

Pueblo Revolt

The **Pueblo Revolt of 1680** or **Popé's Rebellion** was an uprising of many pueblos of the Pueblo people against Spanish colonization of the Americas in the New Spain province of New Mexico.^[1]

Background

Primarily due to their denigration and prohibition of their traditional religion, many Pueblo people harbored a latent hostility toward the Spanish. The Spanish also disrupted the traditional economy of the pueblos, the people being forced to labor on the colonists' *encomiendas*.^[2] Some Pueblo people may have also been forced to labor in the mines of Chihuahua. However, the Spanish had also introduced new farming implements and likewise provided some measure of security against Navajo and Apache raiding parties. As a result, the Pueblos had lived in relative peace with the Spanish since the founding of the Northern New Mexico colony in 1598.

In the 1670s, drought swept the region, which caused famine among the Pueblo and provoked increased attacks from neighboring nomadic tribes—attacks against which Spanish soldiers were unable to defend. At the same time, European-introduced diseases were ravaging the natives, greatly decreasing their numbers. Unsatisfied with the protective powers of the Spanish crown and disenchanted with the Roman Catholic religion it had brought along, the people turned to their old religions. This provoked a wave of repression on the part of Franciscan missionaries. While previously the church and Spanish officials tended to ignore occasional manifestations of the old religion as long as the Puebloans attended mass and maintained a public veneer of Catholicism, Fray Alonso de Posada (in New Mexico 1656–1665) "forbade Kachina dances by the Pueblo Indians and ordered the missionaries to seize every mask, prayer stick, and effigy they could lay their hands on and burn them..... In matters regarding their religion, the Pueblos of the seventeenth Century were not that different from those of today. To give up their religion would have been like giving up life itself." ^[3] Several Spanish officials, such as Nicolas de Aguilar, who attempted to curb the power of the Franciscans were charged with heresy and tried before the Inquisition.

In 1675, Governor Juan Francisco Treviño ordered the arrest of forty-seven Pueblo medicine men and accused them of practicing witchcraft. Four medicine men were sentenced to death by hanging; three of those sentences were carried out, while the fourth prisoner committed suicide. The remaining men were publicly whipped and sentenced to prison. When this news reached the Pueblo leaders, they moved in force to Santa Fe, where the prisoners were held. Because a large number of Spanish soldiers were away fighting the Apache, Governor Treviño released the prisoners. Among those released was a San Juan (called "Ohkay Owingeh" by the Pueblo) Indian named "Popé" (pronounced Po'Pay).^[4]

Rebellion

Following his release, Popé, along with a number of other Pueblo leaders (see list below), planned and orchestrated the Pueblo Revolt. He plotted the revolt from Taos, New Mexico. Popé dispatched runners to all the Pueblos carrying knotted cords, the knots signifying the number of days remaining until the appointed day. Each morning the Pueblo leadership was to untie one knot from the cord, and when the last knot was untied, that would be the signal for them to rise against the Spaniards in unison.

The day for the attack had been fixed for August 11, 1680, but the Spaniards learned of the revolt after capturing two Tesuque Pueblo youths entrusted with carrying the message to the pueblos. Popé then ordered the execution of the plot on August 10, before the uprising could be put down.

The attack was commenced by the Taos, Picuris, and Tewa Indians in their respective pueblos. They killed twenty-one of the province's forty Franciscans, and another three hundred and eighty Spaniards, including men, women, and children. Spanish settlers fled to Santa Fe, the only Spanish city, and Isleta Pueblo, one of the few Pueblos that did not participate in the rebellion.

Believing themselves the only survivors, the refugees at Isleta left for El Paso del Norte on September 15. Meanwhile Popé's insurgents besieged Santa Fe, surrounding the city and cutting off its water supply. New Mexico Governor Antonio de Otermín, barricaded in the Governor's Palace, called for a general retreat. On August 21 the remaining 3,000 Spanish settlers streamed out of the capital city and headed for El Paso del Norte. The Pueblo Indians acquired horses from the Spanish, thus allowing the further spread of horses to the Plains tribes.^[5]

Popé's world

The retreat of the Spaniards left New Mexico in the power of the Pueblos.^[6] Popé was a mysterious figure in the history of the southwest as there are many tales of what happened to him after the revolt had transpired. One tale tells that he ordered the Puebloan people, under penalty of death, to burn or destroy crosses and other religious imagery, as well as any other vestige of the Roman Catholic religion and Spanish culture, including Spanish livestock and fruit trees. He supposedly also forbade the planting of wheat and barley. Popé supposedly went so far as to command those Indians who had been married according to the rites of the Catholic Church to dismiss their wives and to take others after the old native tradition. Another tale says that he left after the revolt to Taos where he lived out the rest of his days incognito to avoid persecution from the returning Spaniards and the anger of the Puebloans who didn't support him during the revolt. Another tale states that he simply disappeared. In short no living person actually knows what happened to Popé but his impact on the native population of New Mexico will forever be felt.



