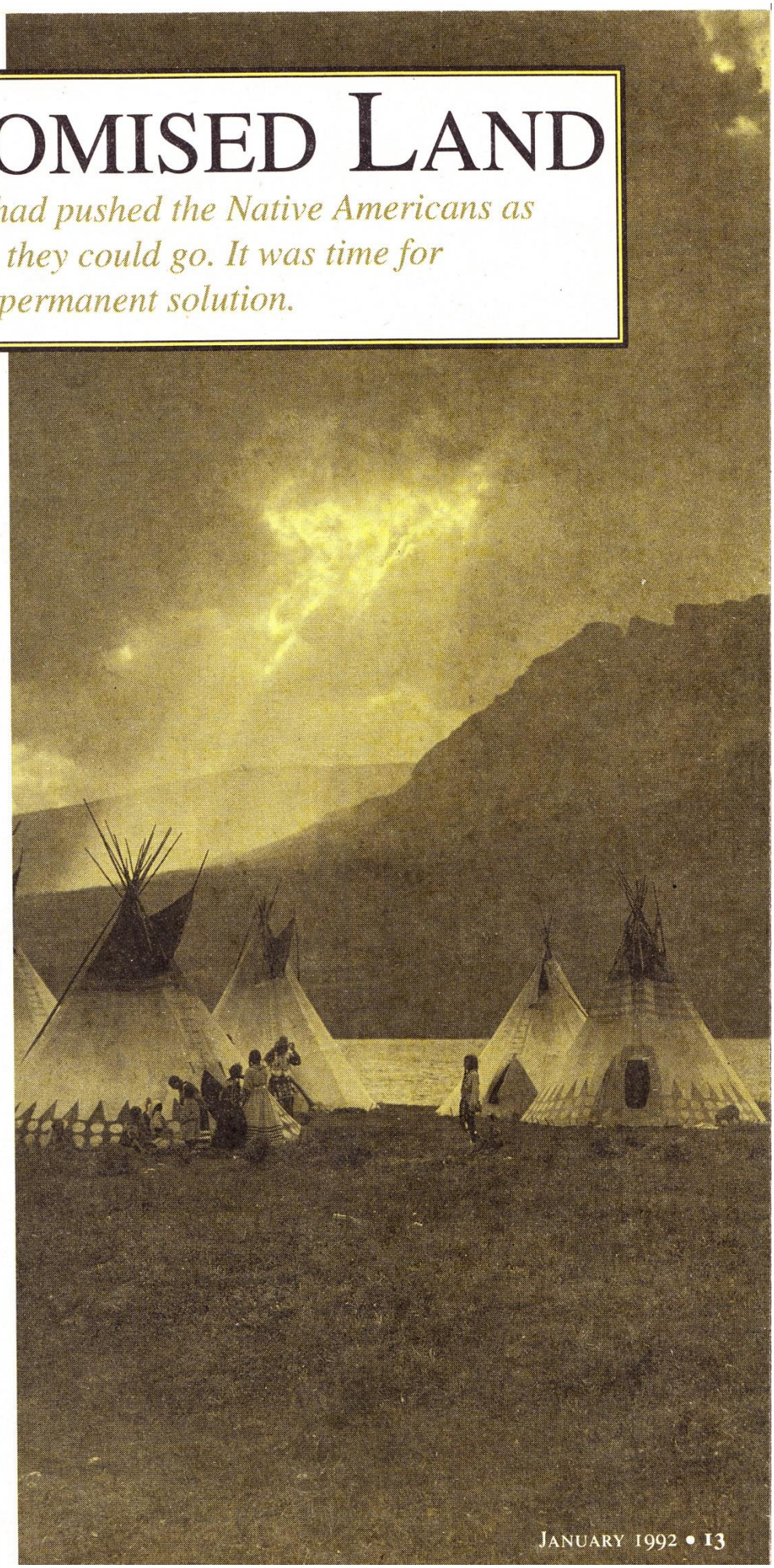
Kyle – U.S. History

THE PROMISED LAND

By 1860s, whites had pushed the Native Americans as far West as they could go. It was time for a permanent solution.



"I do not want to settle down in houses you would build for us. I love to roam over the wild prairie. There I am free and happy." That's how Chief White Bear of the Kiowa Indians explained his refusal to move to a reservation in 1867.

