

As settlers pushed westward into the frontier of the United States, there were more and more conflicts with the Native Americans who had inhabited the land for centuries. The policy of the U.S. government was to move the different Native American nations onto reservations of land throughout the West. Many of these reservations were far away from the ancestral lands of nations, and many nations felt unfairly pressured to move. Several Native American nations resisted orders to relocate and fought both the new settlers and the efforts by the U.S. military to force them to move. Following are biographies of three Native American leaders who fought to protect their ways of life, despite being much outnumbered by the ever-advancing U.S. military.

### **Sitting Bull**

Sitting Bull is perhaps best remembered for his role in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, during which Lieutenant Colonel George Custer was killed. However, there is much more to Sitting Bull's story. Sitting Bull was born around 1831 and was trained to be a warrior for his nation, the Teton Sioux (one of several bands of the Sioux nation). He participated in his first war party, or attack on another nation, at the age of 14. During his youth and young adulthood, Sitting Bull witnessed several instances of mistreatment of Native Americans by the U.S. military. On one occasion, his band of Teton Sioux, also called Lakota, was attacked by the military, who believed the Teton Sioux had massacred whites. The Teton Sioux, however, had taken no part in the raids against the settlers.



Sitting Bull, the Teton Sioux chief, fought the U.S. military to remain free. He eventually surrendered to U.S. troops and died on a reservation.

In 1868, with Sitting Bull as their chief, the Sioux nation signed a peace treaty with the U.S. government. This treaty guaranteed the Sioux land in the Black Hills region of present-day South Dakota. The U.S. government called the treaty into question in the mid-1870s, when gold was discovered in the Black Hills. Rather than set this land aside for the Sioux, the government wanted to open up the land to prospectors and settlers. The U.S. government ordered the Sioux to leave. The government gave Sitting Bull and his nation a timeline: if they did not leave the land by the last day of January 1876, they would be considered hostile enemies of the United States. This order to leave did not arrive until winter conditions had already set in. Even if the Sioux had wanted to leave, they would not have had enough time to retreat from the Black Hills. Instead, they decided to stay and fight for their land.

This decision set the stage for the historic Battle of the Little Bighorn. U.S. military troops, led by General George Crook, pursued the Sioux and attacked them in Montana territory. The Sioux and their allies, the Cheyenne, successfully fought off Crook's troops and moved to a new camp near the Little Bighorn River. The U.S. military then developed an attack plan. Three different regiments intended to sneak up on the Sioux and attack them from different directions. One group, led by Lieutenant Colonel George Custer, spotted the Sioux first in their camp. Custer's regiment decided to attack ahead of the other U.S. troops. Custer's troops were greatly outnumbered, and everyone in Custer's regiment, including Custer himself, was killed.

The battle sparked public outrage when news of it traveled to the East Coast. Public opinion at this time widely viewed Native Americans as hostile, and the defeat of Custer further promoted this view. The military tried to catch Sitting Bull and his followers, but he traveled to Canada in 1877, hoping for safety. In Canada, however, the buffalo population had dropped, and the Sioux found it difficult to survive. A few years later, Sitting Bull and many of his followers returned to the United States to surrender. Most of Sitting Bull's people then spent the rest of their lives on a reservation. Sitting Bull died in 1890 in a gun battle on his reservation.

### Chief Joseph

Chief Joseph was a Nez Percé who lived from 1840 to 1904. Like Sitting Bull, Chief Joseph also attempted to lead his people to Canada, hoping to escape U.S. troops and life on reservations.

The Nez Percé nation inhabited areas of the Pacific Northwest, and they enjoyed mostly friendly relations with the white settlers in the region. That began to change around 1850, when more and more white people settled in the Pacific Northwest. In 1877, Chief Joseph was ordered to move his nation to present-day Idaho, and he agreed. After learning about a small band of Nez Percé who had attacked and killed white settlers Chief Joseph changed his mind about moving to a reservation. He feared that all of his people would be punished for the actions of a few. Instead of moving to the Idaho reservation, he and several hundred of his nation attempted to flee north to Canada.



When he finally surrendered to U.S. troops, Chief Joseph famously said, "My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."

