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Economic Status of American Indians in Montana: A Preliminary Assessment

Prepared for

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This report is the first step in providing a comprehensive assessment of the economic status of American Indians in Montana and those living on the state's reservation. It consists of three sections:

- Selected data from the 2000 Census of Population.
- Attitudes and opinion of American Indians about work-related topics.
- Explanation of different measures of American Indian unemployment.

Characteristics of American Indians Living on Reservations in Montana

About the Numbers. The decennial census provides unique once-a-decade data on a variety of economic and demographic characteristics. The 2000 Census includes a new feature allowing analysis of American Indians living on reservations. The census data are not perfect because their accuracy depends on completeness, and this has been an issue on American Indian reservations. Nevertheless, the census data provide information that is not available elsewhere.

The U.S. Census Bureau has long asked about race. In 2000 the race question was changed to allow respondents to classify themselves into more than one category. The data analyzed in the following sections include all persons who identified themselves as American Indians. Some of the respondents may also classify themselves in other racial categories. Also, the following data may not correlate with the number of enrolled tribal members because American Indians of any tribe may live on a reservation.

Population (Table 1). According to the 2000 Census, there were 65,945 self identified American Indians in Montana, or about 7.3 percent of the total populations. Approximately 37,871 American Indians, or about 57.4 percent, lived on one of the seven reservations in the state.

The Blackfeet and the Flathead reservations were the largest, with 8,665 and 7,853 American Indian residents, respectively. Rocky Boy's (2,598) and the Fort Belknap (2,805) reservations had the smallest number of American Indians residents.

American Indians are not the only persons living on reservations. Across all seven reservations in Montana, approximately 59.6 percent of the residents said they were American Indians. This percentage varies significantly from one reservation to another. About 97.1 percent of the residents of Rocky Boy's and roughly 94.89 percent of the Fort Belknap reservations identified themselves as American Indians. At the other end of the spectrum, American Indians are a minority on the Flathead Reservation; only 30.0 percent of the population identified themselves as American Indian.

Table 1
American Indians and Total Persons
Montana and American Indian Reservations
2000

	Montana	Total All Reservations	Blackfeet Reservation	Crow Reservation	Flathead Reservation	Fort Belknap Reservation	Fort Peck Reservation	No. Cheyenne Reservation	Rocky Boy's Reservation
Total Persons	902,195	63,592	10,100	6,894	26,172	2,959	10,321	4,470	2,676
American Indians	65,945	37,871	8,665	5,274	7,853	2,805	6,574	4,102	2,598
Percent of Total	7.3	59.6	85.8	76.5	30.0	94.8	63.7	91.8	97.1

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing.

Age (Table 2). American Indians are, on average, much younger than other Montanans. The median age for American Indians was 24.1 years, as compared for 37.5 years for the total populations in the state. The youngest American Indians were on the Northern Cheyenne and Rocky Boy's reservations, with medians of 20.2 and 20.1 years, respectively. The oldest were on the For Peck Reservation, where the median age was 30.2 years.

The lower median age for American Indians is due to two factors; relatively few elderly persons and far more young people. Data not presented in Table 2 show that approximately 39 percent of American Indians in 2000 were less than 18 years of age, as compared to 25.0 percent of the total population. About 5.0 percent of American Indians were over 65 years old in 2000, while the corresponding figure for the entire Montana population was 13.5 percent.

Table 2
Age and Housing Status
Montana and American Indian Reservations
2000

	Montana		American Indians						
	Total	American Indians	Blackfeet Reservation	Crow Reservation	Flathead Reservation	Fort Belknap Reservation	Fort Peck Reservation	No. Cheyenne Reservation	Rocky Bo Reservati
Median Age (years)									
Both Sexes	37.5	24.1	24.5	23.1	24.1	22.0	30.2	20.2	2
Males	36.6	23.0	23.0	21.7	22.9	21.0	29.2	19.4	1
Females	38.5	25.4	26.1	24.2	25.6	23.7	31.3	21.4	2
Occupied Housing Units									
Total	358,667	19,149	2,429	1,861	2,646	772	1,764	1,021	61
Owner Occupied	247,723	9,690	1,351	1,320	1,600	419	930	524	26
Percent of Total	*69.1*	*50.6*	*55.6*	*70.9*	*60.5*	*54.3*	*52.7*	*51.3*	4
Renter Occupied	110,944	9,459	1,078	541	1,046	353	834	497	:
Percent of Total	*30.9*	*49.4*	*44.4*	*29.1*	*39.5*	*45.7*	*47.3*	*48.7*	5

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing.