But the pace of events was already making the chief's wishes seem like pipe dreams. The wild prairies were being overrun by settlers, and if the Kiowa or their neighbors protested, soldiers were not far behind. In 1866, Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano told a group of Native American chiefs they must step aside. "The Great Spirit," he said, "has decreed that nothing will stop this glorious clearing of land and building of cities all over the country."

A NOT-SO-PERMANENT FRONTIER

The conflict between whites and Native Americans had been building since the first Europeans arrived on the continent, planted their flags, and claimed land as far as their eyes could see. As the country grew, the U.S. government kept pushing the tribes west. In 1830, the Indian Removal Act forced all Eastern tribes to resettle west of the Mississippi River, the so-called Permanent Indian Frontier. Only 20 years later, this line was erased when miners charged to California and the Rocky Mountains for gold. Soon cattle drivers were invading the Great Plains and farmers were pouring west in search of fertile land.

The "Indian Question"—how to get Native Americans off the land the U.S. wanted—became one of the country's hottest debates. Some Americans, like Civil War hero William Tecumseh Sherman, argued for a fight to the finish. He was convinced that Indians were "nothing more than a class of

savages that must be exterminated."

But others pointed out that warfare was not only brutal, but expensive. In 1865, Congress decided to try to negotiate the land away before resorting to the use of force. Still, many treaties were signed with soldiers standing by, and war was often the result.

"I LOVE THE LAND"

By 1878, only a few ragged bands were left outside the reservations. With the encouragement of the government, white hunters had killed off nearly all the buffalo, the Great Plains Indians' main source of food. There was nothing left to do but go to the reservations, farm, and live off the white man's handouts. "I love the land and will not part with it," said Satanta, another Kiowa chief. "But soldiers are downing my timber and killing my buffalo. It feels as if my heart will burst with sorrow."

For several decades after the 1880s, white reformers tried to get Native Americans to live as whites. Churches were built on reservations, children were sent to boarding schools, and land owned by tribes was given to individuals.

In the 1930s, that policy was reversed and tribal leaders were encouraged to govern their people in their own ways. Since then, the Native American population—which had reached a low of 250,000 in 1890—has risen to nearly 2 million. Still, a whole generation is struggling to rediscover lost tribal traditions. And Indian lands that once stretched from shore to shore have been reduced to 52 million acres, an area the size of Minnesota.

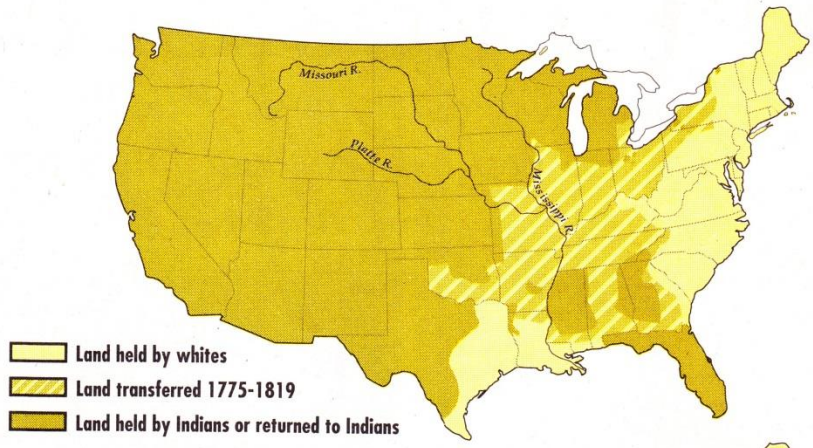
QUESTIONS

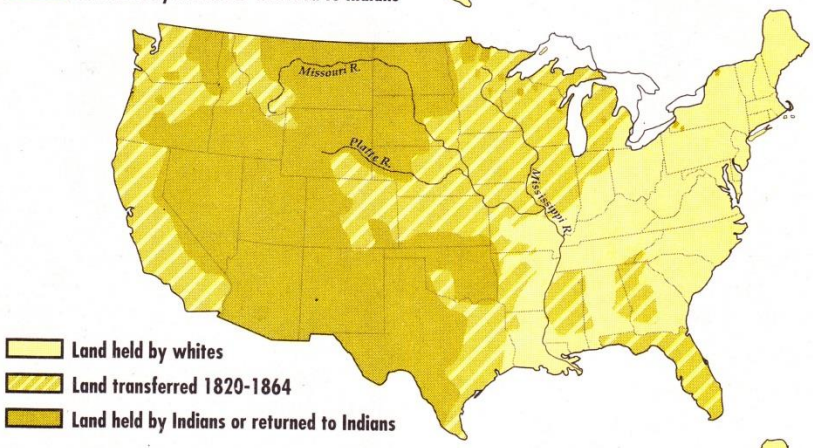
(Answer true or false.)

