work experiences, as well as family and personal connections, often help job applicants gain entry into specific organizations. Thus, while an individual's school and work credentials are relevant to employers, also important are a person's relatives, who may act as sponsors, provide good references, or help to monitor a new employee. However, an applicant's reputation and family group may also hinder his or her access to opportunities; for example, family members whose own

educational experiences were not positive may not provide needed support when their spouse, children, or other relatives want to go to college or get additional training. Also, if employers anticipate that a FAIM worker may not get along with other employees because of personal or family frictions, they are reluctant to accept such workers into their organization. For this reason clients report that FAIM work-site coordinators do not assign individuals to a particular site. Instead, they give clients a list of work sites and ask them to find one that is a good match in terms of skills and social considerations.

Despite the complexities accompanying these dynamics, interview data indicate that clients typically were motivated to improve their situations by obtaining jobs or better work situations. Their job goals ranged from lower level clerical and cleaning, cooking, or janitorial services to jobs requiring more advanced training. In the latter category several clients expressed interest in working with small children in such settings as Head Start programs or day care, while others desired work in social services and home care with the elderly or other persons needing personal care. One client was interested in obtaining computer skills, and several others were interested in nursing or health care. Still other clients expressed interest in carpentry, construction, and electrical work. All except those having degrees or extensive experience in construction and trade skills desired additional training to achieve their job goals.

When asked about the effects of the work requirement and other aspects of welfare reform, most clients did not believe they were beneficial. A few thought that receiving welfare negatively affected their self-esteem, and others believed that the program resources were inadequate to help them improve their work skills and access jobs, especially given the scarcity of jobs. Thus, they continued to draw on subsistence activities, unrecognized work, and informal resources in the local communities to help feed their children and support their families.

SUMMARY

Program directors, employers, and clients viewed recent welfare changes from different perspectives, yet all agreed that the new work requirements of the TANF/FAIM program pose serious challenges to meeting the needs of these Northern Cheyenne clients because they ignore the economic, social, and cultural context of the reservation. Although program directors recognized the need for clients to develop skills, as well as obtain jobs and independence from assistance, they generally agreed that the job scarcity and poor economic incentives in the local reservation context make this very difficult. They were also frustrated with the disorganization, lack of resources, and unsatisfactory communication and cooperation between programs.

Most employers had good experiences with their FAIM workers but did not believe they could help the workers with future employment because there are no positions to offer them. This shortage of job availability was due to either budget limitations or no positions being open. However, most employers said they would like to be able to hire FAIM workers. A better

understanding of how the program works also would allow employers to match the skills, abilities, and interests of the workers to relevant available tasks and jobs. Differences in employer experiences with FAIM workers are linked to the kinds of tasks that workers were assigned to do: those offering jobs with meaningful tasks tended to have more positive experiences than those providing menial tasks requiring little skill. Employers working closely with FAIM workers generally recognized the barriers many of these workers encountered in completing the required work hours, such as the lack of phones as well as access to reliable babysitters and transportation.

Through in-depth interviews with FAIM program participants representing each of five reservation communities, this research builds on previous findings indicating a wide range of experiences and needs among adults receiving welfare benefits.[53] Data on the experiences of Northern Cheyenne welfare recipients indicate that the new work requirements have had important effects on their lives, although not necessarily the ones expected by the creators of the new welfare program. Essentially, workers experienced an entirely new set of struggles to meet their families' needs. For example, they struggled to find an acceptable work site because of the scarcity of opportunities on the reservation. If they found a work site compatible with their skills and needs, the jobs often required very low levels of skills. Thus, workers typically did not benefit much in terms of adding to their skills or qualifications. Workers often struggled to maintain even a poor work opportunity because of child-care and transportation problems. Ultimately, workers knew that there is little likelihood that their FAIM work-site employer would be able to offer them a regular job. The consequences for workers were that they spent a great deal of time and effort meeting work requirements associated with welfare benefits that barely met their family's needs and that most likely would not help them access better paying jobs. Additionally, the time spent meeting with welfare staff and coordinating their schedules with counselors left little time for looking for "real" jobs.[54] In a local and regional economy that now offers primarily service jobs, these FAIM workers reaped little benefit from the work requirement. Interestingly, however, the real beneficiaries of the new TANF work requirement were the agencies that provided work sites for TANF clients. In essence, these employers benefited by having their labor needs subsidized by the welfare system's use of surplus labor.

