

Diego Rivera, “History of Mexico” Analysis

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Diego Rivera's mural, "History of Mexico" (1946-1947), is an expansive mural that can be found on the walls of a large staircase at the National Palace in Mexico City. Diego Rivera was quoted as saying that this "mural represents "the entire history of Mexico from the Conquest through the Mexican Revolution...down to the ugly present" (Flattley 2020). In it, he works in chronological order by working from the bottom to the top, with the bottom of the mural being the beginning of Mexico's history and working his way up to the top, which is what he dreamed and envisioned Mexico would one day be. He shows the beginning of Mexico's history being built on violence and blood and murder and brutality as the Spanish Conquest began, disrupting the lives of the indigenous people whom he shows great respect for. He shows the country's fight for its independence from Spain, the Mexican-American War, the Mexican Revolution, and finally, what he envisioned Mexico to become one day in the future.

There are many people who are positively depicted in the mural, which shows Rivera's admiration and respect for the indigenous roots and the revolutionary ideas that came along as time progressed. The indigenous people are shown as almost heroes in the mural, showing their strength, resilience, and endurance while fighting for their way of life. He paints the Mexican lower-class members, indigenous peoples, and the common people in a positive light as they fight against the oppressive forces of foreigners and the elite upper class. Rivera painted the Aztec gods, the daily lives of the Aztec people, and their architecture in an accurate representation. Rivera also shows key people during the Mexican Revolution in a positive manner, such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. Rivera depicts Zapata and Villa as defenders and protectors of the people, which shows his support for them as they fought against the oppression and the social injustice in Mexico at the time. He shows the hope he had for the

country as it grew. He also includes a depiction of Karl Marx, where he serves as a symbol of hope for Mexico as it grows and becomes more advanced and modernized.

There are also people who are negatively depicted in the mural, which shows Rivera's critique and disagreement with them. He paints Hernán Cortés as a destructive, violent, oppressive, and exploitive figure in Mexican history. He paints him as a disfigured being to help convey how Rivera felt about him and his corruptness, and only seeking to get rich with no regard for the native indigenous people. He paints the people that he views negatively in an almost shadow on the walls, showing that they have a very dark and hidden side, since things are hidden in the shadows. Rivera also depicts some of the more modern people in a negative way. Those who exploited brought more social inequality, and oppression received Rivera's disapproval for their ways and what they brought to Mexico.

I believe that the way that Diego Rivera depicts the different people and scenes in his mural shows his vision of Mexico during this time period. By showing his views of both positive and negative aspects, he shows his vision of Mexico to be one with cultural pride that still incorporates aspects from the indigenous people and from the revolution in modern-day Mexico. He envisions Mexico to be one with social equality that came through the wars and the fight against oppression over the years and years of fighting. Rivera was outspoken in his work about what he envisioned Mexico to become one day. He had one of his works "removed from the Palace of Fine Arts because it eloquently criticized the bellicose international policies of the United States, France, and England" (Joseph and Henderson 2022). Diego Rivera had his own thoughts on other countries in the world and what he believed was 'wrong' and what Mexico should not become.

“History of Mexico” serves as more than just a mural painted many years ago. It serves as a way of telling the story of Mexico through hundreds of years and what Diego Rivera wished Mexico would one day become. Through positive depictions of the indigenous people and some key historical figures and the negative depictions of the Spanish Conquest and of the oppression that Mexico endured, Rivera is able to show his vision of Mexico that includes social justice, cultural pride, and a united nation. His mural is a testament to the past of the country that he loved and honors that while also looking forward to the future of Mexico.

Bibliography

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