



The Revolt of the Pueblos

by Dorothy Heiderstadt

When Popé spoke, men listened—and what he spoke of was how the Spanish had been mistreating the Indians of New Mexico for a hundred years.

“They have taken away our old gods and

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given us one we do not want! They make us pay heavy taxes to support their churches! They drive us into the dark silver mines to work! Even our little children must work in the mines, and are beaten if they try to run away!"

"It is true, it is true," muttered the Pueblos sitting around him in circles.

These people had been simple farmers, potters, and basket weavers until the Spaniards came riding up from Mexico. They had hunted with bow and arrow, and had worshiped the gods of the corn, the earth, the sun, and the rain. But now everyone had to worship the white man's God. Indians who were caught worshiping in the old way were whipped, imprisoned, and even hanged. Popé himself had been imprisoned, and his bitterness was unending.

"We will kill all the Spaniards in every village!" he cried.

"Yes, yes," the people sighed, their eyes fixed on the handsome figure in the robe of jaguar skin.

Throughout 1675 Popé visited the villages of many tribes and held many such meetings. They took place in secret, in the underground kivas, or council chambers. The Spanish had forbidden the Indians to use these places, but the Indians were very careful—and very patient. For five years they waited, secretly gathering weapons and hiding them away.

Then one day a silver mine collapsed, burying alive all the Indians within, and Popé knew that now the time had come.

He sent a signal—a piece of knotted string—to the chief of every village. Each

day the chief was to untie one of the knots, and on the day he undid the last one, his people were to rise and kill all the Spaniards in their village.

If everything had gone as planned, the uprising would have begun on August 13, 1680. But Popé learned that Indian informers had given the plot away, and he decided to act three days earlier. He sent runners to inform the chiefs, and on August 10 the battle began.

In many villages not a Spaniard was spared. A few were able to escape to the city of Santa Fe, but most—about four hundred people—were slain.

When the battles in the villages were over, the Indians set out for Santa Fe. It would be harder to clear out, for it was a large city and the governor and his soldiers were there. But the Indians had made up their minds.

Hastily Governor Antonio de Otermin did what he could to defend the town. The people gathered within its walls, the gates were closed and barred, and soldiers were placed in the towers.

Far down the road, a large cloud of dust appeared; the first group of Indians was coming. Thousands more arrived from the scattered villages, and settled down outside the town.

At last a chief came forward, his face painted black—the sign of war. He offered the governor two choices: all the Spanish could leave Santa Fe, unharmed, or the governor could prepare for battle. The governor refused to make a choice.

For days the Indians simply waited,

while the Spaniards became more and more nervous. Then, on August 20, the Spaniards made a raid. Two hundred Indians were killed, and forty-seven were taken prisoner and hanged in the town square. In return, Popé simply closed the acequias, the trenches that carried water into the town.

Without water, Santa Fe could not hold out. The people became so thirsty that their tongues swelled and turned black. The governor had no choice but to abandon the city. When the last bawling cow and the last Spaniard had gone, the Indians went in and occupied it.

Popé moved into the governor's palace, from where he issued his first order: nothing was to remain of the Spanish. Their churches and books were to be destroyed, and the silver

mines were to be filled in with earth and stones. The kivas were to be opened, and the old rites and ceremonies brought back.

Gleefully Popé's subjects carried out his orders. Raging bonfires dotted the country, and everyone tried to forget that there had ever been any Spaniards.

But unfortunately, that was not the end of the story. Popé's power went to his head. Before long he was giving orders like a king and putting people to death if they failed to obey them. He became a tyrant of the worst kind, and the people hated him. When he died, around 1690, there was rejoicing. But Popé had succeeded in doing a thing that few Indian leaders were ever able to do. Even though only for a short time, he had united the many tribes in one common purpose.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **The Spaniards had been in New Mexico for about**
 - A five years
 - B fifty years
 - C one hundred years
2. **The Indians were angered most by the fact that the Spaniards had**
 - A interfered with their religion
 - B forbidden them to have weapons
 - C forced them to speak Spanish
3. **Popé was especially bitter toward the Spaniards because they had**
 - A killed his family
 - B put him in prison
 - C stolen his fortune
4. **The kivas were**
 - A heavy taxes
 - B rich silver mines
 - C underground meeting places
5. **The event that set off the revolt was the**
 - A shooting of an Indian
 - B collapse of a silver mine
 - C discovery of the hidden weapons
6. **Popé informed the chiefs of the time of the revolt by means of a**
 - A knotted string
 - B smoke signal
 - C drum message
7. **From the Indians' point of view, the revolt in the villages was**
 - A a great success
 - B a mild disappointment
 - C an utter failure
8. **Popé won the city of Santa Fe by**
 - A sending a fake plea for peace
 - B cutting off its water supply
 - C setting fire to the city walls
9. **Popé's first order was to**
 - A start the mines producing again
 - B gather all arms in one place
 - C destroy every trace of the Spanish
10. **Popé's great success lay in**
 - A getting tribes to work together
 - B ruling without use of force
 - C helping people learn new customs