Virtually all participants in this research said they would prefer to have a job and would take almost any job offered, despite the fact that they would most likely still have problems with transportation and child care. Another concern with acquiring a job was that it would not pay sufficient wages to improve their quality of life. Nevertheless, most clients indicated they would take any job paying the standard minimum wage. The only exceptions were skilled technicians (electricians and carpenters) who said they would settle for ten to twelve dollars per hour in order to take a local job.[55] All expected that their current benefits would be cut back, and they worried about how this might affect their ability to feed their families.

Although many FAIM workers acknowledged that they liked their work site, they would have preferred to have other sites approved for meeting

their work requirement. For example, some women preferred caring for their young children, whereas others wanted to return to school for a GED, training, or college degree. Such alternatives were not possible, however, in a welfare system that emphasized "work first," meaning short-term training and acquiring low-paying jobs as a way to leave welfare.[56] As suggested by the workers themselves, new jobs in the low-paying service sector were not likely to improve their ability to meet their families' needs. Other studies on the effects of welfare reform also indicate that the market will only be able to absorb workers barring an economic downturn and that low wages and earning potential continue to be a problem for the transition out of poverty.[57]

CONCLUSIONS

Who does the new TANF work requirement "work" for? If anyone benefits from this requirement, it is not typically the welfare program participants for whom the program was crafted. It is the employers at work sites who gain valuable work from TANF participants, often at a fraction of standard costs and sometimes for free. For this rural Native population, the research data clearly show the difficulties many face in finding and accessing meaningful and constructive work opportunities. The four aspects of work identified at the beginning of this essay—the availability of work, the types and levels of work, qualifications that provide access to work, and local definitions of work—present conditions and obstacles that are unaccounted for in the new welfare work program and its policies. The effects of these issues essentially leave communities like the Northern Cheyenne to fend for themselves.

A central finding of our research supports previous research conclusions that American Indian populations face tremendous obstacles in finding jobs.[58] Importantly, our research points to a dimension of reservation labor-market deficiencies that few studies have discussed: reservation clients are often unable to meet the work requirement needed to even receive TANF benefits, much less leave welfare. Because the state TANF program did not have the flexibility to approve many of the forms of work that are useful and meaningful in the Northern Cheyenne community, welfare recipients were required to find work among the limited number of sites that met TANF regulations. As a result many eligible welfare recipients lost their benefits or were pushed out of the new program. Specifically, when clients tried to meet their family needs through the use of skills that they could exchange for food or transportation, TANF program administrators dismissed these activities as interfering with clients' efforts to develop legitimate skills (i.e., those that have economic value in the bureaucratic organizations and businesses that populate the mainstream urban economy). Interestingly, it is often the clients' types of skills and activities that bring urban tourists to the West. However, American welfare program policies continue to devalue the traditional practices that have always helped the Cheyenne survive.[59]

A second issue concerns the acquisition of new skills that can lead to obtaining good jobs and leaving welfare. Client data suggest that the limits on acceptable work sites, the skill levels required in existing work sites, and

the very limited access to educational or training opportunities have led to little gains in skills by Northern Cheyenne TANF participants. Related to this concern is a third issue identified by other studies of reservation TANF clients: the lack of work opportunities prevents welfare clients from obtaining jobs that allow them to leave welfare and move out of poverty. As suggested by other research, learning new skills will only improve the lives of the welfare workers if there are opportunities to use them at jobs that pay living wages. Specifically, Bernstein asserts, "The challenge to the viability of welfare-to-work . . . comes not only from the lack of skills among recipients . . . but from the number and quality of jobs available" to them.[60] Thus, both individual skills and an adequate opportunity structure are important for the effectiveness of the new welfare work requirement.

While human capital enhancement may be beneficial, even providing conventional training along with eliminating other barriers to work (such as the lack of child care and transportation) would not be enough.[61] As Pickering has pointed out, for individual human capital to be effectively utilized in the rural reservation economy, it also will be necessary to recognize and use the skills and experience that reservation residents already possess in abundance.[62] However, for this to occur TANF programs must be allowed to expand the concept of work and identify local opportunities through which reservation residents can engage in work that is locally valued. As the data presented here show, a narrow range of job skills and work opportunities have been utilized in the Northern Cheyenne reservation setting.

