

## 2. Miguel Antonio Otero Remembers New Mexico, 1880

The “Gorras Blanco,” [*sic*] or White Caps, became very active in San Miguel County about this time, burning houses, cutting fences, and resorting to all kinds of intimidations. They stopped teams from hauling railroad ties, because the owners of the teams, usually the driver, were not charging the contractors enough money for the hauling. On these occasions the White Caps would unload the ties and either burn them or chop them up.

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From Miguel Antonio Otero, *My Life on the Frontier, 1864–1882* (New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1935), pp. 248–251.

At night large parties on horseback, wearing white caps drawn over their faces, would ride through towns and settlements merely for the purpose of intimidating people. Once I saw more than a hundred pass my home at night, two abreast, and on this occasion they rode through both East and West Las Vegas. Numerous complaints had been filed with the county commissioners, asking them to hire detectives and "secret officers" to bring to the courts the perpetrators. . . .

Two nights before our return to Las Vegas it was reported that several haystacks had been burned, miles of fence wire had been cut, and many horses stolen, as well as milch cows, sheep, hogs, and even chickens. It was hard for the county commissioners to secure good and competent men to act as detectives because they were afraid the White Caps would take revenge. Still, a few men agreed to serve, provided their names were not mentioned and they were paid in cash. Very reliable information stated that everything had been properly arranged by S. E. Booth, chairman of the [commission] board, and Plácido Sandoval, one of the members. In order that no leak should appear on the horizon, Booth took a fictitious name, "Joe Bowers," while Plácido Sandoval assumed the fictitious name, "Baltazar Burmudez." These two county commissioners drew the warrants in their fictitious names, and received the cash which they were expected to pay to the detectives in a secret manner. . . .

. . . Matters were beginning to get hot for the White Caps, and, although no arrests were made, the organization decided to abandon their night rides and commit no further depredations in San Miguel County. They still retained their political organization until most of the leaders either died or left the county.

We had no sooner arrived in Las Vegas from . . . Mora . . . than we were again informed of the dastardly crimes committed by the "Gorras Blanco" or White Caps, under the leadership of two brothers, Juan Jose Herrera and Pablo Herrera. It was common talk that the White Caps had again organized, and that the present sheriff, Don Lorenzo Lopez, was very closely aligned with them. These rumors were evidently authentic, for, at the next general election, Pablo Herrera was nominated on the Lopez ticket for the House of Representatives from San Miguel County, and was duly elected.

Pablo Herrera spoke perfectly good English, was rather a large man, had dark hair, and always wore a heavy black mustache. Some years before he entered the House of Representatives, he had been convicted of murder and had served his time in the penitentiary.

Pablo was considered a labor agitator, and on his return to San Miguel County he reorganized the "Gorras Blanco," or White Caps, and started to run things. A warrant was soon issued for his arrest and given to Felipe Lopez, a brother of Sheriff Lorenzo Lopez, to serve. He met Pablo very close to the courthouse, pulled his pistol, and without a word shot him through the heart, killing him instantly. Pablo had a bad name, so nothing was ever done to Felipe Lopez.

This killing, however, had a salutary effect on the "Gorras Blanco," and, finding themselves without an aggressive leader, they soon went out of business as an organization, for Juan Jose Herrera was getting too old to take the leadership. Occasionally one would hear of small groups of White Caps cutting fences and burning burns, but nothing more on a large scale, and gradually the roughnecks disappeared, and quiet was restored throughout San Miguel County.