THE PUEBLO REVOLT

A documentary by Patricia Cunliffe

The Pueblo Revolt was 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, where the Rio Grande and the Chama Rivers meet. The group of Spanish settlers, 129 families, were initially welcomed by the Pueblo People. The two cultures learned from each other as well as provided a unified defense against the marauding nomadic tribes of the area - the Apaches and the Navajos.

The Spanish, originally smitten with the civilized manner in which the pueblo people had already organized their societies, introduced the Encomienda and Repartimiento systems into the pueblo way of life. The Encomienda system forced Pueblo people to donate a major part of their crops to support the Spanish missions, military forces and civil institutions. Under the Repartimiento system, Indians were forced to work in Spanish households, fields and building efforts with no compensation.

But 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. These were not polite requests made by the Spaniards, as anyone who was 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 everyday way-of-life; which was 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 4 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 5 years Po’pay and other Pueblo leaders, would meet to secretly organize a widespread rebellion with Indians from over two dozen surrounding pueblos participating. In 1680, two runners from Tesuque Pueblo, Omatua and Catua, were sent to the various Pueblos to distribute a rope of deerskin with knots tied in it – with the instructions that every day, they were to untie one knot. When the last knot was untied, that was the day of the revolt.

Word of the revolt reached Governor Antonio de Otermin and the 2 runners were captured and put to death. They were the first casualties of the Pueblo Revolt. The second casualty was Padre Pio, the Catholic Priest at Tesuque Pueblo, where the boys were from. By this time the Spanish population had reached 2800, 170 of whom were soldiers.

On August 10, 1680, the Pueblo Indians attacked the city of 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 killing of 21 priests and 400 colonists, and cutting off their water supply, the Indians again offered the governor the option to continue fighting or leave; finally driving out the remaining colonists, who fled to El Paso del Norte, now Juarez, Mexico. 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.

In the 12 years that followed the Pueblo Revolt, the Spaniards made a few unsuccessful attempts at re-conquest. In 1692 Don Diego de Vargas, proclaimed a formal act of repossession and re-colonized the New Mexico territory for Spain.

The story comes full circle with the 2005 installation of the Po'pay Statue in the National Statuary Hall in Washington, DC, representing a person of notable contribution to New Mexico history.

The film will introduce many unfamiliar words and concepts which will be defined quite simply as (motion) text definitions: Kiva, Pueblo, Repartimiento, Encomienda, Cacique, Owingeh, Adobe...

Thus far, history has been written by the conqueror, this film will respect the Native American Oral History tradition with the storytelling by the various historians, with narration only when necessary to tie the story together cohesively. The Spaniards kept well documented records while the Indians have relied simply on Oral History; therefore the story of The Pueblo Revolt is quite unknown. It is time that the record be set straight about the actual origins of the very unique culture which exists in the area today.

This predates the camera era so visuals will be artwork depictions, ruins, terrain, archival elements, Spanish and Indian commemorations and ceremonies with only one staged scene of an elder at Nambe Pueblo recounting the story on the Kiva steps to a group of young people.

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, which will then proceed with the story of the Pueblo Revolt, beginning in 1598, in chronological order. Because the installation of the Po'pay Statue took 30 years from the original inception of the idea in 1976, as it was met with much opposition, the story of the Po'pay Statue will also be the film's end.

The closing line is Pam Agoyo, President of the Po'pay Foundation: "It is fitting that Po'pay should be the final installation in Statuary Hall, when in fact, indigenous people and pueblo people, we were the first people in this country and Po'pay was really the leader of the first American Revolution."

Despite the fact that we exist in a 4K/high end VFX world - I personally believe that this is a story that must be told in an "old school" way aesthetically - visuals should not be so overpoweringly vivid - in order to respect the organic nature of the story. My approach is more of an informative nature rather than purely entertainment.