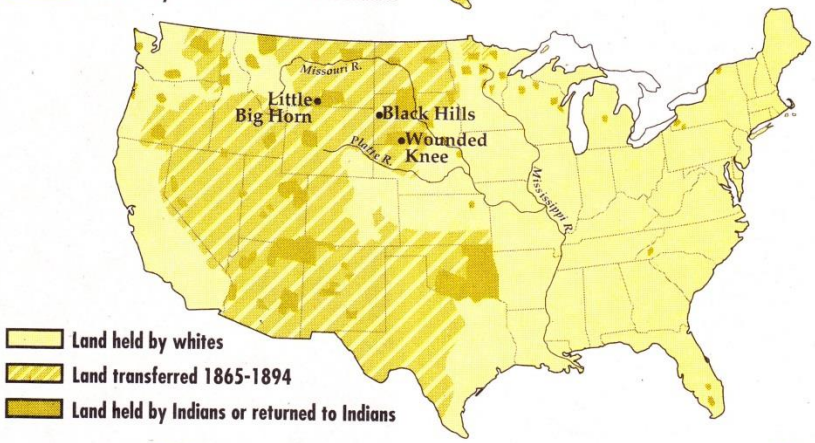
1. In 1815, parts of the Southeast were still owned by Indian tribes.
2. In 1860, everything west of the Mississippi was considered Indian land.
3. West Coast tribes lost their land before the tribes of the Great Plains.
4. The Black Hills were taken from the Sioux and Cheyenne tribes between 1865 and 1894.
5. Today most Native American tribes live east of the Mississippi.
6. Today Indian tribes own the state of Minnesota.