Housing Status (Table 2). American Indians occupied about 19,145 housing units in Montana in 2000. Approximately 50.6 percent of the American Indian households were owner-occupied, as compared to 69.1 percent for the entire population. The highest percentages for American Indian owner-occupied housing were on the Crow and Flathead reservations, reporting 70.9 percent and 60.5 percent of the total, respectively. The Ft Belknap, Fort Peck and the Northern Cheyenne reservation reported roughly equal owner-occupied figures of 51 to 54 percent. Approximately 42.9 percent of the American Indian housing units on the Rocky Boy's Reservation were owner-occupied.

Educational Attainment (Table 3). American Indians generally reported fewer years of education than other Montanans. There are indications, however, that specialized programs and tribal colleges are having a measurable impact on the educational attainment of American Indians. Approximately 25.6 percent of all Montanans said they had some post high school education and 5.9 percent said they had earned an Associate Degree. Both of these figures were higher among American Indians, and several were much higher on several reservations. For example, about 14.6 percent of the American Indians on both the Fort Belknap and the Rocky Boy's reservations said they had Associate Degrees, more than double the statewide average. Tribal colleges emphasize two year and other non-degree programs, which would result in the higher percentages in these two categories.

Table 3
Educational Attainment
American Indians and Other 25 Years and Older
Montana and American Indian Reservations
2000

	Montana				American Indians							
	Total Population		American Indians		Blackfeet Reservation		Crow Reservation		Flathead Reservation		Fort Belknap Reservation	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Per
12th Grade or less (no diploma)	75,358	12.8	7,489	23.1	1,058	24.9	592	23.4	896	24.2	329	2
High School Graduate (includes GED)	183,415	31.3	9,634	29.7	1,089	25.7	756	29.9	1,141	30.8	236	1
Some post HS, No degree	150,467	25.6	8,756	27.0	1,165	27.5	784	31.0	913	24.6	414	3
Associate Degree	34,420	5.9	2,844	8.8	524	12.4	132	5.2	301	8.1	190	1
Bachelor's Degree	100,758	17.2	2,595	8.0	245	5.8	199	7.9	296	8.0	104	
Graduate Degree	42,203	7.2	1,098	3.4	161	3.8	62	2.5	157	4.2	31	
Persons 25 years and older	586,621	100.0	32,416	100.0	4,242	100.0	2,525	100.0	3,704	100.0	1,304	10

	American Indians					
	Fort Peck Reservation		No. Cheyenne Reservation		Rocky Boy Reservation	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
12th Grade or less (no diploma)	811	27.3	468	26.3	213	19.8
High School Graduate (includes GED)	967	32.5	542	30.4	284	26.4
Some post HS, No degree	707	23.8	438	24.6	313	29.1
Associate Degree	241	8.1	190	10.7	157	14.6
Bachelor's Degree	211	7.1	121	6.8	71	6.6
Graduate Degree	38	1.3	21	1.2	39	3.6
Persons 25 years and older	2,975	100.0	1,780	100.0	1,077	100.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing.

Employment by Industry (Table 4). American Indians are employed in a wide variety of industries. Health care and social assistance was the largest category, employing about 3,353 American Indians statewide. Public administration (which includes all forms of governments) and educational services were second and third, employing approximately 3,200 and 2,660, respectively.

