

## What Caused the Bloodless Reconquest?: Understanding the Spaniards' 1692 Negotiated Reentry into Pueblo Lands in the Aftermath of the Successful 1680 Pueblo Revolt

By: Sahil Bathija

The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 is widely considered “one of the most successful Indigenous revolts in the history of the Americas.”<sup>1</sup> The Pueblo Indians successfully drove out the Spaniards. Governor Don Antonio Otermín tried and failed to retake the settlements. Subsequent reconquering attempts in 1686, 1689, and 1691 also ended in failures.<sup>2</sup> Yet when the newly appointed governor Don Diego de Vargas returned to El Paso from his visit of Pueblo communities in 1692, the Cathedral of New Mexico’s bells announced to the people of New Spain what is widely known as the “Bloodless Reconquest.”<sup>3</sup> The news represented a peaceful and successful reconquest through diplomacy. This occurrence leads one to wonder what led many Pueblos to agree to such a negotiation when they appeared to have the upper hand. Why did they allow Vargas and the Spaniards to return without another fight? I analyze the background leading up to the events that transpired in 1692 to illustrate what changed from their initial revolt to the time of Vargas’ reconquest. I examine the relationships among Pueblo communities and the circumstances they arrived at by the time of Vargas’ arrival. I consider the alienation and rivalries provoked by the 1680 revolt leader Po’pay, the skillful diplomacy of Don Diego de Vargas, and the pivotal guidance given to the Spaniards from a Pueblo Indian named Bartolomé de Ojeda. I ultimately conclude that the reasons many Pueblos accepted a diplomatic solution were the acts of these three key figures, coupled with the deep fractionalization of the unified pan-Puebloan identity present during 1680.

Much of the scholarship pertaining to Pueblo Indians focuses on the events leading up to 1680. These works are also widely presented from a Spanish perspective, largely because there are almost no Pueblo textual sources. Many of the documents of the period were destroyed during the 1680 revolt.<sup>4</sup> Only recent scholarship has attempted to discover the indigenous perspective of the events that transpired during the time of the revolt. However, many historians end their work without delving into the revolt’s aftermath. This largely neglected after-phase occasions classrooms worldwide to learn about the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 without ever learning of the largely diplomatic and peaceful act of capitulation by many Pueblos, meaning both Puebloans and

---

1 Michael Wilcox, *The Pueblo Revolt and the Mythology of Conquest: An Indigenous Archaeology of Contact*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 154, ProQuest Ebook Central.

2 Wilcox, *The Pueblo Revolt and the Mythology of Conquest*, 153-54.

3 Matthew Liebmann, *Revolt: An Archaeological History of Pueblo Resistance and Revitalization in 17th Century New Mexico*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), 187, ProQuest Ebook Central.

4 Barbara Ganson, “From Resistance to Rebellion,” in *The Guaraní under Spanish Rule in the Rio de la Plata* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 114.

their communities, in 1692. Furthermore, many prior scholars seemingly neglected to unearth the widespread ramifications the revolt had on Pueblo communities, or the drastic change in the dynamic of inter-Pueblo interaction and amity in the years after the revolt.<sup>5</sup> The recent works of Liebmann, Wilcox, Kessell, and Robins attempt to break both these trends. Yet even though these scholars mention a negotiated compromise between Vargas and many Pueblos, they do not fully clarify how or why these compromises happened. The majority simply state that Vargas traveled around and secured alliances but do not provide the holistic picture necessary to explain the alliances that occurred, despite the animosity only twelve years prior. I add to the scholarship of the Pueblo Revolt by giving a much-needed synthesis of why many Pueblos genuinely sided with the Spaniards in 1692. I delve into the Pueblo Revolt's aftermath and its notable effects and principal personalities that presaged the Spaniards' successful reentry.

