Pueblo Triumph Amidst a World of Tragedy

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How does one triumph measure against a large expanse of tragedy? For the Native Americans under control of the Spanish forces in the Midwest region of the American continent, one triumph could not entirely outweigh their demise. In a time where rights of Native Americans were sorely violated by the juggernaut of the Spanish frontier, rule by despotism seemed inevitable. However, beginning in 1680, one Native American leader, the medicine man Popé, gave the Pueblos in New Mexico a temporary respite from oppressive Spanish rule. The Pueblo Revolts from 1680 to 1692 demonstrated a resurgence in Native American culture, religion, and freedom from slavery. Foreign invasion never relinquished its tragic hold on the continent, but for the Pueblos in New Mexico, their struggle for liberty proved triumphant.

**Native Tensions Increase**

In 1598, conquistador Juan de Oñate established the town of Santa Fe in what would later become New Mexico. While his purpose was to find gold, Franciscan missionaries accompanied him and began to convert the Pueblo Indians [sic].[[1]](#footnote-1) By the 17th century, the Spaniards had completely established a systemized government, religion, and economy. Particularly, Pueblos were forced to adhere to the systems of “encomienda” (sharing portions of their crops with the Spaniards) and “repartimiento” (forced conversion to the Catholic faith)[[2]](#footnote-2).

Though the Puebloes were initially accepting of Spanish rule, it ultimately proved to be violent and oppressive. As a result, Native American opposition gradually increased, especially when the Spanish system of governors began to deteriorate at the turn of the century. Spanish records state that numerous rebellions occurred between 1597 and 1650.[[3]](#footnote-3) While several rebellions were temporarily successful for the Hopis, Apalachicola, and Tewa Pueblos, historian David Weber states, “although vastly outnumbered, Spaniards crushed most of these rebellions primarily because the linguistically and culturally diverse native communities could not unite.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The reasons for rebellions were clear, yet the nature of Pueblo culture impeded rebellion significantly.

By the 1660’s, tensions reached a climax. 1660 to 1680 saw very little rainfall, resulting in lower production rates and extreme drought. The Spanish system of forced labor eradicated the opportunity for surplus crops, eliminating trade between tribes and encouraging thievery. In addition, European diseases ravaged entire tribes. These misfortunes destroyed delicate relations with the Catholic faith, as good deeds promised by Franciscans bore no manifestations. Thus, Pueblos abandoned the Catholic faith in favor of their own.

In response to the Pueblos’ abandonment of the Catholic faith, the governor of Santa Fe, Juan Francisco Treviño, ordered a “witch hunt” in 1675 to punish Native American religious officials. In total, three Pueblo priests were publicly executed, one hung himself in prison, and forty-seven others were flogged. Ritual dances were exclusively forbidden, and Spaniards even burned religious objects[[5]](#footnote-5). According to *The West*, “[The Pueblos] understood, once and for all, then, that the Spaniards meant to have nothing less than total victory.”[[6]](#footnote-6) The witch hunt marked the accumulation of decades of suppression and sparked a new appeal for change in the Pueblos.

**The Medicine Man**

The Medicine Man of the Tewa people in San Juan, Popé (Po’Pay), was whipped twice in the Spanish floggings. He interpreted the cataclysm around him as a message of disapproval from Native American spirits. Thus, he began a campaign to reinstate the Pueblo way of life.

Popé immediately gained the support of war chiefs hailing from Taos, Picurís, Santo Domingo, Jémez, Tanos, San Lázaro, Keres, and beyond.[[7]](#footnote-7) He then traveled across New Mexico preaching his ideas. During a kiva ritual, Popé even claimed divine intervention from the god Poheyemo and three devils in order to stress the urgency of revolt.

Popé’s audience was difficult to communicate with, as it consisted of “17,000 Pueblos living in more than two dozen independent towns spread out over several hundred miles and further separated by at least six different languages and countless dialects, many of them mutually unintelligible”[[8]](#footnote-8). Many tribes refused participation. Despite these tribal differences, Popé’s preaching still garnered mass support. He even won over the favor of the nearby nomadic Apache tribes previously at war with the Pueblos. According to *The West*, “he offered a millenarian vision to the Pueblos, stressing the complete expulsion of Spanish military and religious authority, the elimination of Christian and Spanish cultural practices, and the return of Pueblo deities.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Unification on such a large scale had never been achieved before in the history of the Native American rebellions.

