

“The Boy General and the Old Man Chief”



OBJECTIVES

- To examine the cultural backgrounds of George Custer and Chief Black Kettle
- To analyze the chain of events that led each man to the Washita
- To compare and contrast each mans life with events and personalities of the 21st Century



Black Kettle



George Custer

“He [Black Kettle] was a Suhtai, a people who came to the Cheyennes from the northeast a long time ago and spoke the same language, but a different dialect. Though up to the middle of the last century [1800’s] the Sutaio camped apart from the Cheyennes, they have long been one of the tribal divisions...Black Kettle was the son of Swift Hawk Lying Down [a Suhtai], who was never a Chief. He had three sons: Black kettle, Gentle Horse, and Wolf; and one daughter, Wind Woman.” George Hyde “The Life of George Bent”

“Jay Black Kettle...declared [to the author in 1960] that Wolf was also known as Black Dog. After his brother’s death at the Washita, Wolf or Black Dog was also called Black Kettle.” Father Peter Powell, “People of the Sacred Mountain”

“Black Kettle, according to his sister Wind Woman, was the son of Black Hawk...There were four children, three of whom were Black Kettle, Gentle Horse, and Wind Woman.” Father Peter Powell, “People of the Sacred Mountain”

“In 1684 Paul Custer migrated from the German Rhineland to Pennsylvania...Conceivably he may have been the General’s [George Custer] first American ancestor, but the known family line of the latter begins with Emanuel Custer [George’s great grandfather]who died in 1854, aged ‘about 100 years.” Milo Milton Quaipe, Introduction to “My Life on the Plains”

George Custer was the son of Emanuel Custer and Maria Ward. The Custer and Ward families were of Pennsylvania Dutch and Scotch-Irish ancestry. Among Custer’s siblings was a younger brother Tom who also fought at the Washita; brothers Nevin and Boston; a sister Margaret; a half sister Lydia Kirkpatrick; and two half-brothers, Brice Custer and David Kirkpatrick.

Based on information from your program and school lessons, answer the following questions by putting a GC on the line in front of information about Custer, and a BK on the line in front of information about Black Kettle.

1. I was born in Ohio, on Dec. 5, 1839 ____
2. I fought at Gettysburg, PA. in 1863 ____
3. I was about 67 years old at the Washita ____
4. I gained famed along the Shenandoah ____
5. I was at Sand Creek, Colorado Territory in 1864 ____
6. My wife’s name was Libbie Bacon ____
7. I call the Washita the “Lodge Pole River” ____
8. I fought the Kiowa in 1838, at Wolf Creek ____

Custer had become a hero during the Civil War -quickly rising through the ranks after graduating from the U.S. Military Academy. Custer received the brevet rank of Major General by war’s end for gallantry at the battles of Fisher’s Hill and Winchester; and for meritorious service at the battle of Five Forks, Virginia. In April, 1865 Custer participated in the surrender of Confederate General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia.

As a young man Black Kettle had taken part in many fights against the Crow and Ute, and had played a prominent role in a famous battle with the Pawnee about 1853. Sometime afterwards, Black Kettle succeeded Bear Feathers as a Chief of the Wotapio band of Cheyennes. Over the course of the next decade Black Kettle put his mark on three treaties with the U.S. Government – Fort Wise, Colorado in 1861; the Little Arkansas, Kansas in 1865; and Medicine Lodge, Kansas in 1867.

“Generals Sherman, Sully, and myself [General Sheridan], and nearly all the officers of your regiment, have asked for you, and I hope the application will be successful. [Custer] can you come at once? Eleven companies of your regiment will move about the 1st of October [1868] against the hostile Indians.” Brian W. Dippie “Custer: The Indian Fighter”

“The general has finally decided upon a winter campaign. If we cannot find the Indians, and inflict considerable injury upon them, we will be on the wing all winter. We are going to the heart of the Indian country, where white troops have never been before.” George Custer to his wife, Oct. 24, 1868, “Following the Guidon”

“The only Cheyenne Chief at the treaty grounds from the beginning was Black Kettle. He slipped in and out of the Commission camp every night, conferring with ...members of the official party...Black Kettle placed himself in grave personal danger from his own people by speaking so consistently for a treaty.” Douglas Jones “The Treaty of Medicine Lodge”

“I have always done my best to keep my young men quiet, but some will not listen...we want peace, and I would be glad to move all my people down this way. I could keep them all quietly near camp. My camp is now on the Washita, forty miles east of Antelope Hills...” Black Kettle to Indian Agent Hazen, Nov. 20, 1868

As railroads, migration, and settlement encroached onto the Plains, tensions increased between the United States Government and Indian tribes of the west. Chiefs such as Black Kettle were often at odds with tribesmen who choose to fight rather than sign treaties – Officers such as Sheridan and Custer, obligated to protect the property and lives of western citizens, were at odds with officials of the Indian Bureau, and others, who argued for time and diplomacy, rather than war. These circumstances, decades in the making, ultimately led each man, Black Kettle and George Custer, to the banks of the Washita.

“The whole force of his [Black Kettle] nature was concentrated in the...idea of how best to act for the good of his race...his utmost endeavors [were] used to preserve peace and friendship between his race and their oppressors.” Indian Agent Edward Wynkoop, 1868, Stan Hoig “The Battle of the Washita.”

On the lines below, write down one question, if you could, you would ask Chief Black Kettle:

Is there anyone today, anyone in the entire world, who is similar to or who reminds you of Chief Black Kettle? On the lines below, write down your answer, and explain why:

“...the gallantry and bravery displayed, resulting in such signal success, reflects the highest credit upon both the officers and enlisted men of the Seventh Cavalry...[a] special congratulations to their distinguished commander, Brevet Major General George A. Custer, for the efficient and gallant services rendered...” General P.H. Sheridan, Nov. 29, 1868, from Godfrey, “Some Reminiscences”, The Cavalry Journal, 1928

On the lines below, write down one question, if you could, you would ask Lieutenant Colonel Custer:

Is there anyone today, anyone in the entire world, who you think is similar to or who reminds you of Lieutenant Colonel Custer? On the lines below, write down your answer, and explain why:
