

Geronimo's Plea

Geronimo and S.M. Barrett



OVERVIEW

In August 1877, the famous Apache chief Geronimo surrendered for the last time. The United States Army took Geronimo and his band of about 30 Chiricahua Apaches to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, as prisoners of war. From there, Geronimo asked to be sent to his homeland to die. His plea was translated by Asa Daklugie for S.M. Barrett, who edited the story of Geronimo's life.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- What does Geronimo mean when he says that Native Americans have learned to live like the white people?
 - Why does Geronimo want his people to be able to return to their land?
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There is a great question between the Apaches and the Government. For twenty years we have been held prisoners of war under a treaty which was made with General Miles, on the part of the United States Government, and myself as the representative of the Apaches. That treaty has not at all times been properly observed by the Government, although at the present time it is being more nearly fulfilled on their part than heretofore. In the treaty with General Miles we agreed to go to a place outside of Arizona and learn to live as the white people do. I think that my people are now capable of living in accordance with the laws of the United States, and we would, of course, like to have the liberty to return to that land which is ours by divine right. We are reduced in numbers, and having learned how to cultivate the soil would not require so much ground as was formerly necessary. We do not ask all of the land which the Almighty gave us in the beginning, but that we may have sufficient lands there to cultivate. What we do not need we are glad for the white men to cultivate.

We are now held on Comanche and Kiowa lands, which are not suited to our needs. . . . Our people are decreasing in numbers here, and will continue to decrease unless they are allowed to return to their native land. . . .

There is no climate or soil which, to my mind, is equal to that of Arizona. We could have plenty of good cultivating land, plenty of grass, plenty of timber and plenty of minerals in that land which the Almighty created for the Apaches. It is my land, my home, my fathers' land, to which I now ask to be allowed to return. I want to spend my last days there, and be buried among those mountains. If this could be I might die in peace, feeling that my people,

placed in their native homes, would increase in numbers, rather than diminish as at present, and that our name would not become extinct.

I know that if my people were placed in that mountainous region lying around the headwaters of the Gila River [in New Mexico] they would live in peace and act according to the will of the President. They would be prosperous and happy in tilling the soil and learning the civilization of the white men, whom they now respect. Could I but see this accomplished, I think I could forget all the wrongs that I have ever received, and die a contented and happy old man. But we can do nothing in this matter ourselves—we must wait until those in authority choose to act. If this cannot be done during my lifetime—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.

Source: Barrett, S.M., ed. Newly edited with an introduction and notes by Frederick W. Turner III. *Geronimo: His Own Story by Geronimo*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970.