**Riots**

One Pueblo captive stated, “The Indians of this kingdom are allied for the purpose of rebellion. They plan to kill the priests, and all the Spaniards, even women and children, thus to destroy the total population of this kingdom.”[[10]](#footnote-10) War chiefs, controlling 6,000 trained warriors, devised a plan that consisted of one massive breakout across New Mexico, a tactic never before used by previous revolutionaries. In August of 1680, a delayed mission supply caravan the Spaniards depended upon gave the organized masses the serendipitous opportunity they needed.

Spaniards captured a messenger on August 9, revealing the supposed attack date of August 11. Hence, revolts occurred a day earlier in Taos, Pecos, Santa Clara, San Cristóbal, Santo Domingo, Santa Cruz, Picurís, San Marcos, Keres, Hopi, and Jémez (Appendix A). Despite knowing the time frame of the intended attack, the Spaniards were still unprepared for the confrontations. “…scattered in farms and ranches along the Rio Grande and its tributaries,” [[11]](#footnote-11) the Spaniards were easy prey. The intricacies in the native’s plan demonstrated their strong commitment to rebellion. Popé’s efforts were craftily planned and well executed, all but ensuring victory.

On August 15th, Pueblo warriors advanced onto Santa Fe. A negotiator approached Governor Otermín’s encampment offering two crosses and stated, “If you choose the white…there will be no war, but you must all leave the country. If you choose the red, you must all die, for we are many and you are few.” [[12]](#footnote-12) Otermín chose incorrectly. That night, 3,000 natives battled fewer than 200 Spaniard militants. By the 16th of August, the colonists had retreated to the Governor’s Palace. Spanish forces resurged on the 18th, killing 300 Pueblos and imprisoning 47 others. However, on August 21, 1860, the colonists, numbering more than 2,000, conducted a massive exodus from an utterly decimated Santa Fe. According to Robert Silversberg, “The Indians did not attack. Perhaps they felt that the withdrawal of the Spaniards from their land was sufficient.”[[13]](#footnote-13) The Spaniards retreated to the El Paso district. The destruction of Santa Fe and the loss of lives on both sides were tragic casualties of the fighting. However, the Pueblos had made their point.

After the revolts, Spanish missionaries often faced “the most barbarous and depraved treatment”[[14]](#footnote-14) upon capture, including being tied naked to a pig and whipped, beaten with war clubs, stoned, lanced, and finally shot to death[[15]](#footnote-15). Churches were “burned and destroyed, stripped of their sacred vessels”[[16]](#footnote-16) and turned into barns. One eyewitness stated that the Pueblos scrubbed themselves with the suds of yucca plants in order to remove the sacrament of baptism.[[17]](#footnote-17) While burning the church in Santa Fe, warriors intoned the Catholic liturgy in mocking jeers, a major offense to the Spaniards. The Pueblos’ inherent disregard of the Catholic faith exemplified how its imposition had definitively created devastation to their culture.

**A Short Reign**

The period following the Pueblo Revolt was marked as the only time during Spanish colonization that Native Americans practiced their faith without fear of punishment. Historian Robert Silversberg stated that this time period “was accompanied by a frenzied religious revival, marked by wild dances, offerings to the old gods…a joyous and intense reaffirmation of the long-suppressed faith.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Popé ordered “against speaking Castilian or planting crops introduced by the Europeans.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Pigs, sheep and horses were slaughtered or let loose. According to Robert Silversberg, “The…Sioux and Kiowas and Shoshone and Cheyenne…rode steeds that were descended, for the most part, from those let loose in New Mexico in 1680.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Many Spanish generals attempted to recapture the land, including the former governor of Santa Fe, yet none realized triumph. Spanish chronicler Juan de Villagutierre wrote, “It has been arrived at by my great sins to experience the total ruin that these dilated provinces of Mexico have had”[[21]](#footnote-21), thus claiming divine punishment as an explanation to what was a confounding tragedy to the Spaniards.

Whilst being whipped during the revolt, Franciscan Fray Juan de Jesús reportedly stated, “Do with me as you wish, for this joy of yours will not last more than ten years, after which you will consume each other in wars.”[[22]](#footnote-22) The Pueblos held their land between 1680 to 1692. However, his prediction rang true as Pueblos began to split their lands into warring factions.

The conquistador Diego De Vargas ended Popé’s reign in 1692. At this time the Pueblos were simply too separated, both geographically and politically. He enforced his strength in numbers with firepower and surrounded Santa Fe with cannons on all sides. Eventually, Pueblo leaders had no choice but to surrender.

**Legacy of the Pueblos**

The Pueblos never regained their power as they had in 1680. However, their actions still struck fear in the Spaniards from that point on. In 1694, one Spanish guard wrote, “The four men [promised]…do not provide sufficient armed protection. And the reason is clear because in the year ‘eighty there were more than four armed guards in some of the pueblos, and both the guards and the minister perished. Hence, …the land [is] not at peace.”[[23]](#footnote-23) In essence, the Pueblos had proven their military fortitude and made an embarrassing example of Spaniard forces.