It must be noted that the Puebloans were not a monolith. While it can be said that the critical mass of Pueblos united to drive out the Spaniards in the 1680 revolt, it cannot be said that all Pueblo communities agreed to peacefully accept the Spaniards' return in 1692. Pueblo communities were ethnically and linguistically different groups.<sup>6</sup> Many outwardly accepted the Spaniards' return, but did so as a means to buy themselves time to create a plan to drive out the Spaniards once and for all. Their feigned trust is epitomized by the conflicts such as the Battle of Astialakwa in 1694. When we ask ourselves what reasons the Pueblos had for accepting peace with the Spaniards in 1692, we are only talking about Puebloans among the subset of Pueblo communities that actually did— not those others who feigned allegiance only to attack two years later. We are talking about the Santa Anas, Zias, San Felipeans, and a large faction from Pecos.<sup>7</sup> Those that sided with the Spaniards notably necessitate further examination because not only did they allow the Spaniards to return to indigenous land, but also helped the Spaniards defeat the uprisings of later Pueblo communities to complete the Spaniards' reconquest.<sup>8</sup> The fact that these Pueblos joined peacefully through negotiation and diplomatic means merits further analysis as to why they joined the Spaniards at all.

To realize what changed these Pueblos' position, it is paramount that we understand the reasons for the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. There were a myriad of factors, but in the simplest terms— life became harder after the Spaniards arrived. Pueblo Indians became subject to the forced labor imposed by the repartimiento, the

---

<sup>5</sup> For example: see Charles Wilson Hackett, "The Revolt of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico in 1680," *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 15, no. 2 (1911): 93-147; Henry Warner Bowden, "Spanish Missions, Cultural Conflict and the Pueblo Revolt of 1680," *Church History* 44, no. 2 (1975): 217-28; or Andrew Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680: Conquest and Resistance in Seventeenth-century New Mexico*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Liebmann, *Revolt*, 52.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 190.

heavy taxation of the encomienda system, and strict evangelization.<sup>9</sup> Pueblo communities were exposed to epidemic diseases, raids, droughts, and extreme famines.<sup>10</sup> On top of it all, on the year of the revolt they faced a resurgence of Apache raids, a bitter cold snap, and the harshest drought in 1000 years; their entire harvest was destroyed.<sup>11</sup> Po'pay advocated for a return to the prosperity of ancient times.<sup>12</sup> After all, it was the Spaniards who made them distance themselves from their gods and prohibited their rain dances.<sup>13</sup> Po'pay claimed the spirit of Po'se yemu instructed them that by living "in accordance with the law of their ancestors, they would harvest a great deal of maize, many beans, a great abundance of cotton, calabashes, and very large watermelons and cantaloupes."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, "they could erect their houses and enjoy abundant health and leisure."<sup>15</sup> Other natives reported Po'pay promising "large crops of grain, maize with large and thick ears, many bundles of cotton, many calabashes and watermelons, and everything else in proportion."<sup>16</sup> Another seventeenth-century account notes the promise that these crops would be "better ones than ever, and that [Puebloans] would live in great ease" so long as they followed Po'pay's commands.<sup>17</sup> Po'pay's promises of change and future prosperity invoked a pan-Puebloan movement to rebel.<sup>18</sup>

The Pueblos were victorious in their efforts to drive out the Spaniards— but the promises driving the revolt remained unfulfilled. The promise of a perfect world after the rebellion never materialized. Droughts, disease, famines, and raids continued unabated.<sup>19</sup> There was no prosperity to sustain the happiness of winning the revolt. To add insult to injury, Po'pay adopted many of the customs and policies of the repressive Spanish regime, effectively undoing the progress the Pueblos had fought so hard to garner. As one scholar notes, "not only did [Po'pay] demand tribute of cotton and other goods from all of the towns under his dominion, but he moved into the former Spanish governor's residence in Santa Fe and took to riding in the governor's carriage."<sup>20</sup> His new power and status corrupted him. He required excessive hours to be spent in kivas and ordered the killing of the few who dared to express Catholic sympathies.<sup>21</sup> He went so far as to force people to "kneel in his

9 Ibid., 32-34, 36.

10 Ibid., 31.

11 Ibid., 44-45.

12 Pedro Naranjo, "'As They Had Been in Ancient Times': Pedro Naranjo Relates the Pueblo Revolt, 1680," HISTORY MATTERS - The U.S. Survey Course on the Web, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6527/>.