Statue of Popé, now residing in the National Statuary Hall Collection in the US Capitol Building as one of New Mexico's two statues.

Following their success, the diverse Pueblo Tribes, separated by hundreds of miles and eight different languages, quarreled as to who would occupy Santa Fe and rule over the country. These power struggles, combined with raids from nomadic tribes, Spanish raids (including the destruction of Zia with 600 Indians killed^[7]) and a seven year drought, weakened the Pueblo resolve and set the stage for a Spanish reconquest.

"Bloodless" reconquest

In July 1692, Diego de Vargas returned to Santa Fe with a converted Zia war captain, Bartolomé de Ojeda.^[7] Vargas, with only six soldiers, seven cannon (which he used as leverage against the Pueblo inside Santa Fe), and one Franciscan priest, entered the city before dawn and called on the Indians, promising clemency and protection if they would swear allegiance to the King of Spain and return to the Christian faith. The Indian leaders gathered in Santa Fe, met with Vargas and Ojeda, and agreed to peace. On September 14, 1692,^[8] Vargas proclaimed a formal act of repossession. It was the thirteenth town he had reconquered for God and King in this manner, he wrote jubilantly to the Conde de Galve, viceroy of New Spain.^[8]

Though the 1692 agreement to peace was bloodless, in the years that followed Vargas maintained increasingly severe control over the increasingly defiant Pueblo. During Vargas's absence from Santa Fe in 1693 the Pueblo retook the city. Vargas and his forces staged a quick and bloody recapture that concluded with seventy executions and 400 Pueblo sentenced to ten years' servitude.^[9] In 1696 the Indians of fourteen pueblos attempted a second organized revolt, launched with the murders of five missionaries and thirty-four settlers and using weapons the Spanish themselves had traded to the Indians over the years; Vargas's retribution was unmerciful, thorough and prolonged.^[9] ^[10] By the end of the century the last resisting Pueblo had scattered and the Spanish reconquest was essentially complete.

While their independence from the Spaniards was short-lived, the Pueblo Revolt granted the Pueblo Indians a measure of freedom from future Spanish efforts to eradicate their culture and religion following the reconquest. Moreover, the Spanish issued substantial land grants to each Pueblo and appointed a public defender to protect the rights of the Indians and argue their legal cases in the Spanish courts.

In the arts

In 1995, in Albuquerque, La Compañía de Teatro de Albuquerque produced the bilingual play *Casi Hermanos*, written by Ramon Flores and James Lujan. It depicted events leading up to the Pueblo Revolt, inspired by accounts of two half-brothers who met on opposite sides of the battlefield.

In 2005, in Los Angeles, Native Voices at the Autry produced *Kino and Teresa*, an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* written by Taos Pueblo playwright James Lujan. Set five years after the Spanish Reconquest of 1692, the play links actual historical figures with their literary counterparts to dramatize how both sides learned to live together and form the culture that is present-day New Mexico.

The Pueblo Revolt is referred to in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "Journey's End," in which Capt. Jean-Luc Picard learns that an ancestor of his, Javier Maribona Picard, helped suppress the uprising.

Pueblo revolt leaders and their home pueblos

- *Ku-htihth* (La Cienega de Cochiti): Antonio Malacate
- *Galisteo*: Juan El Tano
- *Walatowa* (Jemez): Luis Conixu
- *Nambé* (Nambé): Diego Xenome
- *Welai* (Picuris): Luis Tupatu (White Elk)
- *Powhoge* (San Ildefonso): Francisco El Ollito and Nicolas de la Cruz Jonv
- *Ohkay* (San Juan): Po'pay and Tagu
- *San Lazaro*: Antonio Bolsas and Cristobal Yope
- *Khapo* (Santa Clara): Domingo Naranjo and Cajete
- *Kewa* (Santo Domingo): Alonzo Catiti
- *Teotho* (Taos): El Saca
- *Tehsugeh* (Tesuque): Domingo Romero ^[11]

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External links

- [ancientweb.org/America](http://www.ancientweb.org/America/index.htm) (<http://www.ancientweb.org/America/index.htm>)
- PBS: *The West - Archives of the West*. (<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/one/pueblo.htm>) "Letter of the governor and captain-general, Don Antonio de Otermin, from New Mexico, in which he gives him a full account of what has happened to him since the day the Indians surrounded him. [September 8, 1680.]" Retrieved Nov. 2, 2009.

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