Chief Joseph and his people were pursued by thousands of U.S. military troops. This chase made it impossible for Chief Joseph to travel in a straight line to Canada. Instead, the group journeyed about 1,600 miles, crossing vast sections of the West. Along the way, stories of the Nez Percé traveled eastward, and they actually gained the sympathy of many white people. In fact, in one book published about Chief Joseph, the author expressed her desire to “excite sympathy and justice” for Native Americans.

Chief Joseph was regarded as an intelligent and eloquent man whose voice captured the Nez Percé cause and desire for civil rights in letters to the U.S. government. He always traded peacefully for goods and supplies and seemed to show incredible compassion toward all people. Some historians suggest that Joseph was not a war chief at all, but he became an important spokesman and symbol for the suffering Native Americans.

The Nez Percé grew weaker and weaker, and their journey dragged on for months. Finally, Chief Joseph surrendered to U.S. troops in October 1877. The Nez Percé were only 40 miles away from the Canadian border.

After their surrender, the Nez Percé were forced to move to present-day Oklahoma, which was another difficult journey. Once there, many succumbed to disease or illness. Until his death in 1904, Chief Joseph continued to speak for Native American rights, even attending meetings with President Theodore Roosevelt.

### **Geronimo**

Like Sitting Bull and Chief Joseph, Geronimo also attempted to protect the freedoms of his people. Geronimo and his small group of supporters were the last group of Native Americans to surrender to the U.S. military.

Geronimo lived a long life, from 1829 to 1909. Throughout his 89 years, he gained a reputation for bold military tactics, fierce fighting, and an immense distrust of white people. Geronimo was a member of the Apache nation, located in what is now the American Southwest.



Geronimo, shown riding the horse on the left, was known for his intelligence. In fact, even the military generals who chased him were said to acknowledge his determination and sharp intellect.

Like other Native American nations, the Apache faced pressure from white settlers, but they also had recurring conflicts with the Spanish in Mexico. Geronimo's story is one of resistance, capture, and escape.

Geronimo was an Apache war chief, which meant he was lower in rank than the overall tribal leader, but he trained as a warrior. In the 1860s, Geronimo joined the Apache chief Cochise in several violent battles against settlers and the military. This training was useful in his life, and he was skilled at outmaneuvering the U.S. military.

After years of fighting, the Apache were ordered to move to a reservation in present-day Arizona, but many refused to go peacefully. Over 12 years of fighting, Geronimo surrendered twice, only to escape each time. The U.S. military sent more and more troops in search of Geronimo. When he was finally captured in 1886, Geronimo and 38 other Apache were pursued by about 5,000 U.S. military troops. At times, Geronimo's group traveled more than 80 miles a day to escape capture. During this chase, Geronimo and his followers often raided towns and military camps, while the military attacked and punished Apache members, hoping to slow Geronimo. Stories of Geronimo's violence—some true, some exaggerated—began to circulate. As news spread east that Geronimo continued to avoid capture, his reputation as a dangerous outlaw grew.

Once he was captured, Geronimo was forced to live as a prisoner of war at Fort Sill in Oklahoma. There, he tried to adopt the white American culture by farming and going to church, but he was unhappy in Oklahoma. Before his death, he dictated his autobiography, which was published in 1906. He used his book to strongly propose that Native American nations be allowed to live on their original, ancestral lands. The closing words of his autobiography read, ". . . if I must die in bondage—I hope that the remnant of the Apache tribe may, when I am gone, be granted the one privilege which they request—to return to Arizona."

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** What text structure does the writer use to organize information about each Native American leader?
  - A.** cause/effect
  - B.** chronological order
  - C.** comparison/contrast
  - D.** most to least important
  
- 2.** What was the U.S. policy toward Native Americans during the late 1800s?
  - A.** All treaties were permanent once they were signed.
  - B.** Native Americans were moved to reservations of land.
  - C.** Most nations were allowed to remain on their ancestral lands.
  - D.** The U.S. military worked to promote peace with the different nations.
  
- 3.** Which event caused the U.S. government to try to remove the Sioux from the Black Hills?
  - A.** the Battle of the Little Big Horn
  - B.** the discovery of gold in the Black Hills
  - C.** the signing of a peace treaty with another nation
  - D.** the completion of the transcontinental telegraph wire
  
- 4.** Public opinion was not always friendly to Native Americans. Describe the different ways Sitting Bull, Chief Joseph, and Geronimo were viewed by white society and explain why you think those differences in opinion existed. Use details from the reading passage to support your answer.