

Wisdom on Signs

Tenets of a Just Society

...A Stenciled Graffito on the Summit of Fremont Peak



Educación	Education
Tierra	Property
Trabajo	Work
Techo	A Roof...housing
Pan	Bread...food
Salud	Health
Independencia	Needs no translation!
Libertad	Needs no translation!
Democracia	Needs no translation!

A few days before I wrecked my knee in December, George, Robin, and I hiked into a crystal blue sky to the summit of Fremont Peak. From that capstone, 3171' above the valley floor, a person can see a full 360 degrees. The Monterey Bay stretches to the West and beyond to the Pacific horizon. One's eyes can roam North beyond Santa Cruz to where the mountains descend into the sea. To the Southwest, the Santa Lucia Mountains tower above Big Sur. One can trace the Salinas Valley South to Greenfield, then southeast over the full sweep of the Gavilan range from San Juan Bautista to the Pinnacles. Directly below us that day, the dormant twin towers of Moss Landing thrust up from the tidal plain, and the Elkhorn Slough sparkled in the angular solstice sun.

On this exposed promontory, white oaks and madrones, toyon and manzanita twist in fierce winds but refuse to break. They could relax during our visit. Poison oak thrives, too...of course. Wild things live in places like this. Condors soar, eagles glide, cougars prowl, and deer browse. Snakes slither...and sometimes rattle. It snows in winter. In the Spring, a tapestry of wildflowers will cover the sere December meadows.

We found something else up there, too.

Just below the summit, an observatory looks beyond our atmosphere on moonless nights. A ridgeline bristles with huge antennae, one of which blew off its mast not long ago. The summit itself, like most high points in California, sports a geologic marker. This one was special.

On that marker, a stenciled *graffito* in Spanish described the essential elements of a just society. It's alarming to think how many of these features are under threat.

As we approach the years of greatest threat to our democracy since the 1850s, years laced with the strands of the nuclear fears of our childhoods and the repulsive echoes of the lethal bigotry that plagued our parents' youth, this simple statement reminds us of what we must protect.

It's no small irony that this entire territory was once a Spanish province, established in 1770 with Monterey as the capital of Alta California. Like most land grabs in history, the native people and their culture were brutally crushed. The territory transitioned to Mexican rule when Mexico earned its independence from Spain in 1821. By then, the residents were probably vexed by the swarm of aggressive illegal immigrants from the East. The Mexican government named this mountain *Gavilan* (hawk). In 1846, intrepid polymath Captain John C. Fremont led an armed intrusion into sovereign Mexican territory. His company holed up briefly on the Gavilan mountaintop, but the soldiers hightailed it before the defenders of the territory could expunge them. The Treaty of Hidalgo was signed 2 years later. The land changed hands but kept the name California. The next year, gold was discovered...and 12 years later the middle swath of North America descended into a gory civil war which apparently has not entirely subsided. Later on, the Peak was later renamed in honor of Fremont.

Those stones have withstood earthquakes, gales, fires, and political vagaries, and they seem peaceful up there now. Seek and protect both the stones and the peace.

Wells, January, 2025