THE PUEBLO REVOLT

A documentary by Patricia Cunliffe

The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 was the single most successful act of resistance by Native Americans against the European invaders; and took place 96 years before the American Revolution. The only time in US Colonial history that the indigenous peoples of an area put aside all of their differences and banded together to successfully oust the European invaders, told in the Native American Oral History tradition.

Conquistador Don Juan de Onate established the first Spanish colony in New Mexico in 1598, at Yuque Yungue, across the river from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, near present-day Espanola. Originally, the Spanish settlers and Pueblo Peoples provided a unified defense against the marauding nomadic tribes - Apaches and Navajos.

The Spanish introduced the Encomienda and Repartamiento systems into the Pueblo way of life. The Encomienda system forced Pueblo People to donate a major part of their crops; and under the Repartamiento system, they were forced to work in Spanish households, fields and building efforts with no compensation.

The harshest burden on the Pueblo People was that the Spanish forced them to abandon their centuries old religious faith and adopt the Catholic religion. Those who were believed to act contrary to the desires of the Franciscans were met with brutal consequences. All of this made survival extremely difficult for the Pueblo People, whose own religion was incorporated as part of their daily way-of-life; increased exponentially by a severe drought at the time.

In 1675, Governor Juan de Trevino arrested 47 religious leaders from various pueblos, accused them of sorcery and sentenced four of them to be hung. Among the 47, was a 50-year-old War Captain (a religious position) named Po'pay from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo. For the next five years Po’pay and other Pueblo leaders, would meet to secretly organize a widespread rebellion. In 1680, two runners from Tesuque Pueblo, Pedro Omatua and Nikolas Catua, were sent to the various Pueblos to distribute a rope of deerskin with knots – with instructions that would determine the day of the revolt.

Word of the revolt reached Spanish Governor Antonio de Otermin and the two runners were arrested, interrogated and put to death. They were the first casualties of the Pueblo Revolt. The second was Padre Pio, the Catholic Priest at Tesuque Pueblo, where the boys were from.

On August 10, 1680, the Native Americans attacked Santa Fe, which had been moved to its present location at the foot of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in 1610, by Governor Pedro de Peralta. After 10 days of battle the Native Americans allowed the Spanish Governor to leave. The Spaniards fled to El Paso del Norte, now Juarez, Mexico.

The story comes full circle with the 2005 installation of the Po'pay Statue in the National Statuary Hall in Washington, DC. Each of the 50 States is allowed two statues to commemorate notable people in their history. The Po’pay Statue is the 100th and final statue to be placed in the National Statuary Hall – which is today a familiar sight after the early 2021 DC events.

The film will introduce many unfamiliar words and concepts which will be defined quite simply with motion graphic text definitions: Kiva, Pueblo, Conquistador, Encomienda, Katchina, Owingeh...
Likewise the film will also introduce different accents and speech patterns, plus some of the historians are somewhat difficult to understand, so subtitles will be included throughout most of the film, incorporated into the aesthetic. Motion graphics will be utilized in abundance.

The story is stitched together through interviews conducted with Native American, Hispanic and Anglo Historians, Elders, Tribal Leaders, etc, in the Native American Oral History tradition.

The Spaniards kept well documented records while the Native Americans have relied on Oral History passed down through generations. Therefore, the Pueblo Revolt still remains unknown.

As this predates the camera era, visuals will be artwork depictions, archival elements, ruins, terrain, Spanish and Native American commemorations, ceremonies and day to day – with one scene of an elder at Nambe Pueblo recounting the story on the Kiva steps to a group of young people. All of this will be composited in layers that will include a good amount of high-quality, more recently shot footage, as well as very old images. Although many filmmakers may disagree – I have always liked the aesthetic of various sourced footage combinations used together.

There will be animation sequences, such as the Zuni Pueblo encounter, the Acoma Pueblo battle and the battles of the Pueblo Revolt – although they too will incorporate layering of other images.

Music will be Native American flute, Native American Turtle Dance – the music of the time, very old recordings of traditional Spanish songs and incidental.

The film will open with the most current element - which is the unveiling of the Po'pay statue in Statuary Hall in Washington, DC, intercut with the unveiling of the statue at Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, NM, then proceeding with the chronological story of New Mexico’s history, beginning in 1528 and ending in 1696. Although the film is long on information, it’s short on topic, for shorter attention spans.

This film debunks the myth behind the oldest community festival in the United States, the Fiesta de Santa Fe. A celebration of the “bloodless” re-conquest by Don Diego de Vargas that was supposed to have taken place in 1692, but was not accomplished until 1696, and was not bloodless.

The film portrays New Mexico’s unique culture and the significance of the Po'pay Statue, which took 30 years from the original inception of the idea in 1976. Pamela Agoyo, President of the Po'pay Foundation states: "It is fitting that Po'pay should be the final installation in Statuary Hall. When in fact, Indigenous People were the first people in this country, and Po'pay was really the leader of the first American Revolution."

The final shot is of wild horses with text overlay: The horses that were released into the wild, as a result of The Pueblo Revolt, would later become the famous Wild Mustangs. Which led to the fierce horsemen warriors of the Plains Indians.