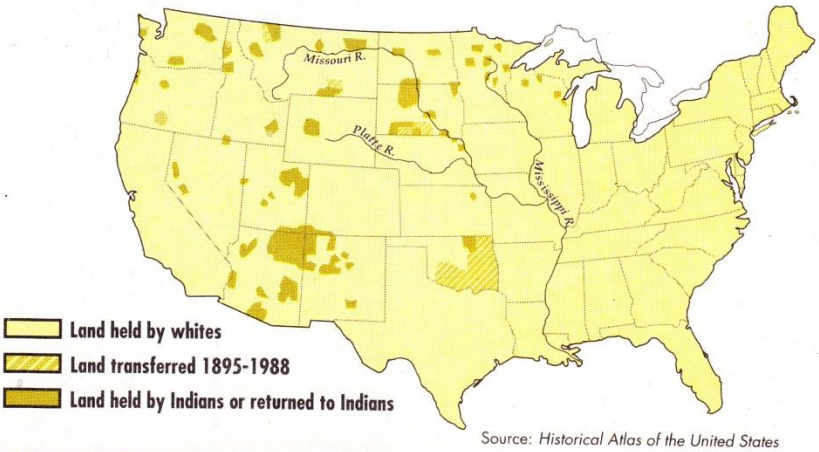
—Claudia Rowe

THE LAND CHANGES HANDS



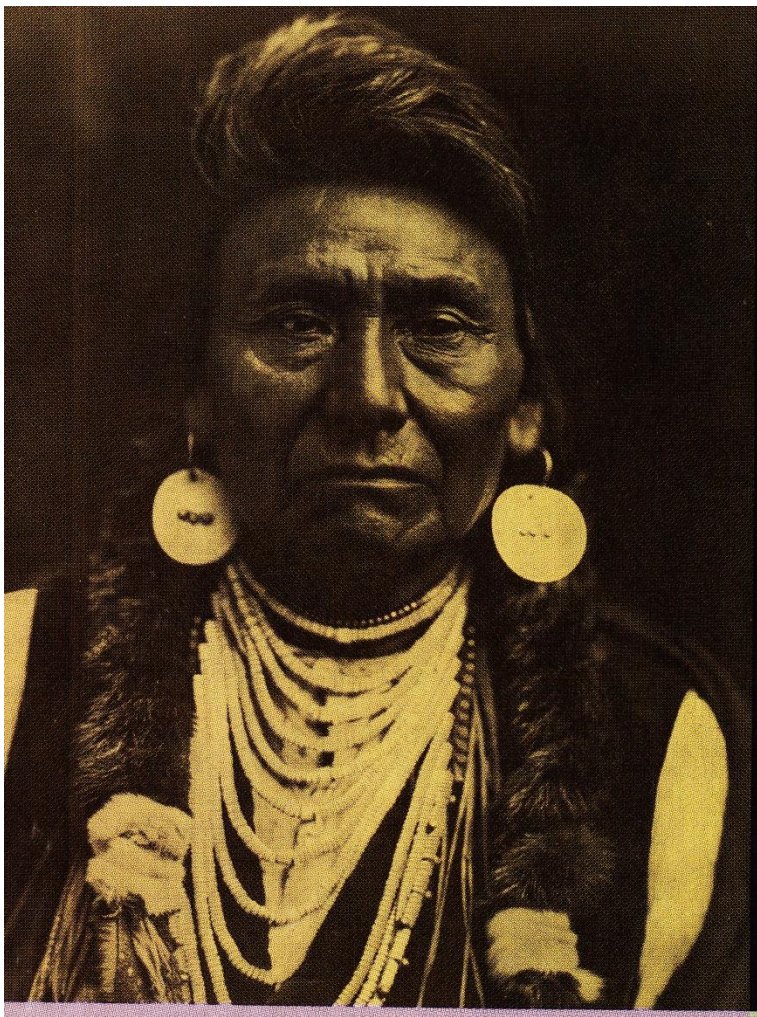






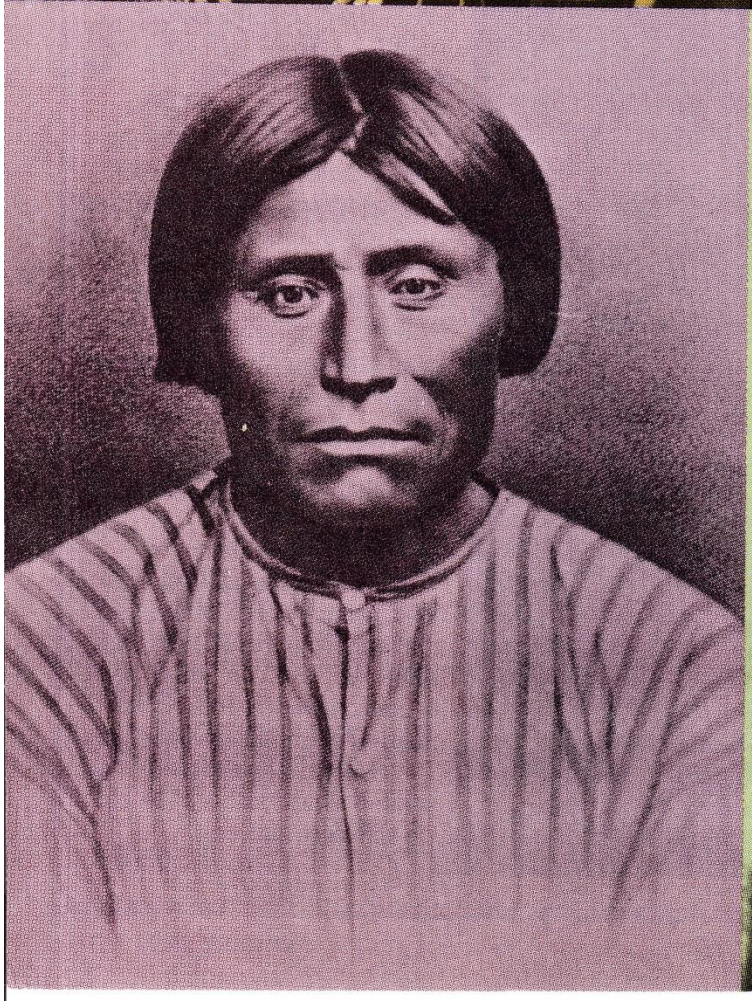
Source: *Historical Atlas of the United States*

