



# Let There Be Towns: Spanish Municipal Origins in the American Southwest, 1610-1810

*Gilbert R. Cruz*

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Three pillars supported the empire of New Spain. The first two, the presidio and the mission, have lived on in history and the popular imagination. The third, less studied and less understood, has lived on in the traditions of local self-governance and the distinctive cultural and social patterns of the Southwest. That third pillar is the civil settlement, or town, with its distinctive governmental institutions.

Town councils, or cabildos, brought to the northern frontier a high degree of law and order, patterns of local government, a rough democracy, and the principle of justice based on rule of law. The towns populated the Borderlands, introduced industry, and contributed to the economy and defense of Hispanic territories.

*Let There Be Towns* presents the origins and contributions of six of the early settlements of New Spain—San Antonio and Laredo in Spanish Texas, Santa Fe and El Paso in Nuevo Mexico, and San Jose and Los Angeles in Alta California. In *Let There Be Towns*, Gilbert R. Cruz carefully assesses their importance as part of the Spanish government's policy for implanting in North America the linguistic, social, religious, and political values of the crown.

Ten years of archival study, as well as travel through Spain and Mexico researching the origins of colonial towns in parent institutions, have led the author to the provocative conclusion that town settlements and their civil governments were even more important than the more glamorous missions and presidios in establishing Spanish dominion over the northern Borderlands.

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