



ACTION/EXPRESS, 1976: “KING ANTONIO” DEFERRED

In April 1976, anonymous San Antonian, E.P., wrote to the column of “*Action/Express*” in the *San Antonio Express News* whose purpose was to “have [your] problem solved, or question answered.” E.P. contended that, “The title *King Antonio* should be changed to *King Anthony* since he is always an Anglo.” They went on to criticize the tradition of only selecting *Texas Cavaliers* for the part of the king, as well as the monopolization of “royal” roles by the city’s rich neglecting the existence of harder-working, civic-minded men and women.

The staffer responsible for writing up a solution for E.P. provided a particularly unhelpful answer: *Mexican Americans should just sponsor their own queens and kings*. Although the response drew attention to and praised titles like San Antonio’s *Queen of Soul* and *Miss Black Dignity* as examples of the cultural diversity of our city, the staffer completely missed the point of E.P.’s frustration. That is, the appropriation of Mexican culture by well-to-do Euro-Americans in the city.

The Express’ original reply failed to get at the heart of the issue that E.P. brought up, but in the intervening years, others have pierced it in ways that heighten the sting of white supremacy in our beloved city. Ruben C. Cordova – in his *Glasstire* piece, “*Is It Time for San Antonio’s Fiesta to Secede from San Jacinto?*” (Part II, April 18, 2024)—offered another solution: “*keep the party, lose the war.*” He argued that *Fiesta*, San Antonio’s largest public festival, should be decoupled from the *Battle of the Alamo* and the *Battle of San Jacinto* (both originating in 1836), from which *Fiesta* (originally called *Fiesta San Jacinto*) was created to commemorate and celebrate.

For many San Antonians, *Fiesta* permeates our earliest memories and we are well-aware that it is the city’s biggest money-maker. However, overly nostalgic renderings of the event obscure a much more sinister history, which has romanticized the slave-owning,



Photograph of a student posing as Barbara McNair, seated on a float during the Fiesta Flambeau Night Parade in 1966 that was part of “Fiesta Famous Female Artists In Music.”

antebellum South and cast Mexicans as villains. This city celebrates the defeat of Mexico with hallmarks of Mexican culture and elects (often affluent) citizens to cosplay as royalty, like the Europeans who colonized Mexico and the United States.

Back in 1976, “*Action/Express*” argued that “*while members of the city’s ethnic minorities may complain,*” city elites have sponsored and paid to perpetuate the “*traditions and trappings*” of their own *Fiesta* “activities”. What this arrogant response failed to consider is that these “activities”—to go

on for as long as they have—require the buy-in of San Antonians. For decades, they have propagandized us with historical and cultural lesson plans in the classroom and projects that allow young people to participate directly—or to simulate participation—in the festivities. We are encouraged to purchase the colorful, handcrafted flower crowns that grace heads throughout the city and indulge in school holidays set aside for Fiesta Parades—viewing and shoe-showing. And as in 1976, the city’s Euro-American elite continue to control the event narrative with school children happily constructing shoe box floats.

To E.P. (decades ago, now): *You are right to say that the hard-working people of San Antonio have civic pride, too. But while you are advocating for their/our inclusion, this inclusion would be an invitation to participate in European imperialism. I contend that we should work to reconsider the propaganda we have been delivered by city elites and to divorce ourselves from the desire to perpetuate this legacy. And so it goes, another year, another Fiesta.*