To address this dilemma, the concept of native capital may be useful in identifying the range of skills and resources that Cheyenne workers bring to the local labor market, as well as the unique ways workers may utilize these skills.[63] The notion of native capital emphasizes the range and balance of social and cultural resources (including both formal credentials and informal resources) that play particular roles in the allocation of individuals to work opportunities within the context of reservation communities.[64] This concept is important to our discussion of TANF since success in finding a work site and job to meet the new TANF work requirement is affected by individual access to and use of social and cultural resources. That is, access to the jobs available and notions about appropriate work are tied to the resources—native capital—on which individuals and families draw. Thus, the effectiveness of TANF in the context of reservation communities is a result, at least in part, of its ability fully to recognize and utilize both the native capital of reservation residents and the types of jobs and work opportunities available.

Rather than focusing on the lack of credentials among TANF clients, the program and the reservation would be better served by building on the clients' experiences and skills as important resources in a developing economy. In essence, efforts must be made to fully understand and address both the supply and demand sides of the equation. This is especially difficult in rural, reservation areas that have been hit hard by recent economic restructuring, as well as the effects of decades of isolation and discrimination directed toward reservation populations.[65] However, our findings support the recommendations of Brown and associates that new efforts must be made to create economic opportunities

that will be compatible with the reservation populations' needs, interests, cultural resources, and the vast array of skills unique to this context.[66]

Finally, it is important to note that this particular research effort does not include a representative sample of reservation residents (in terms of demographic and other characteristics). However, it does provide data on the specific range of experiences relevant to understanding the effects of the new TANF work requirement for reservation residents from different communities, age groups, skill levels and other relevant circumstances. Since our findings essentially support and extend the results of other research efforts investigating these issues with other methods and in a variety of other American Indian communities, we believe they can be reasonably generalized to other communities that experience many of the same social, cultural, and economic circumstances as the Northern Cheyenne.[67] Our recommendation is for others to build on this research and continue to clarify the effects of the TANF work requirement in other contexts and to hold policy makers accountable for how the new work requirement "works."

NOTES

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14. Albelda, "Fallacies."

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22. Bernstein, "Welfare Reform," 39.

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Welfare Reform on Food Assistance Programs on American Indian Reservations: The Northern Cheyenne Case Study, report submitted to USDA, October 1999.

49. Hiwalker et al., *Does the Food Stamps Program.*

50. Interviewees quoted in this section included TANF program directors for Rosebud and Big Horn counties. They were interviewed by Rita Hiwalker at their offices between June and August 1999. Interview transcripts are archived in the Sociology Department at BYU and at Chief Dull Knife College in Lame Deer, MT. These are confidential interviews and are available only by special permission.

51. Interviewees quoted in this section included Cheyenne and white employers. All were interviewed by Rita Hiwalker and Erin Feinauer Whiting at the interviewees' various work sites on the Northern Cheyenne reservation between spring and fall 2000. Interview transcripts are archived in the Sociology Department at BYU and at Chief Dull Knife College in Lame Deer, MT. These are confidential interviews and are available only by special permission.

52. Interviewees quoted in this section are American Indian, mostly Cheyenne, FAIM clients living on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. All were interviewed by Rita Hiwalker on the reservation between spring of 1999 and fall of 2000. Interview transcripts are archived in the Sociology Department at BYU and at Chief Dull Knife College in Lame Deer, MT. These are confidential interviews and are available only by special permission.

53. Hiwalker et al., *Does the Food Stamps Program*; Hiwalker et al., *Relationship of Food Assistance.*

54. For more details see Ward "Importance of Context"; and Pickering "Alternative Economic Strategies."

55. Hiwalker et al., *Does the Food Stamps Program.*

56. Brown et al., *Welfare, Work, and American Indians.*

57. Albelda, "Fallacies"; Bernstein, "Welfare Reform"; Burtless "Employment Experiences."

58. See, e.g., Bernstein, "Welfare Reform"; Pickering, "Alternative Economic Strategies"; Brown et al., *Welfare, Work, and American Indians*; Harvey et al., "Short-Term Impacts."

59. See John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne Nation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

60. Bernstein, "Welfare Reform," 33.

61. Brown and Venner, "Initial Returns"; Morgen and Weigt, "Poor Women"; Turner and Main, "Work Experience"; House subcommittee, *Welfare Reform.*

62. See Pickering, "Alternative Economic Strategies."

63. Ward, "Importance of Context"; see also Carol Ward, *Native Americans in the School System: Family, Community, and Academic Achievement* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005).

64. Ward, "Importance of Context."

65. Ward and Snipp, "Introduction"; Ward, "Importance of Context."

66. Brown et al., Welfare, Work, and American Indians.

67. Ibid.