

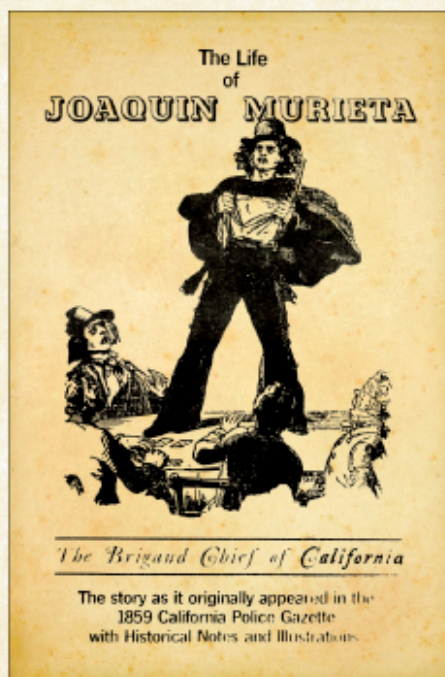
BANDITRY, whether considered social or ill-intentioned, was rampant during the 1800s, especially in the West. The economic depression of 1839 drove many people to seek a better quality of life on the frontiers, cloaked in the American ideal of "Manifest Destiny," which rationalized the acquisition of land and the displacement of the non-Anglo populations who already lived there. Meanwhile, Mexico was struggling to populate and protect vast northern territories it had won in its war for independence from Spain, and its coffers were running dry. The stage was set for a conflict between Anglos settling in frontier lands and Mexicans trying to protect Mexico's northern borders. Efforts by the U.S. government to purchase California from Mexico were rejected, and the U.S. annexation of Texas stirred even more resentment among the Spanish-speaking Catholic Mexicans and Native Americans who lived in those areas. Consequently, some groups considered the bandits below to be heroes fighting injustice and Anglo-imposed subjugation while others were convinced they were marauding criminals.

Joaquín Murrieta (ca. 1832–ca. 1853)

Known as the Mexican Robin Hood or the Robin Hood of El Dorado, Joaquín Murrieta is variously described as a coldhearted murderer or a social bandit fighting for the rights of the oppressed. Most say he came from Sonora, Mexico; others claim he is from Chile. Some say he didn't exist at all but was a composite of many who experienced discrimination and victimization by Anglos during the California gold rush of the 1850s. Typical accounts say Murrieta left Mexico to seek his fortune in California in 1850 at the age of eighteen. Instead of riches, he found social injustice. The most common story, first printed in Cherokee author "Yellow Bird"

LEFT: The story of Joaquín Murrieta inspired publications, poetry, and performances. "Yellow Bird" John Rollin Ridge, the first Native American novelist, wrote the first account in 1854. In 1859, it was serialized with minor changes in the California Police Gazette.

RIGHT: Captain Harry Love, hired by California governor John Bigler, was charged with hunting down Murrieta and his band.



John Rollin Ridge's fictionalized account in 1854, describes a brutal attack on Joaquín's family by Anglos who raped his wife and hanged his brother. Murrieta's passion for revenge fueled his growing disillusion, leading to a violent crime spree. With his companion "Three-Fingered Jack" (Manuel García), and possibly four other men named Joaquín, Murrieta roamed the Sierra Nevadas, stealing gold and horses and killing nineteen people (most were said to be Chinese mine workers).

California governor John Bigler assigned Captain Harry Love to lead the posse that would hunt down Murrieta and his band. On July 25, 1853, the "California Rangers" encountered a group of Mexican men. In the battle that followed, two of those Mexicans were killed: the rangers said one was Murrieta, the other García. They took the head of one and the hand of the other as evidence of their identity and displayed them in jars of alcohol. As much controversy swirls around Murrieta's death as



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FACING PAGE: Captain Harry Love and his posse claimed to have killed Murrieta and his cohort Manuel García ("Three-Fingered Jack") on July 25, 1853. They exhibited Joaquín's head and García's hand throughout California.