

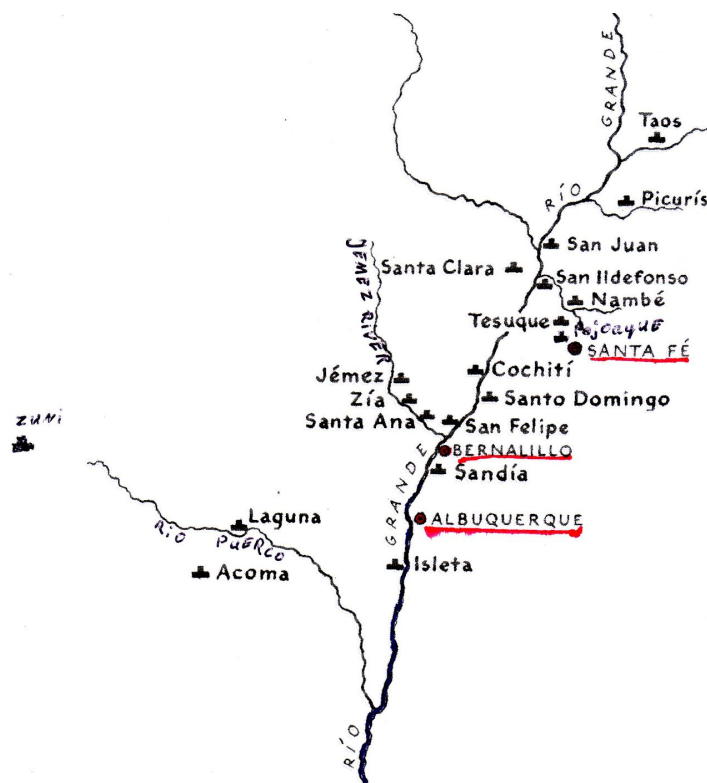


# FIESTA MELODRAMA

Directed by Robyn Rikoon and Andy Primm | Produced by Santa Fe Playhouse

New Mexico has a staggering diversity of indigenous cultures and a rich and complicated history, boasting some of the oldest evidence of human life in North America. The complexity of Santa Fe's past can be seen in its names alone. Its Tewa name is Oghá P'o'oge, or White Shell Water Place. The full name the Spaniards gave to Santa Fe in 1610 was La Villa Real de la Santa Fe de San Francisco de Asís. Today it is "The City Different." Santa Fe's tourism website credits this nickname to "the founding frontiersman at the turn of the 20th century" - a nonsensical claim considering the city was "founded" over 400 years ago by the Spanish, and was inhabited for a thousand years before that by Pueblo people and their predecessors.

Archaeological evidence shows that several hundred years before the Spanish arrived, Santa Fe was the site of a variety of settlements, including Arroyo Negro, Pindi Pueblo, Arroyo Hondo Pueblo, and El Pueblo de Santa Fe, where Santa Fe High School stands today. Droughts drove the inhabitants to greener pastures, but they left diverse pottery and other evidence behind. When the Spanish arrived, they encountered the established Pueblos of Tewa, Tiwa, Towa, Tano, and Keres people. The Spaniards planned their settlements near Native towns, close to their source of exploited labor. Farther away to the west and south lived other nations, including the Diné (Navajo), Jicarilla Apache, Zuni, and Hopi.



A rough map of the Rio Grande Valley  
Courtesy Wikimedia Commons



Before all of these settlements there were the Ancestral Pueblo people, farmers and foragers who built their pithouses over a thousand years ago where the Civic Center now stands. Before them came archaic hunter-gatherers who made seasonal camps, and before that, ancient Paleoindian nomadic hunters, with fossil points that date as far back as 9500 BCE. Even our geologic history is incredibly rich, with an impressive fossil record. Santa Fe is a very old place.

Since the 1960s, the Santa Fe Playhouse has resided on De Vargas Street. Historically named Barrio Analco, the neighborhood is home to the famed Oldest House. Some reports indicate that the structure was present when Oñate arrived in 1598. In this area, the Spaniards forcibly settled Tlaxcalan servants from Mexico who provided the name *Analco*, from the Nahuatl meaning “across the water.” Years later, the neighborhood was inhabited by a new generation of servants, the *genízaros* - Comanche, Plains, Apache, and Navajo children taken from their homes and sold into slavery.

