

## CHAPTER 5

# MONTANA'S GOVERNMENT AND TRIBAL NATIONS

- What are the things all Montanans should know about Montana Indians?
- What does it mean to be sovereign?

One thing that makes Montana so special is the number of American Indians who live here. In 2020, about one out of twelve Montanans was a tribal member. Indians have lived in this region since long before Montana became a state. They are an important part of our history and an important part of our present, too.

In 1972, Montanans decided to write a new state **constitution** (a document that sets the



Artist Ben Pease painted this portrait of his aunt, Dr. Janine Pease, to honor the **resilience** (strength) of many Indian women.

rules for government). The people writing the constitution recognized how important Indians were to Montana. They wrote: “The state recognizes the **distinct** (separate) and **unique** (not the same) cultural heritage of the American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity.”

What does that mean? It means that the State of Montana understands that American Indians have special traditions and beliefs and that the state is committed to protecting these traditions. Montana is the only state out of all fifty states that recognizes the importance of American Indians in its constitution.

## INDIAN EDUCATION FOR ALL

The constitution sets out big ideas, or principles. The state legislature and governor decide how to make those big ideas a reality. In 1999, the legislature passed a law they called Indian Education for All (IEFA). This law supports the 1972 Constitution by requiring that every Montana school teach about Montana Indian history and **culture** (language, customs, and ideas).

After the legislature passed Indian Education for All, the state asked each Montana tribal nation to choose a representative to help decide the best way to teach students about Montana

Indian history and culture. There are so many things to know! However, the state asked these representatives to come up with a list of the most important (or **essential**) ideas that they wanted all Montanans to understand. They chose seven things. They called these the Seven Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians.

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 1

The first thing that the tribes want everyone to know is that Montana has twelve tribes. Each tribe is **unique** (not the same as any other). They have their own history, culture, and language, and they all contribute to modern Montana.

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 2

The second thing that the tribes want people to know is that not all Indians are the same, even if they are members of the same tribe. Some Indians may speak their tribal language. Others may speak only English. Some Indians may participate in tribal celebrations or **traditional** (old) ceremonies. Others do not. Every individual Indian person is different, and the way they understand what it means to be a tribal member is unique.



Every Indian person has his or her own likes and dislikes. Victor had his portrait painted in 1964 wearing a black cowboy hat and red bandana; in 1956, Judy Larsen chose a beaded dress and eagle-feather fan for her portrait.



## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 3

The third thing that the tribes want people to know is that traditional tribal beliefs are still important. Some of these traditions **predate** (come before) the arrival of Europeans on this **continent** (one of the earth's main areas of land). Tribes passed down important traditions and information from one generation to the next. Every tribe has **oral histories** (important stories that people pass down) that are older and are as good as written histories.

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 4

The fourth thing that the tribes want people to know is that the U.S. government did not give them land. Indians lived here long before Europeans arrived. They gave up most of their lands to the U.S. government, but they kept some of it for their own use. The lands they **reserved** (kept) are called reservations.

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 5

The fifth thing that the tribes want people to know is that the U.S. government treated Indian tribes and Indian people differently at different times. Sometimes the U.S. government respected tribal **sovereignty** (self-rule). Other times the U.S. government tried to erase tribes altogether. The ways the U.S. government acted toward Indians continues to affect Indian people today.



*Painted by Assiniboine artist William Standing, this picture shows some of the ways life changed on the Fort Peck Reservation in the 1920s and 1930s. When you look at it, what do you notice?*

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 6

The sixth thing that the tribes want people to know is that a person's point of view shapes the way they understand and explain history. Indian historians often see things differently than non-Indian historians.

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 7

The seventh thing they want people to know is that tribes are **sovereign** (self-governing). They make their own laws and are in charge of governing themselves. However, the U.S. government sometimes limits what tribes can do.



*The U.S. and tribal flags in front of the Montana state capitol symbolize sovereignty.*

## AN ONGOING LEARNING JOURNEY

The Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians are just a starting point. These are the big ideas you need to understand before you can start to learn more about the different cultures and histories of Montana tribes. What are some of the things you would like to learn about Montana tribes and tribal members, from their earliest history to today?



*Dora Rides Horse teaches a traditional Crow song to students at Crow Agency School.*

# GLOSSARY

**Abandon** leave

**Adapted** changed to fit new conditions

**Allies** friends

**Allotment** portion

**Allotment policy** dividing Indian reservations into separate farms for each family

**Amber** yellow

**Ancestors** family members who lived long ago

**Ancient** very old

**Archaeologists** scientists who study the past by analyzing objects people have left behind

**Artifacts** objects created by people

**Assimilate/assimilation** to be absorbed into the majority culture, in this case, the white American culture

**Atlatl** a spear thrower

**Bacteriology** the study of bacteria

**Badlands** an area created by erosion of rocks and hills with little vegetation

**Band** group

**Bison** buffalo

**Boom** time of great prosperity or rapid growth

**Capotes** coats made from thick wool blankets

**Chinook** a warm wind that blows down the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains

**Claim** take for their own

**Climate** typical weather condition

**Communal** group

**Constitution** document that sets the rules for government



**Continent** one of the main areas of land on earth

**Continental Divide** a mountain ridge that separates North America and determines whether water flows east to the Atlantic Ocean or west to the Pacific Ocean

**Culture** a shared system of behavior, attitudes, and understandings; language, customs, and ideas

**Descendants** a person's children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, etc.

**Discrimination** treating a group of people unfairly

**Disease** sickness

**Distinct** separate

**Diversity** variety

**Drought** lack of rain

**Economy** businesses and jobs

**Environment** land, water, climate

**Epidemic** rapid spread of disease

**Erosion** the process by which rock or soil is gradually taken away by wind, rain, or water

**Essential** most important

**Extinct** gone

**Extinction** death of a species

**Fell** cut down trees

**Fertile** good for growing things

**Foothills** hills at the edge of a mountain range

**Geography** where things are, the study of particular places

**Geologists** scientists who study the earth

**Geology** minerals, rocks, and soil and the study of these things

**Great Plains** the flat land region west of the Mississippi River and east of the Rocky Mountains

**Homesteader** someone who received land from the U.S. government in exchange for farming that land

**Immigrant** someone who moves to a new country to live

**Immigrate** move from one country to another

**Indian agent** a person (usually non-Indian) who the government put in charge of a reservation

**Industries** types of businesses

**Leased** rented

**Lumber** wood for building

**Mechanization** using machines to do the work that people once did

**Natural resources** things found in nature and used by people

**Negotiate** discuss to come to an agreement

**Northern Divide** landform that separates water that flows north from water that flows south

**Opportunities** chances for something better

**Oral histories** important stories people pass down

**Pacifist** someone who believes that problems cannot be solved by fighting

**Pelts** skins

**Plains** flat land

**Poultry** birds raised on farms, like chickens and turkeys

**Poverty** being poor

**Prairies** flat grasslands

**Precipitation** rain and snow

**Predate** come before

**Prospectors** people looking for gold or other precious metals

**Published** printed

**Pull factors** things that make people want to move to a new place

**Push factors** things that make people want to leave their homes

**Push-pull factors** things that influence immigration (that push you out of your home country and pull you to another place)

**Reservation** an area of land that a tribe or tribes reserved (kept) for their own use

**Reserved** kept

**Residents** people who live in a place

**Resilience** strength

**Resourceful** good at figuring things out

**Resources** useful things

**Sovereign** self-governing

**Sovereignty** self-rule

**Spacious** large

**Specific** exact

**Strike** gold discovery

**Suffrage** vote

**Suffrage activist** someone working to win women the right to vote

**Surplus** extra

**Taxes** money people pay the government so the government can provide services

**Timber** wood for building

**Time immemorial** as long as anyone can remember

**Toxic** poisonous

**Traditional** old

**Transcontinental** all the way across the continent

**Transport** move

**Treasurer** the person who keeps track of an organization's money

**Treaty** agreement between nations

**Union** an organization that stands up for workers' rights and fights for better pay

**Unique** not the same as any other

# IMAGE CREDITS

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**Montana Historical Society is abbreviated as MHS.**

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p. 48, Victor by Elizabeth Lochrie, oil on board, 1964, gift of the artist, MHS 1979.12.21; Judy Larsen by Elizabeth Lochrie, gift of the artist, MHS 1979.12.24

p. 49, Untitled (Reservation Scene) by William Standing, Assiniboine, oil on canvas, no date, MHS X1977.01.01

p. 50, Tribal Flag Plaza by Tom Ferris, 2021

p. 51, Dora Rides Horse by James Woodcock, Billings Gazette, August 24, 2006