13 Liebmann, *Revolt*, 45.

14 Naranjo, "'As They Had In Ancient Times.'"

15 Ibid.

16 Nicholas Robins, "Leadership and Division," in *Native Insurgencies and the Genocidal Impulse in the Americas*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005), 109, ProQuest Ebook Central.

17 Robins, "Leadership and Division," 109.

18 Liebmann, *Revolt*, 52.

19 Robins, "Leadership and Division," 111.

20 Ibid., 110.

21 Liebmann, *Revolt*, 78-79.

presence” and receive him with the same pomp as they would for Spanish governors.<sup>22</sup> In less than a year and a half, Po’pay had alienated so many Pueblos to the point that Luís Tupatu, his own lieutenant, ousted him. Internal tension rang high when Po’pay returned to power in 1688, ousting Tupatu and dying soon after.<sup>23</sup> Some Pueblos sided with Po’pay and others with Tupatu, foreshadowing the deeper divisions to come.

The unity that enabled the rebellion was crumbling. With the threat of Spanish hegemony falling to the wayside, the zeal prompting the pan-Puebloan amity lost its momentum.<sup>24</sup> The continuance of famines exacerbated traditional rivalries separating Pueblo communities.<sup>25</sup> Local identities soon resumed after none were willing to truly accede authority to centralized leadership.<sup>26</sup> Many neglected to recognize Po’pay or Tupatu, and the persistence of problems bolstered a resurgence of traditional autonomy.<sup>27</sup> This led to further animosity and disunion as leaders angrily sought to punish those Pueblos who failed to recognize them as supreme. These polarizing internal divisions would lead some groups to side with the Spaniards just to spite the others. For instance, when Tupatu sided with the Spaniards in 1692, he did so as a means “to punish the Pecos, Keras, Jemez, and Tanos Indians who had failed to recognize him.”<sup>28</sup> The pan-Puebloan identity was waning away.

Then came the miraculous return of the captured war hero Bartolomé de Ojeda in 1692. Ojeda was a mixed-blood Keres, fighting for the Pueblos during the 1680 revolt and in many subsequent battles against reconquering attempts. When the Spaniards attacked the Zia Pueblo in 1689, Ojeda was wounded and dragged off the battlefield in Spanish hands.<sup>29</sup> Spanish sources indicate that he begged for confession “near death and impelled by fear of hell.”<sup>30</sup> Upon his return, when asked how he had escaped and how many Spaniards he had to kill, he answered “the Spaniards were his saviors. They had nursed him back to health at their village in the south, and the friars had redeemed him in the face of the Lord, his Savior.”<sup>31</sup> This account of Spanish and Christian triumphalism is mediated through Spanish sources, but Ojeda’s actions seem to support these claims. Ojeda spoke with Antonio Malacate, the respected leader and captain of the Cerro Colorado area, and told him “he had been sent by a great Spanish warrior named Diego de Vargas.”<sup>32</sup> Ojeda translated an official

---

22 Robins, “Leadership and Division,” 110.

23 Ibid., 111-12.

24 Wilcox, *The Pueblo Revolt and the Mythology of Conquest*, 158.

25 Robins, “Leadership and Division,” 111.

26 Wilcox, *The Pueblo Revolt and the Mythology of Conquest*, 158.

27 Robins, “Leadership and Division,” 111-12.

28 Ibid., 112.

29 John Kessell, “The Pueblo-Spanish War, 1680-1696: Neither Black nor White,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 94 (2) (2019): 196; Liebmann, *Revolt*, 181.