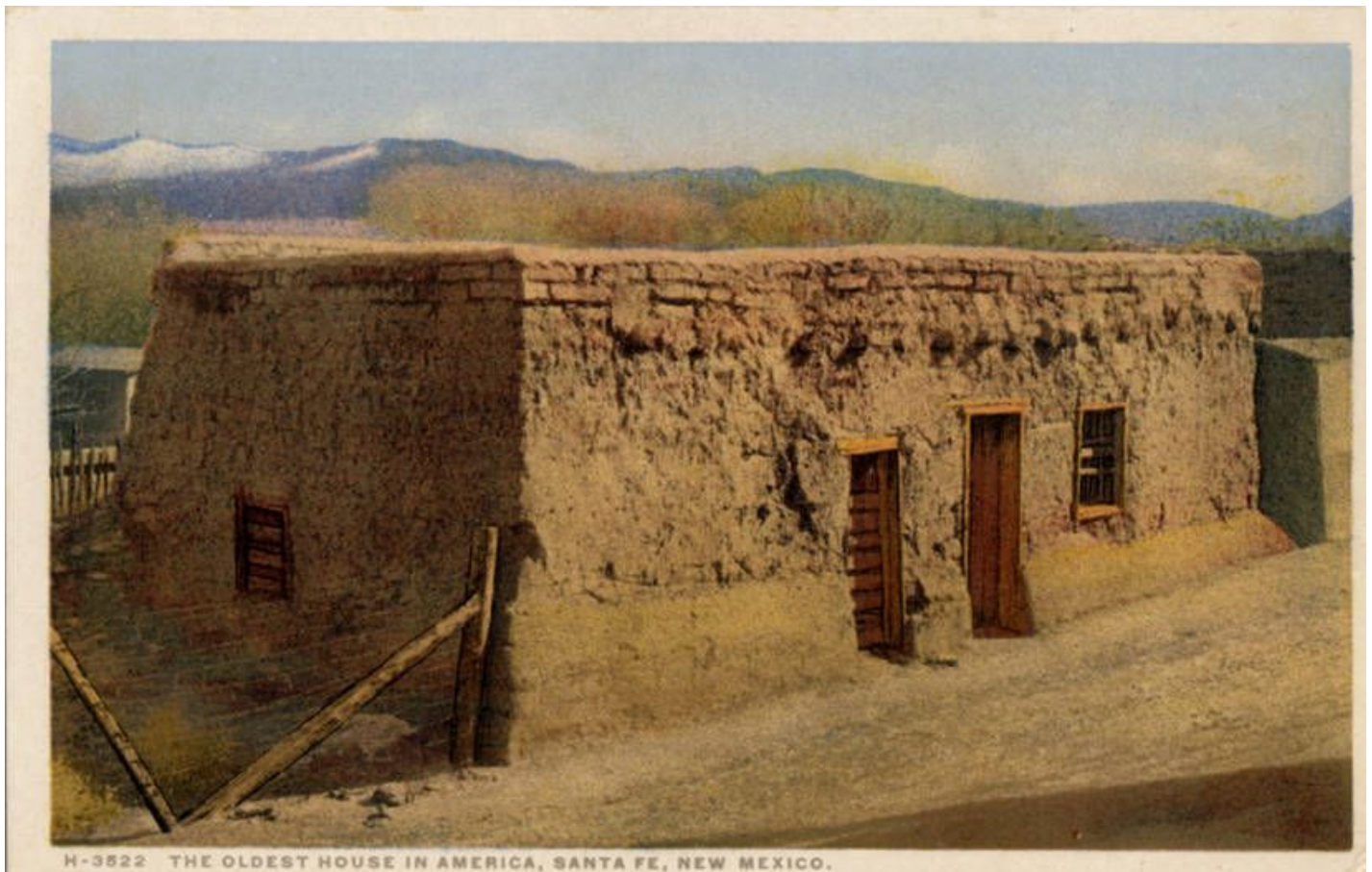
We at the Santa Fe Playhouse have a commitment to intersectionality. We strive to put a magnifying glass on bias in our community, including and especially our own. We acknowledge that the Playhouse, along with the rest of Santa Fe, resides on ancestral and contemporary Native land. We aim to support and further the fight against indigenous erasure, to celebrate our town and its original people, and to provide historical background to combat Eurocentric, settler-colonial narratives. We are working to educate ourselves internally, but we recognize that there is always more to learn, and much more work to be done.

