



FIESTA MELODRAMA

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

PASEO DE PERALTA

Location: El Convento de Santa Fe, 1613

In 1610, Governor Pedro de Peralta moved the capital of New Mexico from Santa Cruz to Santa Fe. Peralta chose the location and planned the layout for the plaza, the casas reales (government buildings) and la parroquia (where the St. Francis Cathedral now stands). Two years later, Peralta received word that Friar Isidro Ordóñez was en route to replace the current prelate. "Would to God the Devil were coming instead of that friar!" exclaimed Peralta in response. Ordóñez had served in the Oñate administration, and his reputation was notorious.

Catholicism ruled in New Spain. Throughout the 1600s, Native people were still sold as slaves, imprisoned, and executed for their beliefs. Hechicheros and spiritual leaders were prosecuted harshly, seen as practitioners of witchcraft by the Church. Ordóñez was in favor of Catholic supremacy, an even more powerful and pervasive church that claimed ecclesiastical superiority over the civil government. The friar brought papers from the capital of New Spain declaring his authority, and even suggested soldiers and settlers abandon the area if they wished - his attempt to clear the way toward his own rule. It wasn't until four years later that his documents were examined and declared to be likely forgeries, but by that time it was too late.



Our scene in 1613 is a hybrid of several true clashes between Friar Ordóñez and Governor Peralta. One morning, Peralta arrived at mass and found that his seat had been removed from its place of honor and unceremoniously tossed outside. The friar's speech at the pulpit that morning decried the governor's evils in an attempt to turn the citizens against him.

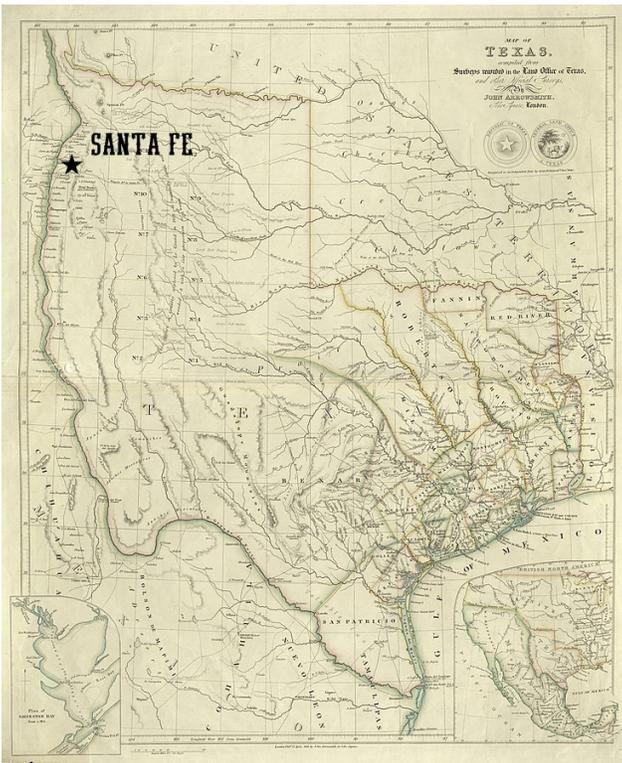
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Their rivalry intensified until July 19th, 1613, when Peralta ordered his men to arm themselves and accompany him to the convento. Weeping women, afraid for their husbands, were told by Ordóñez to “Shut up!” Ordóñez met Peralta outside, armed with a cane. They traded insults. Capes were torn, hands were slapped, and Peralta’s wrist was grabbed, causing him to misfire his pistolet, accidentally shooting a nearby friar. The fault lay on both sides, but the optics were terrible. A man of God, shot by the governor! Peralta was imprisoned in Sandia Pueblo for months. He escaped to Santa Fe through the snow, shackled and hungry, only to be imprisoned again. Eventually a new governor was chosen, and Peralta returned to Mexico City where he was cleared of charges and Ordóñez’s actions condemned. The damage, however, was done.

Location: The Santa Fe Trail, 1841

The Spanish land grant system gave citizens and communities (including Pueblos) the rights to settle tracts of land under the Spanish crown. By 1880, however, the Spanish-Mexican population had lost 90 percent of their grants. As many citizens had feared, the United States didn’t recognize many claims and in other cases, the U.S. government actively superseded existing grants and sold land to the highest bidder. Even before the Mexican-American War, Governor Armijo sold enormous tracts to his friends, mostly American and French traders. After an initial grant in 1841, eventually Armijo’s fellow merchants Charles “Carlos” Beaubien and Guadalupe Miranda and their heirs were owners of over two million acres northeast of Taos - one of the largest private holdings in American history.

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In 1806, United States Lieutenant Zebulon Pike made his way into New Mexico, claiming to be lost, and was escorted back to the border. Though his journals were confiscated, he wrote an account of his travels that attracted more Americans to New Mexico, which was only compounded by the opening of the Santa Fe Trail in 1821.

The Republic of Texas was born in 1836 when rebels - mostly American expatriates - fought and declared their independence after a number of disagreements with Mexico. The “Texians” wanted to preserve slavery, for example, though it was abolished in Mexico in 1829, and resented the government’s ban on further American settlement in the area. In 1841, President Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar ordered a squadron of around 300 soldiers into New Mexico territory. Of course, the invading Texan is an archetype all-too-familiar to any New Mexican.

By Texan accounts it was a peaceful diplomatic mission meant to engender trust between the two powers; according to most other accounts, the Texan Santa Fe Expedition was a show of force, an effort to claim everything east of the Rio Grande - including Santa Fe. Texians expected oppressed Mexican citizens to greet them with gratitude and excitement, eager to join their fabulous Republic. A firsthand account by one soldier notes that he knew nothing of the true purpose of the expedition until they were already on the march.

The soldiers were intercepted by Mexican forces and claimed to be merchants. As they were wearing Texas military uniforms, this defense did not hold. Governor Armijo hastened east from Santa Fe to meet them and ordered them to be held captive at San Miguel. Some reports indicate Armijo was in favor of executing the lot of them, while others claim the opposite, that Armijo defended their lives. One account alleged that Armijo tricked the soldiers, assuring them of their diplomatic rights and convincing them to hand over their weapons, only to take them prisoner. Ultimately Armijo spared the soldiers, but they were marched hundreds of miles south to Mexico.

Further Reading

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-Isabel Madley, Dramaturg

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