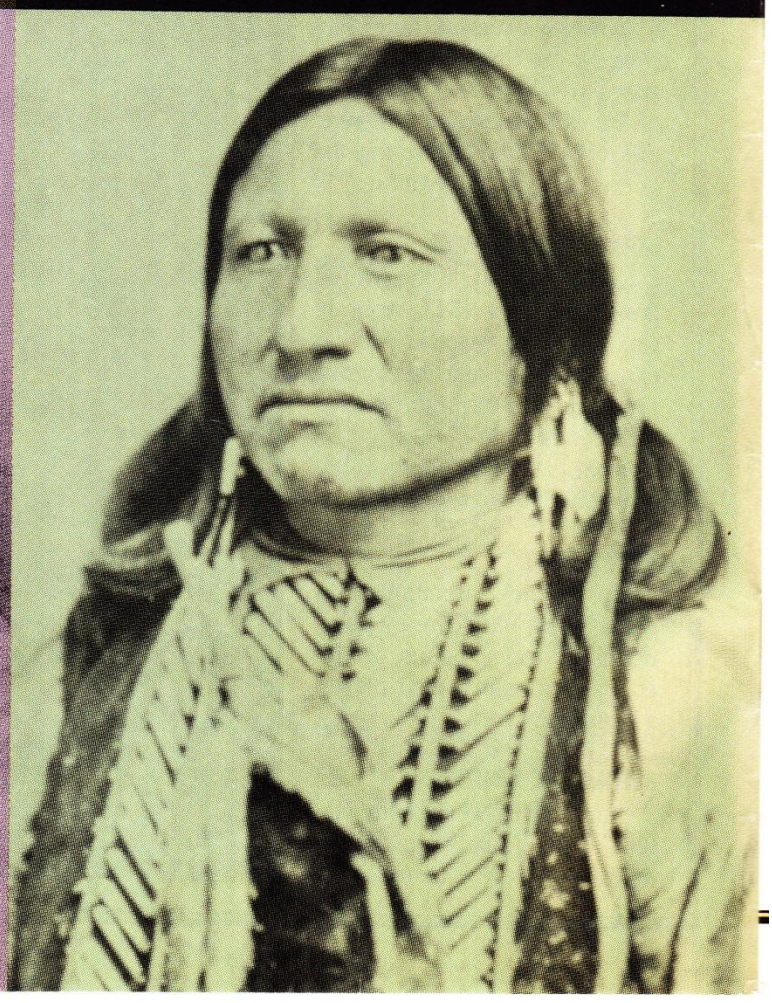
Maps by Jim McMahon



SNAP-SHOTS

Five portraits of Native American leaders who faced the loss of their land and their people.





On June 25, 1876, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and 4,000 Sioux and Cheyenne warriors had their day in the sun.

For weeks, General George Custer of the U.S. Army had been hot on their trail. (In fact, Custer was known to spend such long hours in the saddle that the warriors nicknamed him "Hard Backsides.") Then that day, as the Indians watched, Custer marched the U.S. 7th Cavalry right into their camp. The Indians attacked, and in a few hours they wiped out all 265 soldiers.

It was Custer's last stand, the most dramatic victory ever by Native American warriors over the U.S. Army.

But little did the Sioux and Cheyenne realize that it was also the beginning of the end.

For the Sioux, Cheyenne, and 100 other Native American tribes of the West, the struggle had begun more than 20 years before—when the men from Washington started showing up. They'd ask Native American leaders to sign away their tribal lands and go peacefully onto reservations. If the leaders put up a fight, the U.S. Cavalry was just around the corner. Between 1865 and 1890, Native Americans and U.S. soldiers clashed in more than 1,000 battles, all lumped under the name Indian Wars.

On the next few pages, you'll read about five Native American chiefs who lived on land from the Dakotas to California and faced this no-win situation: They could save lives by signing treaties and giving up their way of life; or they could fight to save their land and traditions, knowing they were outnumbered—and outgunned. Each of the five led his people in a different direction. But the outcomes of their struggles were tragically similar.

Captain Jack

Kintpuash, son of the chief of the Modocs, was tired of watching his father lead Modoc warriors to their deaths. True, ever since gold had been discovered in the hills of California in 1848, Eastern fortune seekers had been trespassing all over Modoc land. But Kintpuash hated bloodshed and urged his father to make peace.

In 1856, Kintpuash's father followed his son's advice and went to talk with the miners. But at the conference, he and 40 of his warriors were shot and killed.

Still, as the new chief of the Modocs, Kintpuash made friends with the whites; they nicknamed him Captain Jack; and for a while, life was pretty calm.

But then the U.S. government decided to move Kintpuash's people. And in November 1872, when Kintpuash refused, soldiers under General Edward Canby chased the Modocs into the Lava Beds, a harsh landscape of craggy, volcanic rock south of their home.

Surrounded, Kintpuash was about to surrender when he was stopped by a young warrior named Hooker Jim. Jim and several other warriors had killed 11 white civilians, and feared that if the tribe surrendered, they would be hanged. So about 50 Modocs camouflaged themselves with sagebrush, hid in the crevices, and held off 330 soldiers armed with cannons.

That April, after a long winter in hiding, Kintpuash went to a peace council. When he returned, Hooker Jim and his men taunted him: "If you are our chief, promise us that you will kill General Canby." With his warriors surrounding him, calling him a "fish-hearted woman," Kintpuash gave in. Four days later, he showed up at a peace council and shot Canby dead.

Kintpuash rushed back to his hideaway. But within a month, he was betrayed by Hooker Jim. Jim and his band, fearing for their lives, turned themselves in, and then tracked down Kintpuash in exchange for their own freedom. On October 3, 1873, Kintpuash was hanged. His body, stolen that night, ended up in a carnival that traveled a circuit of Eastern cities, charging 10 cents admission to see the famous rebel chief "Captain Jack."

Chief Joseph of the Nez Percé *(top)*; Kintpuash (Captain Jack), chief of the Modocs *(far left)*; and Kicking Bird, chief of the Kiowa *(left)*.

Kicking Bird

Ever since Kicking Bird could remember, his people, the Kiowa, had been chased south. Before the white man's Civil War, the Sioux and their Cheyenne allies had pushed the Kiowa out of Nebraska and Kansas. In the 1860s, the whites wanted the Kiowa to move again.

Kicking Bird had made a name for himself fighting the Sioux, but he knew that if he fought the whites, the odds were against him. The whites had better guns and more soldiers. And they were fast killing off the great buffalo herds—the Kiowa's main source of food.

Reluctantly, Kicking Bird agreed to settle on a small reservation in Oklahoma. His people, he conceded, would grow corn for a living.

Many of the Kiowa bitterly refused to go along with this decision. They lashed out violently against the whites, raiding wagon trains and cattle drives. By 1873, Kicking Bird felt his authority was gone. "I am as a stone," he said, "broken and thrown away. I am chief no more."

A year later, when 2,000 Kiowa ran away from the reservation, the chief turned over 26 ringleaders to government officials. On the day the men were to be sent to prison, a medicine man called Mamanti cursed Kicking Bird, "You remain free, a big man with the whites. But you will not live long. I will see to that!"

Two days later, after drinking a cup of coffee, Kicking Bird died. Though some claim the chief was poisoned by his enemies, to this day, many Kiowa main-

tain it was Mamanti's curses that killed Kicking Bird.

On his death bed, Kicking Bird still thought his way had been the right one. "I have taken the white man's road," he said. "I am not sorry for it. Tell my people to keep in the good path."

Red Cloud

Red Cloud was a young Oglala Sioux chief with a reputation for fierceness in battle against other Native American tribes. In 1866, he extended his reputation by taking on the U.S. Army.

For years, whites had been marching across his land, trekking through Nebraska and Wyoming and up the Bozeman Trail to Montana. That summer, Red Cloud decided it was time to close off the trail. And 3,000 warriors backed him up.

Men from Washington showed up and tried to negotiate a treaty. "Our women and children will starve," Red Cloud responded, "but for my part I prefer to die fighting than by starvation." In two years, he had kicked the soldiers out. In 1868, he signed a treaty that he thought gave his people the land around the Powder River forever.

But the government continued pressuring Red Cloud, and eventually, he buckled. By 1873, his people were moved to a reservation on Nebraska's Platte River. Four years later, he and other chiefs signed away the Black Hills of South Dakota. And that same year, Red Cloud also advised a band of Cheyennes to give up. "What can we do?" he asked. "The Great Father is all powerful. His people fill the whole earth. We must do what he says."

Red Cloud lived the rest of his days on his reservation, haggling with the whites over supplies and watching his lands shrink. When he died in 1909 at the age of 87, he was given a white man's burial. The spirit of the warrior had left him long ago.

Crazy Horse

When Crazy Horse was young, his father, a great medicine man of the Oglala Sioux, took him into the mountains to a place looking out at the Black Hills of South Dakota. "Somewhere a good man must rise from the young ones among us," he told his son. This man, he said, must "give the people heart to make them strong against the power of the white man's favor."

