

Anaya, Rudolfo  
Albuquerque

# OPINION

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## EDITORIALS

### Welcome to Albuquerque

The Duke City should do what hometown author Rudolfo Anaya suggests and put the "r" back in "Albuquerque."

Even if the move fails because of concerns about hassle and expense (Anaya argues it needn't cost a dime), the debate will prod us to think about our city's identity, its roots, its destiny. That's something we do far too little of these days.

Anaya is pressing for the "r" following the publication of his latest novel, "Albuquerque," about a young man's search for his father. The book makes forays into the city's history. At one point, Anaya tells the legend of an Anglo stationmaster in the late 1800s who couldn't pronounce the Spanish name "Albuquerque," so he left out the "r" when he wrote the name on the railroad station wall.

Anaya sees the name change as a way to get back in touch with the Spanish culture that preceded the Anglicization of the city's name and as a great local project for the Quincentennial.

That's a sensible aim, even if we question the accuracy of the legend of the stationmaster.

Byron Johnson of the Museum of Albuquerque tells us the city was named in 1706 after the Duke of Albuquerque, who was the chief administrative officer of

this region when it still was under Spanish control. Albuquerque is the name of a place in Spain, still in existence, near the Portuguese border. It is based on the Latin words meaning "white oak."

Contrary to the tale of the stationmaster, Johnson notes that local folks were using Albuquerque without the "r" as early as 1820 — before Anglos started arriving here in any significant numbers off the Santa Fe Trail. Those numbers didn't increase in a big way until the arrival of the railroad in the late 1800s.

We doubt that anyone meant harm by dropping the "r." All cultures, including the Spanish, force names into their own spellings, often distorting them.

Americans, for example, have altered the German "München" into "Munich." Many Spanish-speakers call New York "Nueva York" and London "Londres."

And what did the Pueblo tribes call Albuquerque before the Spanish came?

Still, the United States has taken pains to change "Peking" to "Beijing" to reflect more closely the original Chinese. Why shouldn't we do something similar on the homefront?

Finally there's the question of expense. No one we've talked to knows for sure how much the transition would cost.

Officials from Truth or Consequences, which changed its name more than 40 years ago, reminded us they had to hold a special election on the issue. Special elections in Albuquerque cost about \$100,000 if they use paper ballots. But that cost could be cut to nearly nothing if we held the election along with with a regular election.

City officials such as Jean Ele, assistant purchasing officer, note the change could affect city letterheads, water bills and envelopes, business cards, identification tags, not to mention signs, plaques, logos on cars and more.

But Anaya says that by taking a soft approach — for instance, changing letterheads only when new supplies are needed — expenses could be "zero."

Whatever the decision, look what the debate can bring us: In this short space, we've already touched on the city's history dating to the ancient pueblos; ties with Spain; and interactions among different cultures. This all is part of Albuquerque's identity.

For a city still struggling in many ways to discover what it is, the effort is well worth our time.

Go for it, Rudolfo.

Jack Ehn