



# THE HARSH REALITIES OF FIESTA WEEK IN SAN ANTONIO *PURO PARTY, O ALGO MAS?*

By Dr. Puente Para La Gente

As a lifelong resident of San Antonio, “*Fiesta Week*” was a yearly event that I loved more than any actual holiday season. I remember excitedly planning my schedule every year to attend my favorite events. In my journey over the last eight to ten years as a student of *Mexican American Studies* at UTSA and working and volunteering at *The Esperanza Peace and Justice Center*, a veil has been lifted, so to speak. To be honest, I am having a hard time reconciling my treasured memories of *Fiesta* and the harsh reality of how *Fiesta San Antonio* came to exist. The origins of *Fiesta S.A.* sit firmly in celebrating *The Battle of San Jacinto*, the center of the 134-year-old *Battle of Flowers Parade*. This is the battle where the Texican forces defeated and captured Mexican General Santa Anna. Critics of *Fiesta S.A.* claim that the *Texas Revolution* was fought in large part as an attempt to uphold slavery after Mexico outlawed the practice. Despite these grievances, *Fiesta S.A.* continues to grow in popularity and economic impact. Supporters argue that *Fiesta S.A.* (as we know it today) is providing jobs and boasts large altruistic benefits for non-profits primarily benefiting youth and historic preservation in San Antonio.

With more ways than ever to learn about our past, it is hard to deny the association of *Fiesta* with slavery and anti-Mexican rhetoric. The harms of anti-Mexican violence in Texas have been documented in books from the pivotal David Montejano classic *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* and more recently in *The Refusing to Forget* project’s collective works, activism and website. In a 2023 article by Dr. Ruben Cordova in *Glasstire* entitled “*Is It Time for*

*San Antonio’s Fiesta to Secede from San Jacinto? A Modest Proposal*” he writes “the first *Fiesta* king in 1896 was called *King Cotton*.” This choice of name summons up the kind of plantation fantasies that were common among White elites in the old South.” (For more reading on slavery in Texas and Anti-Mexican violence we will include a recommended reading list at the plática).



Thomas Nast “The Queen of Industry, or The New South” (detail of upper left section showing the plantation economy of the pre-Civil War South), 1882, wood engraving, illustration in *Harper’s Weekly*, January 14, 1882. Photograph: Library of Congress.

Over the years, there have been rumblings from activists and artists that the origins of *Fiesta S.A.* had racist implications, and the disparity between the rich and poor is astonishingly clear at the parades (think *The Texas Cavaliers* and *The Order of the Alamo* and who serves them). New scholarship by scholars like Dr. Liliana Saldana’s upcoming digital archive (*Voices of Resistance: Decolonizing Fiesta through Community Praxis*) and Dr. Norma Cantu (*Fiestas in Laredo: Matachines, Quinceañeras, and George*

*Washington’s Birthday*) and Dr. Laura Hernández-Ehrisman’s book (*Inventing the Fiesta City: Heritage and Carnival in San Antonio*) has informed my continued fascination with historical commemorative parades. Events in Texas, like *Fiesta S.A.*, serve as a way to address the underlying structures of white supremacy that linger in presumed harmless ways in the name of recalling collective historical memory. In the new book by scholar-activist and historian Ben Johnson titled *Texas: An American Story* closes the final line by stating “As long as there is Texas, there will be arguments about how we should remember its history.” In other words, Texas history and how we celebrate it is as complicated as the people who inhabit this in between space. All this sparked my interest when the highly controversial 2015 medal “*Fiesta is Racist*” exploded on *The Esperanza*



## FIESTA IS RACIST



Artist: Courtney Davis (KKK King), based on the first Fiesta king.

Peace and Justice Facebook page advertised as a fundraiser. The viral moment led to visceral reactions causing the medal to gain an iconic status for collectors and anti-fiesta sympathizers. In the ten years since issuing the 2015 “Fiesta is Racist” medal, more attention has been paid to the historical grievances associated with *Fiesta S.A.* due to the work of artists, writers, and scholar-activists’ critical analysis of *Fiesta S.A.* And now in 2025, the artist behind the controversial work, Ali Friedrich, has reproduced the medal in conjunction with an art show at ChingARTE Gallery at Blue Star

Arts Complex titled “*It’s Complicated: Fiesta is Racist. A Performative Commentary of Fiesta S.A.*” The show will feature exclusive contributions by local artists, new screenprints, and a line of select merchandise. In addition, and in partnership with *The Esperanza* an exhibition and plática titled “*Is Fiesta Racist? It’s Complicated, So Let’s Talk About It*” will be held at *The Esperanza Peace and Justice Center*. The plática will invite both Anti-Fiesta and Pro-Fiesta supporters to come together to talk about history, and community and perhaps even offer some solutions. I hope the plática will serve as a small effort to understand our complex history through art. I am especially excited that art can be used in this way and as artist Eudora Welty states “*I like the feeling of being able to confront an experience*

*and resolve it as art.*” I like her thinking. Adelante.

BIO: Dr. Puente Para La Gente is a community historian and curator who intersects their work in the community with their work as a rasquache scholar activist to build bridges between those who produce knowledge and the community that are the source of that knowledge. Their research interests include San Antonio cultural bearers and artists, activism, *The Borderlands*, *fashion*, *Rasquachismo* and the arts. She is currently at SMU’s Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies.



The first Fiesta king, King Antonio IX (1927), Sterling C. Burke.

Pop-up Shop,  
Art Show, and  
Fiesta Medal Sale

**FIESTA  
IS  
RACIST**  
**IT’S COMPLICATED**

The show will include  
2025 Fiesta is Racist limited  
screenprints and Fiesta Medals  
in addition to select merchandise.

**OPENING FIRST THURSDAY (APRIL 3RD)**

**FIRST FRIDAY (APRIL 4TH)**

**THIRD THURSDAY (APRIL 17TH)**

**FIRST THURSDAY (MAY 1ST)**

**CLOSING FIRST FRIDAY (MAY 2ND)**

**AND BY APPOINTMENT**

**@CHINGARTE GALLERY #106**

**LOCATED AT BLUE STAR ARTS COMPLEX ANNEX  
1414 S ALAMO ST, SA TX**

**WANNA TALK ABOUT IT?**



**ARTIST ALI FRIEDRICH-CURATOR DR. PUENTE PARA LA GENTE**