This newfound respect had the effect of creating tolerance, specifically in recognizing religious dissidence. While the Franciscans still pursued their Christian endeavors, “Popé's revolt had permanently weakened the political power of the Franciscans, …the Pueblos were now given greater latitude for their own religious practices.” [[24]](#footnote-24) In addition, according to *The West*, “fewer demands for food and labor were placed upon them. The Spanish even armed the Pueblos to defend their own villages and acknowledged their rightful ownership of village lands. In short, the post-rebellion political system in New Mexico can be seen as a Pueblo-Spanish alliance.” [[25]](#footnote-25) (Appendix B). Spanish records report intermarrying between the Spanish and Pueblos and the incorporation of Spanish culture into Pueblo culture.

Despite this new tolerance, the Spanish frontier never slowed. Other European countries also began their own pursuits to colonize America and weren’t necessarily as tolerant. Resulting Native American history is full of tragedy, accumulating in such events as the Massacre at Sand Creek and the Trail of Tears. In today’s world, the continent of North America is completely overcome with colonists, or people whose heritage does not claim from America. Modern Native American culture is resigned to reservations, politics, and legal battles.

Despite these disparages, the spirit of the true American native still exists. Some groups of people in today’s world even claim heritage to this “Pueblo-Spanish alliance” incentivized by the Pueblo Revolts. One individual in *The West* states, “beyond the initial clash emerges a new view of the world…that’s what Chicanos represent today.”[[26]](#footnote-26) In addition, the state of New Mexico gifted the U.S. Statutory Hall in the U.S. Capitol Building a statue of Popé (Appendix C). Here Popé safeguards a fundamental story that resonates with many individuals in today’s world.

The hardship endured by the Native American peoples is a tale reaffirmed by generations of American history. Their stories chronicled the lack of humanity in foreign colonization and the plight of the indigenous people as they were forced to assimilate. Nonetheless, in 1680, “a people who had grown accustomed to defeat, who had suffered at the hands of fiercer tribes for centuries, had in one glorious convulsion of wrath expelled from their midst… the white men who had convinced half a world of their invincibility.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Amidst a world of tragedy, this group of influential Pueblos had proven the triumphant spirit of a people long oppressed. Their endeavors were not enough to eradicate foreign despotism across all of America, but their strength in their struggles produced an undeniable triumph in Native American history.

Appendices

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| Appendix A | Appendix B |
|  | /var/folders/3w/95bmptyj5k32wnxjwj1ytmxc0000gn/T/com.microsoft.Word/WebArchiveCopyPasteTempFiles/3c11284_150px.jpg |
| "The Pueblo Revolts August-October 1680." The Map Archive. Accessed April 17,       2019. https://www.themaparchive.com/       the-pueblo-revolts-augustoctober-1680.html. | Curtis, Edward S. *Tewa Indian Guard at Top of the Kiwa Stairs*. 1905. Photograph.       https://www.loc.gov/item/94507035/. |
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"Po'Pay." Architect of the Capitol. Last modified May 10, 2018. Accessed March 15, 2019. https://www.aoc.gov/art/national-statuary-hall-collection/popay.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

1. Curtis, Edward S. *Tewa Indian Guard at Top of the Kiwa Stairs*. 1905. Photograph.   
        https://www.loc.gov/item/94507035/.
   1. This photograph is a picture of a Tewa Pueblo guarding the Kiwa in his town. This photograph is meant to entertain the reader through visual representation of a historical fact. I used this photograph as an example of long term effects of the Pueblo Revolt. It provided visual proof of an allegation I made about the position of Native Americans as guards instead of the Spaniards. This photograph is not from the time period of the Pueblo Revolt, albeit important to the understanding of the event. It also does not provide a location, and is only from one perspective.
2. De Marco. Barbara. *Documents from the Early Days of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680*.   
        UC Berkeley: Research Center for Romance Studies, 2017. Accessed April 17,   
        2019. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4v34d0nw#author.
   1. This source is a collection of letters from Spanish governors, soldiers, chroniclers, etc to their superiors. This was an excellent collection of primary sources, meant to inform the reader from the point of view of the actual time period. I used this source to understand the thoughts and feelings of the Spaniards at the time by presenting new ideas. This source also helped me understand the historical context of the time and certain characteristics of individual peoples. This source was difficult to understand as it was in Spanish. It also does not provide perspective from the Native American’s part.
3. "Po'Pay." Architect of the Capitol. Last modified May 10, 2018. Accessed March   
    15, 2019. https://www.aoc.gov/art/national-statuary-hall-collection/popay.
   1. This web page presents an image of the statue of the Native American leader Popé as well as factual information about the statue. The creation of this statue related to the long-term effects of the Pueblo Revolt. Learning about this statue and its history helped me to understand the positive cultural influence of the Pueblo Revolt. I used the picture in the web page as an appendix.
4. "The Pueblo Revolt - Letters from the Governor." PBS. Accessed March 13, 2019.   
   https://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/one/pueblo.htm.
   1. This web page details a letter sent by the Governor of Santa Fe during the Pueblo Revolt. This letter provides insight into the thoughts and emotions of the governor. His tone and explanations helped me to understand the urgency and strength of the Revolt. Overall, this letter gave me information about the Revolt from the perspective of a first hand experience and a valuable primary source. The source presents bias as it is from the perspective of only one man on the opposing side of a significant battle.