The employment distributions reflect the differing economies of the reservations. The relatively high percentage for mining on the Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations, both more than double the statewide average, reflect the presence of coal mines in the area. The relatively large number of persons employed in health care on the Crow Reservation may reflect the BIA hospital located there.

Manufacturing accounted for 11.9 percent of the employed American Indians on the Flathead Reservation, almost twice the statewide figure. This large percentage was due to the local wood products industry, Jore manufacturing and the Tribes' economic development efforts emphasizing manufacturing activities. The manufacturing percentage may understate the true figure because some employees of tribal manufacturing firms may have considered themselves as tribal employees. This potential mis-classification may also explain the relatively low reported figure for manufacturing on the Fort Peck Reservation, where A & S Industries and other manufacturing enterprises are important tribal undertakings.

Table 4
Employment by Industry
Montana and American Indian Reservations
2000

	Montana				American Indians							
	Total Population		American Indians		Blackfeet Reservation		Crow Reservation		Flathead Reservation		Fort Belknap Reservation	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Perce
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	29,109	6.8	1,096	5.2	310	9.9	65	4.2	178	6.9	55	7.
Mining	4,582	1.1	273	1.3	0	0.0	51	3.3	9	0.3	6	0.
Construction	31,724	7.4	1,730	8.1	206	6.5	54	3.5	202	7.8	66	8.
Manufacturing	25,414	6.0	925	4.4	22	0.7	0	0.0	306	11.9	5	0.
Wholesale trade	12,937	3.0	267	1.3	24	0.8	6	0.4	5	0.2	2	0.
Retail trade	54,468	12.8	1,980	9.3	244	7.8	97	6.3	194	7.5	50	6.
Transportation and warehousing	18,632	4.4	571	2.7	82	2.6	18	1.2	26	1.0	8	1.
Utilities	4,477	1.1	222	1.0	30	1.0	14	0.9	92	3.6	6	0.
Information	9,283	2.2	182	0.9	13	0.4	8	0.5	27	1.0	0	0.
Finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing	23,351	5.5	636	3.0	77	2.4	18	1.2	99	3.8	33	4.
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	27,654	6.5	968	4.6	116	3.7	35	2.3	87	3.4	7	0.
Educational services	41,367	9.7	2,660	12.5	534	17.0	304	19.6	291	11.3	128	16.
Health care and social assistance	51,078	12.0	3,353	15.8	547	17.4	327	21.1	317	12.3	184	23.
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	44,135	10.4	2,194	10.3	157	5.0	80	5.2	207	8.0	23	3.
Other services (except public administration)	22,471	5.3	986	4.6	140	4.5	18	1.2	112	4.3	19	2.
Public administration	25,295	5.9	3,200	15.1	644	20.5	455	29.4	427	16.6	183	23.
Total persons 16 years and older	425,977	100.0	21,243	100.0	3,146	100.0	1,550	100.0	2,579	100.0	775	100.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing.

Table 4 continued

	American Indians					
	Fort Peck Reservation		No. Cheyenne Reservation		Rocky Boy's Reservation	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	102	6.2	37	3.6	20	3.1
Mining	25	1.5	37	3.6	4	0.6
Construction	134	8.1	69	6.7	47	7.2
Manufacturing	30	1.8	19	1.8	7	1.1
Wholesale trade	17	1.0	11	1.1	6	0.9
Retail trade	116	7.0	60	5.8	21	3.2
Transportation and warehousing	33	2.0	3	0.3	6	0.9
Utilities	9	0.5	22	2.1	2	0.3
Information	6	0.4	2	0.2	4	0.6
Finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing	56	3.4	19	1.8	15	2.3
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	43	2.6	26	2.5	17	2.6
Educational services	239	14.4	286	27.7	171	26.2
Health care and social assistance	281	17.0	162	15.7	86	13.2
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	155	9.4	50	4.8	69	10.6
Other services (except public administration)	69	4.2	21	2.0	22	3.4
Public administration	342	20.6	207	20.1	155	23.8
Total persons 16 years and older	1,657	100.0	1,031	100.0	652	100.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing.