

Name _____



Native Choices

When the American Civil War began in 1861, Native American groups had to make difficult decisions about what to do. Some supported the Union (North), others sided with the Confederacy (South), and some tried to stay neutral. Their choices were often influenced by promises from the U.S. government, relationships with settlers, and their own struggles to keep their land and way of life.

Divided Loyalties

Many Native American nations had been forced off their land and moved to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) before the war. The Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Nations lived there, and many had ties to both the North and South.

Some tribes, like the Choctaw and Chickasaw, supported the Confederacy because they wanted to keep their lands and had been treated unfairly by the U.S. government. Others, like the Creek and Seminole, sided with the Union because they had escaped slavery or hoped for better treatment from the U.S. after the war.

Fighting in the War

Native Americans fought bravely on both sides. The Cherokee leader Stand Watie became a Confederate general and led troops in battle. Other Native leaders, like Opothleyahola of the Creek Nation, fought for the Union, trying to protect their people.

There were several battles in Indian Territory, and Native soldiers were often caught between two powerful armies. Their homes were destroyed, and many suffered from hunger and disease.

After the War

When the war ended in 1865, Native Americans lost even more land and rights. The U.S. government punished some tribes for helping the Confederacy, even though they had been forced into the war. Many Native groups signed new treaties and were forced to give up land or accept new laws.

For Native Americans, the Civil War was not just about slavery or the Union and Confederacy—it was also about survival. Even though they played an important role, their sacrifices were often forgotten in history books.