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ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS REGARDING MONTANA INDIANS

Essential Understanding 1

There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

Essential Understanding 2

There is great diversity among individual American Indians as identity is developed, defined and redefined by entities, organizations and people. A continuum of Indian identity, unique to each individual, ranges from assimilated to traditional. There is no generic American Indian.

Essential Understanding 3

The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs.

Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America.

Essential Understanding 4

Reservations are lands that have been reserved by the tribes for their own use through treaties, statutes, and executive orders and were not “given” to them. The principle that land should be acquired from the Indians only through their consent with treaties involved three assumptions:

- I. *Both parties to treaties were sovereign powers.*
- II. *Indian tribes had some form of transferable title to the land.*
- III. *Acquisition of Indian lands was solely a government matter not to be left to individual colonists.*

Essential Understanding 5

Federal policies, put into place throughout American history, have affected Indian people and still shape who they are today. Much of Indian history can be related through several major federal policy periods:

<i>Colonization Period</i>	<i>1492 -</i>
<i>Treaty Period</i>	<i>1789 - 1871</i>
<i>Allotment Period</i>	<i>1887 - 1934</i>
<i>Boarding School Period</i>	<i>1879 - - -</i>
<i>Tribal Reorganization Period</i>	<i>1934 - 1958</i>
<i>Termination Period</i>	<i>1953 - 1988</i>
<i>Self-determination</i>	<i>1975 – current</i>

Essential Understanding 6

History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

Essential Understanding 7

Under the American legal system, Indian tribes have sovereign powers, separate and independent from the federal and state governments. However, the extent and breadth of tribal sovereignty is not the same for each tribe.