Secondary Sources

1. Countryman, Edward. "The Pueblo Revolt." Gilder Lehrman Institute of American   
   History AP US History Study Guide. Accessed March 13, 2019.
   1. This web page lists factual information concerning the Pueblo Revolt. It is purposed to inform the reader, and to be used as a study guide for the AP US History exam. This source provided me with valuable information and specificities of the events which occurred during the revolt. While the information is only sourced from one historian’s research, it is from a credible organization and presents little to no bias.
2. Britannica Library, s.v. "Pueblo Rebellion," accessed February 20, 2019,   
   https://library.eb.com/levels/referencecenter/article/Pueblo-Rebellion/6182.
   1. This web page lists important information about the Pueblo Revolt. It is purposed to inform the reader. I used this source to gain an initial understanding of the revolt when I first began conducting my research. It helped me to capture the essence of the spirit and implications of this historical event, especially in reference to the theme Triumph and Tragedy. The source does not provide detail in depth, yet is still highly educative. I accessed the Britannica Library through my membership with the Pueblo County Library District. It is a legitimate research database.
3. Britannica Library, s.v. "Popé," accessed February 20, 2019,   
   https://library.eb.com/levels/referencecenter/article/Pop%C3%A9/60835.
   1. This web page provided information about the medicine man Popé. It was purposed to inform. Similarly to the other Britannica Library article, this source did not provide very detailed information, yet helped me understand the context of the Pueblo Revolt. The source, being an educational tool as part of the Britannica Library database, provided little to no bias.
4. *Ken Burns - The West*. "The People." Episode 1, season 1. PBS America. September   
        15, 1996. Directed by Stephen Ives. https://www.netflix.com/title/70210484.
   1. This documentary explores the history of the mid-west region of the American continent. The specific episode considers the lives of the Native Americans as understood through accounts from colonists. The documentary was created by historian Ken Burns and his historian associates, and pursued by the company PBS, a legitimate organization dedicated to pursuing research. One section of the documentary focuses specifically on the Pueblo Revolt. It provides pictures, images, and primary sources, told from the perspective of numerous respected historians. This source aided me tremendously. It presented information in a different way than traditional research (i.e. written research) and gave not only facts, but both short and long-term effects of the Revolt. The documentary exposes the audience to multiple biases, perspectives, and stories, allowing the audience to gain a complete understanding of the event.
5. "Pre-Revolution Timeline - the 1600s - 1680 Detail." America's Best History.   
        Accessed March 13, 2019. https://americasbesthistory.com/abhtimeline1680m.html.
   1. This web page provided a detail concerting the Pueblo Revolt. The detail was purposed to inform and used in context of a consideration of the history of the 1600s in general. Thus, the source helped me understand the implications of the revolt in short-term history. Specifically, the source notes that this event occurred not long after the events of Pocahontas and John Smith, a popular story concerning foreign and native relations in America. This source is not very detailed, yet it presents little to no bias.
6. Rocky Mountain PBS. "The West - Popé." PBS. Accessed February 28, 2019.   
        https://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/i\_r/pope.html.
   1. This web page details information specifically concerning the medicine man Popé. It provided me with important information about this man in order to better understand the revolt as a whole. The information presented in this web page was part of a larger study about the history of the American Midwest, from a legitimate organization dedicated to pursuing research. The source presents little to no bias and is adequately detailed with relevant information.
7. Robert Torrez, "Pueblo Revolt of 1680," New Mexico Office of the State Historian, accessed April 17, 2019, http://newmexicohistory.org/people/pueblo-revolt-of-1680
   1. This is a web page detailing the Pueblo Revolt. The information is meant to inform the reader about the topic. I used the factual information presented in order to develop a depth of knowledge in the paper.
8. Silverberg, Robert. *The Pueblo Revolt*. New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970.
   1. This book is specifically about the Pueblo Revolt. It is a non fiction research novel that is purposed to inform. The information in the book helped me tremendously with understanding specific details and facts I hadn’t previously known. The author obviously did in-depth research to develop the book, and thus it presents little to no bias as he considers sources from a variety of facts and opinions.
9. "The Pueblo Revolts August-October 1680." The Map Archive. Accessed April 17,   
        2019. https://www.themaparchive.com/   
        the-pueblo-revolts-augustoctober-1680.html.
   1. This source is a map detailing significant locations during the Pueblo Revolt. It is purposed to inform the viewer by providing a visual representation of locations. I used the source as an appendix. The map is a secondary source and does not necessarily provide all the towns listed, yet still lists most of them.
10. Weber, David J. *The Spanish Frontier in North America*. Castleton, NY: Hamilton   
         Printing Company, 1992.
    1. This book is a research novel about the history of the Spanish frontier in the American continent. The book is not specifically about the event I researched. However, it did provide an in-depth analysis of the Pueblo Revolt lasting multiple pages that provided me with important details. In addition, mentions of the event throughout the book helped me to understand the short and long-term effects of this event. The author compiled many different sources to create this literature and gave the information factually, eliminating bias in this novel.
11. Wood, Margaret. "1680 - The Pueblo Revolt." *In Custodia Levis: Law Librarians of*   
         *Congress* (blog). Entry posted October 31, 2013. Accessed February 28,   
         2019. https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2013/10/1680-the-pueblo-revolt/.
    1. This blog details the author’s personal research about the Pueblo Revolt in reference to her understanding of her ancestral history. The blog is purposed to inform and presented in depth information valuable to my research. In addition, the blog contains primary source quotations and a photograph of a mission in Santa Fe. Because the blog is from the point of view of one author and was created in pursuit of personal reasons, it presents some bias in her favor. However, the information is accurate, compiled from many sources, and was overall very helpful to my research.

