

# THE INDIAN WARS CONTINUE

Level: middle school  
Course: Western Hemisphere Studies or American History

## Rationale

Most US history texts state or imply that the “Indian problem” came to an end with the surrender of Geronimo in 1886 or with the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. Most secondary texts on Latin America tend to ignore the Indigenous peoples altogether, except for perhaps a few pages on the conquest, inevitably focusing on how a relatively few Spaniards were able to defeat huge numbers of Native Americans. However, one of the themes which runs through the works of the El Salvadorian poet, Roque Dalton, is that some of the continued political and social instability in Latin America can be attributed to the fact that the Europeans have not yet finished their intended conquest—the Natives are still restless and still resistant to integration. I would argue that, indeed, the same is true in the United States, evidenced by the sporadic unrest of Native Americans in the USA.

## Lesson Overview

This lesson plan will focus on three incidents: the Chiapas uprising, the occupation of Alcatraz and the occupation and subsequent battle of the Wounded Knee reservation. The class will look for common reasons why Indian resistance continues 500 years after the initial European attempt at conquest and repression.

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## Time Needed

1-2 class periods

## Materials

as mentioned in the "Lesson Procedure" and bibliography

## Objectives

- \* Students will find causes of Native American discontent.
- \* Students will seek solutions to said problems.
- \* Students will practice persuasive writing.
- \* Students will find commonalities between Latin America and the United States.

## Procedures

The lesson begins by the teacher asking the class if they have ever heard of the three incidents mentioned above. There will likely be minimal response, so the teacher will give a very brief lecture, ignoring details. Emphasis is on making sure the students understand that presently, and in the recent past, Native peoples in the US and in Mexico have revolted against their governments. The brief lecture should include only the minimal facts, dates and locations, for example. More important information will be gleaned from the readings.

The instructor will then ask the class why they think Indians would still be rebelling 500 years after the Europeans arrived here. Again, the response will probably be minimal, but the teacher could write those responses on the board, to be compared later with the reasons the students find in their readings. Announce to the class that the rebellions have an historical basis which began with Columbus.

The teacher then reads aloud a few selected paragraphs from pages 1-5 in Howard Zinn's book or from William Bigelow's article. This should dispel any notion that resistance to the colonial powers was anything less than appropriate.

Remind the students that something must still be happening to the Native Americans because people do not rebel without good cause.

Students are then divided into three or six heterogeneous groups, depending on the size of the class. Each group is assigned articles to read:

Chiapas: EZLN Declaration of War and page 59 of 500 Years of Chicano History

Alcatraz: Pages 44-47 of Adam Eagle's book and page 187-189 of Josephy's book

Wounded Knee: Pages xxxix-xl of Mattheisen's book and selected paragraphs from Kip's article

Each group has only 4-5 pages to read.

As they read, the teacher writes the names of the three incidents on the board.

Students are then directed to use the articles to find as many reasons as they can as to why the Native Americans in those three places felt they had to rebel. Common answers should include: land disputes, poverty, lack of health care, need to hang on to culture, neglect by government, etc.

Each group then selects a scribe to come to the board to write the reasons they were able to find. With proper help, clues and prodding by the teacher during the group process, all three lists should be very similar.

Now we take an imaginary journey back to 1492. We arrive with Columbus in the Caribbean and meet the docile people he described in his journal entries (page 100 of Sale's book could be read aloud at this time).

Each group is to compose a short, persuasive letter to the king and queen of Spain explaining how these newly "discovered" people ought to be treated by the Europeans, making sure that the content of the letter addresses the present day concerns of the Native American population.

Letters will be read aloud and debated as to whether or not the suggestions to the Crown would have made a real difference 500 years later.

### Homework

Students will read the George Horse Capture article, a contemporary story about a Native American and his impressions of Anglo culture, especially about how he was treated at school.

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