In his short life, Chief Crazy Horse tried to be that man. In 1875, when U.S. officials came to convince the Sioux to sell the Black Hills, Crazy Horse ordered his lieutenant, Little Big Man, to attend the meeting. Little Big Man rode in, pistols at his waist, yelling, "I will kill the first chief who speaks for selling the Black Hills."

U.S. troops went after Crazy Horse. They found him on June 25, 1876, at the Little Big Horn River in Montana. With him, however, were Sitting Bull, dozens of other chiefs, and about 10,000 Indians. That's when General George Custer was wiped out.

Still, Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull were no match for the U.S. Army. After a long chase, Sitting Bull made it to the safety of Canada. But Crazy Horse, frozen and starving, surrendered in May of 1877.

In September, he tried to escape. When soldiers caught him and started leading him to jail, he noticed that one of his captors was Little Big Man, who had become a reservation policeman. Crazy Horse lunged in despair to get away and was caught in the ribs by a soldier's bayonet. On September 5, 1877, he died. He had spent only 4 months of his 35 years on the white man's reservation, but it was too much.

Chief Joseph

In 1877, Chief Joseph of the Nez Percé knew he was in trouble. Fourteen years earlier, his father had rejected a treaty that would have taken three-quarters of his land and moved the Nez Percé to a small reservation in Idaho. It was, his father had said, "the thief treaty." Still, a majority of chiefs had signed it. So in May of 1877, General O.O. Howard of the U.S. Army told Joseph he had 30 days to move.

Unwilling to risk war, Joseph advised his people to give the reservation a try. Instead, they stockpiled ammunition. And one day, a young brave rode into camp bragging that he had killed a white man who had shot his brother. "You will have to go to war, as I have begun it," the brave said.

For the next four months, Chief Joseph led 300 warriors and 600 women and children 2,000 miles through the mountains, fighting rearguard battles all the way.

By September, the ragged band was cold and hungry. Nearly 150 of them had been killed by soldiers' bullets. They were three days from the safety of Canada when they stopped to hunt buffalo in the Bear Paw Mountains of Montana. That night, the soldiers overwhelmed the Nez Percé. Chief Joseph was forced to surrender.

"Our chiefs are killed," he told the whites. "It is cold and we have no blankets. I want to have time to look for my children and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."

—Tod Olson

Red Cloud, chief of the Oglala Sioux. There is no known authentic painting or photograph of Oglala Sioux Chief Crazy Horse.

Indian Facts

Don't be silly. There was no such thing as a typical Indian.

THE AVERAGE INDIAN?

First of all, "Indian" was a name thought up by European explorers hoping to find India when they landed here. "Native American" might be more descriptive.

But no matter what term we use, the original Americans didn't lump themselves together. They didn't even have a word for *all* the people in the land. They were Kiowa or Iroquois or Ute or Sioux.

EVEN NOW?

Well, contact with whites probably made the tribes identify more with each other. In some cases they formed alliances to help protect their land. And when they failed, different tribes were often thrown together on the same reservation.

NUMBERS AND DATES

Good luck. When the whites first arrived in 1513, nobody was counting heads. All we can say is that anywhere from 1 million to 10 million Native Americans lived here.

What is sure is that by 1890, only 250,000 were left alive.

HOW COME?

Mostly they succumbed to diseases brought over by Europeans. European guns, wielded by Europeans, also played a significant role.

BEFORE THE WHITES

Some tribes were pretty violent. The Sioux were always fighting the Crow or the Pawnee for the good buffalo-hunting land. In many tribes men gained honor in battle.

But before the whites came, most wars were small, involving less than 100 warriors. Some tribes, like the Pueblo, would only fight in self-defense.

Library of Congress

KEEP YOUR HEAD

Scalping was practiced by both Native Americans and whites. The Sioux hung scalps on a stick to show them off. But the state of Minnesota also offered settlers $25 for each Sioux scalp they brought in. Navahos, on the other hand, considered scalping barbaric.

ONE BRAVE, ONE VOTE

Most tribes had some form of democratic government. Many chiefs were elected, and decisions were made after discussions in tribal councils.

WHAT ABOUT THE COWBOYS?

They were really just one group of many that trespassed on Indian land. Gold hunters and farmers were pests too. But the real problem was the soldiers that followed them west.

END OF THE OLD LIFE

Some tribes fought for their land; others signed treaties. In the end, the result was the same. By 1877 all tribes had been confined to reservations mapped out by the government. The hunting was poor and the farming almost as bad. The old life was over forever.

—Rachel Maizes