



FIESTA MELODRAMA

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

LA CIUDAD DIFERENTE

Santa Fe is a curious place, both town and city, ancient and ever-changing. It is home to a prestigious array of cultural attractions, more than one would expect from a city about the size of Muncie, Indiana (more on that later...). Our history is rich and complex; one may visit New Mexico and encounter its true inhabitants, living in their ancestral homelands, an appallingly-rare claim in the continental US. We have modern additions like the Santa Fe Opera, the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, the Santa Fe Institute, Museum Hill, and our innumerable art galleries, not to mention one of the primary draws of people who aren't retirement age, the small town experimental art collective-turned-national cash cow Meow Wolf.

Much of the Plaza area caters almost exclusively to wealthy tourists or part-time residents - of which there are many. Often Santa Feans never go downtown unless it's to play tourist. ("Throw on your turquoise and your cowboy boots, baby, and let's pretend we're from Texas - wait, not Texas. Anywhere but Texas.") Many galleries and restaurants are owned by wealthy transplants from major cities, tired of the hustle and bustle of urban life and desperate to retire somewhere "real." The cruel irony is that the more gentrifying forces move into Santa Fe, the less real Santa Fe becomes.

As the oldest capital city in the US, Santa Fe has been passed from government to government, conquered and reconquered - much to the chagrin of its inhabitants - beginning with the Spaniards' incursion in the 1500s. After over 200 years of Spanish colonial rule, Santa Fe was a Mexican capital for only twenty-five years before the Mexican-American War claimed Santa Fe as part of the US in 1846. Even then, it took over sixty years for New Mexico to achieve statehood, persisting in territorial limbo. In its continuous change, however, Santa Fe found a form of constancy. ("Who the hell ever knows who's in charge? Just let me eat my posole in peace!")

With the constant influx of a bizarre combination of young adventurers and retirees, colonization in Santa Fe is not a relic of history but a painfully obvious reality. It goes beyond the usual gentrification and actively erases hundreds of years of history in favor of a new gallery or a luxury vacation home. Construction projects are often interrupted, put on hold as archaeological sites are discovered beneath the city streets. Locals criticize the "Adobe Disneyland" downtown has become. Former mayor Debbie Jaramillo lamented in 1991: "We painted the downtown brown and moved the brown people out."

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While New Mexico has among the highest percentage of Native residents of any state (over 10%), conversely a significant portion of its residents are born elsewhere. Its distinct Southwestern personality has always drawn the attention of “outsiders,” from the 1800s with the advent of the Santa Fe Trail to the turn of the century, when creative types and free thinkers sought to escape the industrialized homogeneity of city life. During the early 1900s, archaeologists and artists flocked to Santa Fe to procure a taste of the past, a culture different from their own. The trend continues to this day.

Even now during coronavirus, masked tourists swarm the Plaza, sniffing out bargains on Native-made art and ordering their chile on the side in case it’s too spicy. One contributor for the Indigenous coalition The Red Nation wrote: “Santa Fe has evolved into a smoldering cesspool of white privilege, entitlement, cultural appropriation and racism adorned in faux adobe, concho belts, turquoise jewelry and expensive bikini waxes.” (therednation.org)

Santa Fe’s history is never straightforward. One may condemn visitors, but also acknowledge that Santa Fe is largely a tourist economy, dependent on outsiders. Fiestas is another example. Fiestas de Santa Fe has been proudly described as “the longest continuously-running community celebration in the United States.” The veracity of this claim is tenuous at best but then, 308 years is a very long time. To many, Fiestas signifies the peaceful reconciliation between cultures, a celebration of unity between peoples, and a nod to their continued coexistence and similarities. To others, it is a form of reclamation, an assertion of Hispano identity in a town whitewashed by Anglo culture and politics. To others still, it amounts to the active erasure and rewriting of history, at best an oversimplification, and at worst, an outright celebration of forced cultural assimilation and genocide. There are often two sides to every story, but in Santa Fe there are a thousand.

- Isabel Madley, Dramaturg



A HELPFUL GLOSSARY OF TERMS

1920 in Santa Fe history saw the reveal of the long-awaited New Mexico state flag, a contest winner which married the colors of old Spain with the Zia symbol (likely a well-intentioned homage but in truth an unauthorized appropriation of Zia culture). The Cross of the Martyrs was constructed the same year, a tribute to the friars that lost their lives in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 (with a stark lack of memorials to commemorate the Native lives lost during the extraordinary, history-making Revolt). Women had just won the right to vote, and prohibition was in full swing.

Fiestas de Santa Fe has been reinvented many times over the years. The Catholic procession that forms the backbone of Fiesta dates back to a 1712 proclamation that called for an annual celebration to commemorate the retaking of Santa Fe by Diego de Vargas, which ended a historic twelve years of Native sovereignty following the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.

Retired in 2018 after decades of protest, **La Entrada** was a historical pageant that presented a romanticized, stylized version of the 1692 “peaceful reconquest” of Santa Fe by de Vargas. Critics note that while there may have been a “bloodless” recapture in 1692, it was purely symbolic, and it was followed by years of bloodshed, conflict, and subjugation.

La Conquistadora, Our Lady of the Conquest is one of the oldest and most beloved Marian symbols in the New World. Legend has it she was purchased in a market in Mexico City, and brought to New Mexico as a symbol of faith. In 1692 Diego de Vargas prayed to the sacred Mary, wishing for a peaceful resolution to his conquest of Santa Fe. She was renamed “Our Lady of Peace” in the early 1990s in an effort to foster reconciliation between Native and Hispano peoples.

El Colegio de San Miguel - Founded in 1859, the predecessor of the now-extinct College of Santa Fe.

Karen - An entitled woman who uses her privilege as a member of the dominant culture to get her own way. In the Western world, Karens are white women between the age of 30 and 60. Trademarks include asking to speak to a manager, dehumanizing service industry workers, complaining about trivial things, indignantly involving herself in others’ business, and worst of all, practicing thinly-veiled racism then playing the victim.

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Drought is an ever-present reality in New Mexico. Long before Los Angeles became “water-wise,” our local alternative news rag delighted in publicly outing the most heinous water-wasters in town. (Unsurprisingly, the biggest culprits were usually the palatial homes in the wealthy parts of town... and golf courses.) Over its thousand-year history, Santa Fe has been repeatedly abandoned, its residents driven to greener pastures by the lack of reliable water. Irrigation canals called acequias were built by the Spanish hundreds of years ago, and the rights to their water remained heavily contested well into the 20th century.



Muncie, Indiana - Everytown, USA. Home to the landmark Middletown studies in the 1920s, in which researchers conducted a socio-anthropological survey - of white residents only - in an effort to study a city “as representative as possible of contemporary American life.” To this day Muncie is often regarded by journalists and pollsters alike as a quintessentially “average” (white) American city, emblematic of so-called “flyover country.”

Several local organizations to follow and support:

- Keep Santa Fe Multicultural (keepsantafemulticultural.org/IG: @keepsantafemulticultural)
- The Red Nation (therednation.org / IG: @therednationmovement)
- Three Sisters Collective (threesisterscollective.org / IG: @threesisterscollective)
- Walk the Talk Santa Fe (Facebook and IG: @walkthetalksantafe)