This is an important moment in our history. The Melodrama is associated with the most historically divisive and ideologically-fraught celebration in this town. We must acknowledge our painful truths, and educate ourselves and others about the tragic and shameful elements in our history. It isn't just “history;” colonization and gentrification are continuing processes, whether in the form of a Starbucks remodel in historic downtown, locals priced out of their hometown, or far worse. Many colonialisms have lasting trauma to this day. Residential education - a nice-sounding term for kidnapping and forced cultural assimilation - is just one example. The archaeological revolution that brought many to New Mexico to study its Native people was often no more than theft of culture under the guise of research. Lastly, through Fiestas the myth of peaceful reconquest persists, when in truth conquest is an inherently violent act.

How long must one live in Santa Fe before they become a local?



A year? Twenty? A lifetime? Sometimes it feels as if half the people in this town came here from somewhere else. We are all Santa Feans, but with obvious exceptions, we are all immigrants to this land. Santa Feans are not the enemy. Our enemies are ignorance, prejudice, exclusionary practices, and turning a blind eye to our past. It is imperative we remember our past, in its absolute truth, if we want to move forward together into a better future.



The Oldest House ca. early 1920s, Barrio Analco, E. De Vargas Street.



## A Fiesta Timeline

**1538 - 1540** - The first Spaniards arrive in New Mexico.

**1598** - First colonial governor Juan de Oñate arrives and claims the territory for New Spain. That fall, after Acoma Pueblo declines to trade their winter food supplies to the Spanish, a skirmish erupts, and Oñate's nephew is killed. The following January, Oñate orders the Pueblo to be destroyed and an estimated 800 - 1,000 Acoma people are massacred. Men of fighting age have the "ends of their feet" amputated and the remaining 500 tribe members are enslaved.

**1675** - Forty-seven Pueblo spiritual leaders are imprisoned and four are sentenced to death, inspiring Po'Pay, a leader from Ohkay Owingeh, to organize the Pueblo Revolt.

**1680** - August 10th. The Pueblo Revolt begins, expelling the Spaniards from northern New Mexico. Hundreds of Spanish are killed and the rest retreat to the south.

**1692** - After twelve years, General Diego de Vargas marches on Santa Fe to take back the city. He prays to La Conquistadora for a peaceful resolution. After pointing cannons at the city and blocking the water supply, the Puebloans concede. De Vargas and his army return south.

**1693** - De Vargas arrives to resettle the city and meets opposition. A bloody two-day battle ensues, the city is retaken, and over 70 Pueblo loyalists are publicly executed.

**1712** - Eight years after de Vargas's death, a compatriot proclaims a yearly celebration in his honor, commemorating his successful reconquest.

**1883** - The "Tertio-Millennial Exposition" plants the seeds of Fiesta as we know it today, -- though its existence is based on a convenient falsehood. The Exposition celebrates Santa Fe's 333rd anniversary, though nothing of note happened in 1550 (the date was chosen out of convenience). The three-day celebration devotes the first day to Native culture, the second to Spanish, and the third to Anglos, reinforcing a notion of "tri-cultural harmony."

**1912** - New Mexico gains statehood, and Fiestas are included as part of the Fourth of July celebration, complete with a costumed Diego de Vargas and a reenactment of the entrada.



**1919** - After no Fiestas during World War I and the Spanish Flu, the Museum of Santa Fe reinvents Fiesta yet again, this time a callback to the 1883 Fiestas, with a tri-cultural emphasis and an appeal to tourists.

By the late **1920s** the alternative celebration El Pasatiempo, created by Anglo artist Will Shuster and his friends, has been incorporated into Fiestas, including the burning of Zozobra and the Hysterical Parade. By this time the Native participants have split off to form the yearly Santa Fe Indian Market, and the roots of Spanish Market can be seen.

**1927** - The first Fiesta Queen is crowned, and Nina Otero-Warren serves as one of the first Latina women on the Fiesta Council.

**1964** - The archdiocese of Santa Fe withdraws their involvement, citing the loss of focus and overcommercialization of Fiestas. They are reintegrated several years later.

**1971** - The “Fiesta Riots,” with vandalism and National Guard involvement, prompt the city to move Fiestas from Labor Day to later, in an effort to make the celebration more local.

