



Revolt at Taos: The New Mexican and Indian Insurrection of 1847

James A. Crutchfield

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In 1847, Taos, New Mexico, in the parched hinterland of the nation's newest territory, was about as remote as it got in America. It was not, however, an unlikely location for a revolt against America's heavy-handed takeover of what had been the Republic of Mexico's northernmost outpost.

It started on January 19, with the murder of the newly appointed governor of the territory, Charles Bent, by irate Mexicans and Indians, who went on to kill five more leading citizens. The revolt was quelled, with scores of casualties—including some who had sought refuge in a church—by US forces within a month. Some of the captured insurrectionists were summarily hanged.

Even though the revolt failed to wrest control from America, it focused attention, to President James K. Polk's embarrassment, on the debate about whether the administration had exceeded its authority in claiming New Mexico. It also reverberated in Mexico City.

James A. Crutchfield states in his introduction that it is not his intent to be scathingly critical of America for the duplicity of its politicians and the alcohol-sodden behavior of the army. Still, he makes it clear that the revolt was in reaction to an overwrought pursuit of Manifest Destiny and a general contempt for the Indians and Mexicans who stood in the way.

THOMAS BEVIER (Summer 2015)

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