30 Kessell, “The Pueblo-Spanish War,” 196.

31 Liebmann, *Revolt*, 181.

32 Ibid., 182.

scroll stating Spaniards were returning not to fight, “but to pardon the Indians so they can become Christians.”<sup>33</sup>

He assured Malacate and his fellow Punames that the Spaniards indeed have good intentions and only want a peaceful return; all that was required was accepting “the King and Christ.”<sup>34</sup>

Bartolomé de Ojeda’s promise for peace and good intentions sparked fecund conversation and debate as to what their next steps would be. A council of many Pueblo communities, including the Hopi, Kewa, Pecos, San Filipe, Zuni, Jemez, and Cochiti, gathered to deliberate if things would really be different this time around as Ojeda claimed.<sup>35</sup> When Vargas later arrived and toured Pueblo communities, he strikingly did so peacefully without firing a single shot— seemingly confirming the intentions reported by Ojeda.<sup>36</sup> As Vargas toured from one community to another, he secured alliances with many as he went. Before October’s end, “Vargas had negotiated peace with all but the Keres, Jemez, Zunis, and Hopi Pueblos.”<sup>37</sup> Vargas’ military journal records many of such meetings and the reception of each, one of which was the Keres community of Zia atop the Cerro Colorado area mesa:

With the other captains and elders, [Antonio Malacate] received me with all reverence. They all had crosses in their hands and on most of the houses of the cuarteles of the plaza, where they had prepared a ground-level room for me... It was seen that 123 of all ages, male and female, were baptized.<sup>38</sup>

Many did not want to make the same mistake of fighting that cost the lives of so many loved ones in their participation in the 1680 revolt.<sup>39</sup> Others may have never wanted to revolt in the first place. Recorded testimonies from 1680 indicate some Puebloans were forced to participate in the rebellion under the threat of death and destruction, but these were given in Spanish custody so they must be taken with a grain of salt.<sup>40</sup> There is a very likely possibility that they were only made to preserve one’s own life in the face of Spanish punishment. Regardless, Vargas’ journal suggests some Pueblo communities greeted the Spaniards in celebration.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, Tanos, Jemez, Tewas, and factions from Pecos and Tiwas made agreements to oppose the Spaniards. Vocal rhetoric of Spanish conspiracies convinced many to prepare for defense in case the Spaniards fell short of their word.<sup>42</sup> They feigned outward support on his initial arrival to prepare to fight when it came time for the Spaniards’ return, but Vargas journal notes he had been warned of “their evil intention” by

---

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 183.

37 Wilcox, *The Pueblo Revolt and the Mythology of Conquest*, 220.

38 Liebmann, *Revolt*, 184.

39 Ibid.

40 Robins, “Leadership and Division,” 111-12; Naranjo, “As They Had In Ancient Times.”

41 Liebmann, *Revolt*, 189.

42 Ibid., 186.

his newfound allies.<sup>43</sup>

The reason Vargas was ultimately able to secure the alliances he did was two-part: one due to strategy and circumstance, and the other due to Bartolomé de Ojeda. Vargas approached the reconquest with diplomacy over force.<sup>44</sup> He skillfully used the disunity between Pueblo communities that had been fomenting since the time of the revolt to his advantage. His strategy was to “divide and conquer.”<sup>45</sup> Vargas approached individual settlements at a time of weakness and fragmentation. He altered the dynamics of the relationship between Spaniards and Pueblos in an effort to address the problems precipitating the 1680 revolt and the problems that fomented thereafter. The tribute system and encomiendas were dissolved. Cultural practices were restored along with the establishment of a larger degree of religious freedom, unlike the oppressive policy under Po’pay.<sup>46</sup> Vargas proved his worth by supporting his allies. When he learned that people from Old Cochi were harassing his Pueblo allies, he sent “a large party of warriors” to fix the situation.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, Pueblo allies helped quash further insurgencies.