**1990, 2000, 2016** - Just a few of the years in which large gatherings formed to protest the colonialist nature of the Entrada.

**2018** - The Entrada is retired.

**2020** - After impassioned protests fortified by the international Black Lives Matter movement, statues of contested figures Juan de Oñate and Diego de Vargas are removed from several public spaces in New Mexico.

---

Over the years, Santa Fe Fiesta has ranged from Catholic rite to overblown tourist trap - and everything in between. Fiesta is at its origin a Catholic celebration, including a thanksgiving to God, dawn masses, and the novena, nine days of prayer that end in a reverent procession. For many it represents a chance for the community to come together, a celebration of shared identity and peace. For others, it is a slap in the face, seen as outright glorification of the brutal colonization of the Americas.



Author Sarah Horton suggests that the modern day Fiestas are a form of cultural reconquest in themselves, an opportunity for Hispanos to reclaim their identity in a whitewashed city. The Fiesta Council requires that members of the pageant have Spanish surnames and proof of Spanish descent. Interestingly, with the advent of at-home genetic testing, it turns out that many who have played the conquistador Diego de Vargas or the Queen in Fiesta pageants have significant Native heritage.

The Entrada was added to Fiestas in the early 20th century, as part of an array of historical reenactments meant to portray compromise and unity. According to the Entrada proclamation of 1997, in 1692 “[the] Spaniards returned as humbler people. They were no longer conquerors, overlords, but partners with Pueblos in the land ... Neither was one culture the conqueror nor the other the subjected, and so was a greater New Mexican culture born.” Needless to say, this version of history leaves out much. The Pueblo people may have also desired peace, but the reconciliation of sorts was followed by hundreds of years of colonization and subjugation, not only at the hands of Spain and Mexico but the United States as well.

Even today, efforts to remove colonial landmarks are perceived by many older Santa Feans as an attempt to sanitize or erase history, to reject centuries of peace between peoples, and to sow hatred. Protesters are seen as disruptors of the peace. After she was arrested for protesting the Entrada, San Ildefonso Pueblo activist Jennifer Marley said: “They see us as being outsiders on our own land. Where the plaza is - where Santa Fe is, Pueblos once stood. (...) And it was in that space - where I was arrested - that historically it's very plausible that my ancestors, who were dissenters, could have been hung.”

Historian Estevan Rael-Galvez cites the changing nature of Fiestas as a chance “to tell a story in a more truthful, in a more healing way to bring our communities back together again. If someone could come in in the early 1900s and invent this Entrada notion, we certainly in this particular moment have an imaginative opportunity to invent something new.” The Entrada is gone, and so is the statue of de Vargas that once stood in front of St. Francis Cathedral. We mustn't move beyond our history; we must move through it, clearing the way for greater understanding of our past, and therefore ourselves.

**- Isabel Madley, Dramaturg**



### Some Organizations to Follow:

Pueblo Action Alliance (<https://www.puebloactionalliance.org/> or Instagram @puebloactionalliance)

The Three Sisters Collective (<https://threesisterscollective.org/> or Instagram @threesisterscollective)

The Red Nation (<https://therednation.org/> or Instagram @therednationmovement)

**Others on Instagram:** @riseindigenous, @nativewomenlead, @seedingsovereignty, @decolonialatlas, @orendatribe, @kinsalehues, and many more.

---

### Bibliography / Further Reading:

Horton, Sarah Bronwen. *The Santa Fe Fiesta, Reinvented: Staking Ethno-Nationalist Claims to a Disappearing Homeland*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2010.

Lovato, Andrew Leo. *Santa Fe Hispanic Culture: Preserving Identity in a Tourist Town*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004.

Noble, David Grant, ed. *Santa Fe: History of an Ancient City*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008.

"Of Bloodlines and Conquistadors." NPR, May 23, 2018.  
<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/613390087>.

Ortiz, Elena, and Jennifer Marley. "Pueblo Resurgence, White Revisionism: The Bloody Truth about the Santa Fe Entrada." The Red Nation, 2017.  
<https://therednation.org/pueblo-resurgence-white-revisionism-the-bloody-truth-about-the-santa-fe-entrada/>.

Tobias, Henry J. and Charles E. Woodhouse. *Santa Fe: A Modern History*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001.

Wilcox, Michael V. *The Pueblo Revolt and the Mythology of Conquest*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

Wilson, Chris. *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997.