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My Turn

Annexation: Does Taos really want to do this?

David Krusell

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Concerned residents of El Prado, many who twice came forth in droves to successfully protest a dollar store in their pastures and on their Main Street, seem to be approaching the end of their proverbial rope. The last few months have found them trying to decide which legalistic strategy might prevail in helping them to resist the threat of annexation and surrendering control of their Main Street permanently.

Legal option number one is forming a neighborhood association to outlaw big box stores and possibly even resist annexation, a process which can take a long time and require a great deal of formal organization.

Legal option two is getting El Prado designated as a historical district, in spite of the facts the state requires 50,000 inhabitants for such a designation, there are only four cities in New Mexico with this population, and El Prado is not one of them — although there have been exceptions. The fate of El Prado hangs, at the moment, in some unknown legalistic limbo, like a lost password.

Given the meaning of the word annexation: “adding to” or “taking without permission,” and the experience of reading in the headlines that the community your ancestors have dwelled in for generations is to be annexed, I can understand the extreme anger I hear in the voices of the elders when they talk about this issue.

El Prado is not some housing project built overnight in a cornfield on the edge of a big city suburb; and the history they are talking about preserving is not just in the adobe buildings; it still remains in hearts and the way of life of the people and how they act.

Speaking of earlier days of Northern New Mexico in his classic, “Enchantment and Exploitation,” William deBuys explains, “The most important civic virtue for a man was to have *verguenza*, a self-effacing probity that restrained him from advancing himself at the expense of others. (In reference to women, *verguenza* had a different meaning, connoting sexual morality and modesty.) A man who possessed *verguenza* would never enter the predominantly Anglo professions of banking, law, or trade, which required that one profit from others’ loss ... Such a man would count tradition and rootedness as life’s primary treasures ...”

Of course, in the modern money-dominated world we need banks and trade and even lawyers occasionally to protect the shirts on our back; but could it be that in this dog-eat-dog world of inculcate vying and broken leadership and ubiquitous violent and pornographic images, there

are still some people walking among us who remember a world ordered by honor and mutual respect. If this be so, let us harbor them and learn from them, so that their wisdom might resonate one day back into the larger community.

I revere their sentiment and hold it as a model to live by, whether it took hold in Northern New Mexico as a reaction to a history of endless and brutal annexations (Spain by the Muslims; the unincorporated Americas by the Europeans; much of Europe by Napoleon, then Bismark, then Hitler, then the Soviets — not to mention the fates of Asia and Africa) or as a simple embracing of the Tenth Commandment, carried from the mountaintop by one whose community had been annexed and would be annexed again and again — by the Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Muslims, European Crusaders, the Muslims again, and eventually by the original inhabitants, who had roamed the earth for 19 centuries and ran out of places to go.

In fact, the history of human kind is essentially the history of annexations and attempted annexations. A large part of our human and natural resources have been consumed and continue to be consumed by this activity and its lingering aftermath — which we, strangely, have come to accept as normal.

In view of the vast, generational suffering, emotional and physical violence, and just plain waste associated with this ancient bad habit of annexation, why don't we as rational adults in the modern world, rather than conjuring legal attacks and defenses and modeling for our children what we tell them never to do, just agree not to go there anymore?

This issue will be tabled at 9 a.m., Tuesday, Nov. 5, in the Taos County Commissioners' Office, at the Taos County Administrative Complex. Please lend your support to what you believe in.

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