Tertiary Sources

1. Espinoza, J. Manuel. *The Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1696 and the Franciscan*   
        *Missions in New Mexico*. London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988.
   1. This book details the revolt that occurred in 1696. It is purposed to inform. While the topic of the book does not relate to the same revolt I focused on, the book still provided very beneficial information. Primarily, it was composed of letters from the time period. These were valuable resources to me as finding primary sources for this topic was difficult. Letters written after the revolt helped me to understand the short term effects of this event. The book also contained a feature about the Pueblo Revolt which provided some helpful information.

1. Margaret Wood, "1680 - The Pueblo Revolt," *In Custodia Levis: Law Librarians of Congress* (blog), entry posted October 31, 2013, accessed February 28, 2019, https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2013/10/1680-the-pueblo-revolt/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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3. David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (Castleton, NY: Hamilton Printing Company, 1992), 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (Castleton, NY: Hamilton Printing Company, 1992), 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ken Burns - The West*, "The People," episode 1, PBS America, September 15, 1996, directed by Stephen Ives, https://www.netflix.com/title/70210484. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Ken Burns - The West*, "The People," episode 1, PBS America, September 15, 1996, directed by Stephen Ives, https://www.netflix.com/title/70210484. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. J. Manuel Espinoza, *The Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1696 and the Franciscan Missions in New Mexico* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 34 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (Castleton, NY: Hamilton Printing Company, 1992), 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Rocky Mountain PBS, "The West - Popé," PBS, accessed February 28, 2019, https://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/i\_r/pope.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
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11. David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (Castleton, NY: Hamilton Printing Company, 1992), 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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13. Robert Silverberg, *The Pueblo Revolt* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970), 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. J. Manuel Espinoza, *The Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1696 and the Franciscan Missions in New Mexico* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. J. Manuel Espinoza, *The Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1696 and the Franciscan Missions in New Mexico* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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18. Robert Silverberg, *The Pueblo Revolt* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (Castleton, NY: Hamilton Printing Company, 1992), 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
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22. J. Manuel Espinoza, *The Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1696 and the Franciscan Missions in New Mexico* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. J. Manuel Espinoza, *The Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1696 and the Franciscan Missions in New Mexico* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 216 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (Castleton, NY: Hamilton Printing Company, 1992), 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Rocky Mountain PBS, "The West - Popé," PBS, accessed February 28, 2019, https://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/i\_r/pope.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Ken Burns - The West*, "The People," episode 1, PBS America, September 15, 1996, directed by Stephen Ives, https://www.netflix.com/title/70210484. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Robert Silverberg, *The Pueblo Revolt* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970), 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)