

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Historic Decisions Issue Guide

“Callout” Boxes

The following sections are intended to supplement each option with an example of a person from 1840s California whose experiences suggest that they might either have agreed with that option or inspired others to do so.

Although we refer to them as “callouts,” we are not yet sure whether to include each one in its option section, include all three together at the end of the book, or present them separately, perhaps as supplemental materials distributed with the guide. On one hand, we think these real historical examples may help all three options feel more realistic and appealing to students and other guide users.

On the other hand, sharing details about these individuals’ experiences may have the reverse effect, prejudicing guide users against a particular option because an example suggests things did not turn out well for people who chose a similar course of action.

We are leaning toward “splitting” them, sharing the beginning of each as a callout box with its relevant option, then sharing “how things turned out” at the end of the guide. Final decisions about this and about how to position and call attention to this supplementary material will be made during document design and layout.

##

Option 1 Callout Box: Pio Pico

Supporters of Option 1, who believe that the best course of action is to cooperate as much as possible with the Yankee government in hopes of retaining current wealth, power, and prestige, might point to the story of Pio Pico, a Californio born in poverty who became a wealthy political leader.

Pio de Jesus Pico was born on May 5, 1801 at Mission San Gabriel Archangel in California. His grandparents were among the first people to settle in the area, arriving from Mexico—then called New Spain, and still a colony of Spain—as part of the Juan Bautista de Anza expedition in 1776.

Around 1821, after Mexico became independent, Pio Pico started his business career in San Diego, where he met wealthy Californio families and became interested in politics. In 1826 he joined the newly formed legislature of what was now the Mexican territory of Alta California; in 1829, he received his first grant of land from the Mexican government, and by 1830 he was well-known for his wealth and influence in Alta California. He married Maria Ignacia Alvarado in 1834.

In 1845, Pico became the governor of Alta California and moved the capital from Monterrey to Los Angeles, where this guide is set. When the Mexican-American War broke out and U.S. troops invaded Alta California, Pio Pico left to seek reinforcements and help contribute to the ultimately unsuccessful Mexican defense.

Split: How Pio's story turned out

After the war and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Pico came back to a very different Los Angeles, one where he and his fellow Californios would no longer have the same power and status that they had before the war. Although Pico had hoped to reclaim claiming his status as governor, this was not to be. And although he retained and continued to build his wealth—his cattle business, in particular, thrived during the Gold Rush—it did not last.

By the time he died in Los Angeles in 1894, he had lost everything, partly as a result of constant lawsuits on the part of competing businessmen who wanted his land, business inventory, and other assets for themselves. They were aided in their efforts by unfair laws passed by the new American government, including one that prevented people who were more than one-eighth black—such as Pico—from testifying in court against whites.

Option 2 Callout Box: Rosalía Vallejo de Leese

Supporters of Option 2, who recommend passive resistance and a refusal to accept the ways of the new Yankee government, are reacting to the experience of the Mexican-American War much as did a woman named Rosalía Vallejo de Leese. Her experience as a detainee of U.S. soldiers led her to refuse ever to learn English, so bitterly did she resent her rough treatment at their hands.

Rosalía Vallejo de Leese grew up in Monterey, a member of the Vallejo family that dominated northern California in the middle of the nineteenth century. Her family had a strong tradition of military service; her grandfather, father, and two brothers were all military officers who worked to colonize northern California, first in Spain's army and then in Mexico's. While the men were off fighting indigenous tribes for weeks at a time, the women, girls, and young boys of Vallejo's community were left at home to guard property, care for smaller children, and manage the household. Her family was unusual in the area for its literacy. Her brothers studied with a public tutor while she and her sisters studied at home.



Vallejo married outside of the military. Her brothers wanted her to marry an Irishman who was a friend of the family, Timothy Murphy. But Rosalía chose Jacob Leese, who was from Ohio. Leese converted to Catholicism and became a Mexican citizen before the Mexican-American war. He established successful businesses in what is now San Francisco and Sonoma, California.

When Rosalía thought about the Mexican-American War, she focused mainly on the wrongs perpetrated against her by the American soldiers John C. Frémont and John A. Sutter (of Sutter's Mill fame), whom she described as liars and thieves. She had her reasons: during the war, a U.S. Army unit led by Frémont threatened to murder her brother, rape a young woman working in her household, and burn her and her unborn child alive. "Though twenty eight years have elapsed since that time," she said, "I have not yet forgotten the insults they heaped upon me, and not being desirous of coming in contact with them I have abstained from learning their language."

Split: How Rosalia's story turned out

Rosalía Vallejo de Leese was one of many Californios who ended up moving to Monterey, California—about 300 miles from Los Angeles—between the 1850s and 1870s. They lived close together and kept up their community traditions, including primarily speaking Spanish. Many, including Rosalía and her children, lived off small pieces of property they had been able to purchase or keep after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The Californio community in Monterey typically raised their children together in Catholicism and passively resisted outside influences.

Photo: Rosalía Vallejo de Leese with husband and children, ca. 1850. San Mateo County Historical Association, San Mateo County History Museum.

OPTION 3 CALLOUT BOX: Joaquín Murrieta

Supporters of Option 3, who call for active resistance and even fighting against the new American rulers, might have looked for inspiration to legends like that of Joaquín Murrieta, “the Robin Hood of the Gold Rush.” Although no one can be sure which parts of Murrieta’s story are true and which are embellished or simply made up, the popularity of his legend and similar ones suggests that many people in conquered California found appeal in the idea of resistance to and rebellion against the new Yankee government.

Almost immediately after the Mexican-American War, gold was discovered in northern California. In what became known as “the Gold Rush,” thousands of people traveled to the region in search of wealth—and found competition and conflict, too. The new American government enforced laws, such as the Foreign Miners Tax, that treated white Americans better than other people; in response, some people who felt unfairly treated decided to resist. Joaquín Murrieta, a Mexican miner, was one of them.

What we know of the Murrieta legend is largely shaped by paperback writers and reporters, many of whom were more interested in sales than truth, but the basic facts are as follows. Murrieta and his brother had a gold-mining claim near Hangtown (now known as Placerville, just outside of Sacramento, California’s capital city), but lost it, either as a result of an attack by Yankee miners or from failure to pay the Foreign Miners Tax. From this point on, Murrieta lived as an outlaw. His band of highwaymen, known as the Five Joaquins, left a trail of slashed throats and stolen gold throughout the area between 1850 and 1853.

In 1854 journalist John Rollin Ridge published a book, based on newspaper stories, about the Five Joaquins. Murrieta had been quoted justifying his actions as revenge against the Americans who had abused him, although many of his victims were actually Chinese people seeking their own fortunes during the Gold Rush. At any rate, Murrieta’s justification was a popular refrain among bandits and others who resisted the new reach of the American government. His legend inspired sympathy among people who prized self-determination and felt more connected to Mexico than to America.

Split: How Joaquín’s story turned out

Governor John Bigler eventually offered a large cash bounty to anyone who could arrest or kill Murrieta. In July 1853, a Texas bounty hunter and sometime law enforcement officer named Harry Love produced a jar containing the severed head of a man he claimed was Murrieta. Love toured northern California charging audiences a dollar to see his trophy. Even in death, Murrieta’s legend grew: a woman claiming to be his sister disputed that he was dead, and people reported sightings of the bandit long after 1853. Joaquin Murrieta came to be celebrated as a popular hero by many Mexican, Californio, and Chileno people who were angered by what they saw as unfair treatment by the new American regime. Some people may also have seen him as a role model as they mounted their own acts of resistance and rebellion against the area’s new rulers.