Unbeknownst to other Pueblo Indians, in the years prior to Bartolomé de Ojeda’s return, Ojeda had mentored Don Diego de Vargas and briefed him “about the jealous dissension that had torn apart the Pueblo union.”<sup>48</sup> It is impossible to know for certain why Ojeda switched sides, but some theories suggest the role of religion or the goal to ease his people’s suffering by aiding an inevitable reentry of the Spaniards.<sup>49</sup> His role as an interpreter and negotiator was indispensable. Consistently siding with the Spaniards, Ojeda also informed Vargas of resisters.<sup>50</sup> It was Ojeda who led “a hundred Zia, Santa Ana, and San Felipe fighters” against the dissenting Pueblos readying for battle.<sup>51</sup> When Malacate had second thoughts about the Spaniards’ good intentions, he was forced to leave Cerro Colorado with his warnings to “neither make peace nor be friends with the Spaniards” falling to deaf ears.<sup>52</sup> Scholars of Vargas’ journal state that this was the case only after Ojeda convinced Puebloans that Malacate was “worshipping the things of the devil every night in order to kill [Vargas] and the Spaniards.”<sup>53</sup>

Ultimately, it was a combination of specific personalities and the dissolution of the pan-Puebloan unity

- 
- 43 Ibid., 185.  
 44 Ibid., 183.  
 45 Kessell, “The Pueblo-Spanish War,” 196.  
 46 Wilcox, *The Pueblo Revolt and the Mythology of Conquest*, 158.  
 47 Ibid., 220.  
 48 Kessell, “The Pueblo-Spanish War,” 196.  
 49 Ibid., 196.  
 50 Ibid., 197.  
 51 Ibid.  
 52 Liebmann, *Revolt*, 188.  
 53 Ibid.

that allowed for many Pueblos to peacefully accept a negotiated compromise in 1692. Before Don Diego de Vargas arrived with the goal of a diplomatic reconquest, much of the Puebloan unity had fallen apart. The Pueblo Revolt was built on the backbone of Po'pay's promises and ideals, and it did not take long for many Pueblo Indians to become disillusioned in the chances of the utopian vision. The symbol and leader of the successful revolt, Po'pay, had become an even stricter oppressive overload than it seemed the Spaniards were. Very little had improved in the time following the revolt; the promises of the revolt remained unfulfilled. The momentum and rationale for any sort of unity quickly dissolved. Pueblo communities steadily returned to their autonomous ways before the Spaniards ever arrived. This fragmentation fomented an 'every settlement for itself mentality,' causing many to worry about attacks from neighboring communities. When Bartolomé de Ojeda arrived and assured Pueblos of peace and protection under a better system, it seemed quite appealing for many. Ojeda mentored Vargas on how to best approach the Pueblo communities and utilize the disunion. Vargas went from settlement to settlement, creating appealing alliances by addressing many problems affecting Pueblos in their recent past. The success of his strategic diplomatic approach largely utilized the failures of the post-1680 Pueblo community dynamic. Those that peacefully aligned themselves with the Spaniards invariably did so because of these reasons.

The events of 1680 were not the end of the story. Revolutionary moments do not end with the revolt's success or failure but must be examined beyond the timeline typically considered in classrooms. Pushing against the conventional 1680-based narrative, it is paramount that we have a holistic understanding of the events leading up to 1692. The explanation of why any Pueblo communities agreed to the Spaniards reentry in 1692 in light of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 challenges what a limited timespan account of the 1680 event would suggest. Indeed, the story of the Pueblo Indians continues far beyond 1692 up to the present. However, for now, an addition to existing scholarship synthesizing the events explaining the 'Bloodless Reconquest' is a step in the right direction.



## Bibliography

- Ganson, Barbara. "From Resistance to Rebellion." In *The Guarani under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata*, 87-116. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Kessell, John. "The Pueblo-Spanish War, 1680-1696: Neither Black nor White." *New Mexico Historical Review* 94 (2) (2019): 193–200. <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.seattleu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=30h&AN=137308821&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Liebmann, Matthew. *Revolt: An Archaeological History of Pueblo Resistance and Revitalization in 17th Century New Mexico*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Naranjo, Pedro. "'As They Had Been in Ancient Times': Pedro Naranjo Relates the Pueblo Revolt, 1680." *HISTORY MATTERS - The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6527/>.
- Robins, Nicholas. "Leadership and Division." In *Native Insurgencies and the Genocidal Impulse in the Americas*, 108-114. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Wilcox, Michael. *The Pueblo Revolt and the Mythology of Conquest: An Indigenous Archaeology of Contact*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. ProQuest Ebook Central.