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THE USE OF PATH DEPENDENCE TO EXPLAIN THE REPRESENTATIONS OF UNITED
STATES INDUSTRIALISM IN MEXICO IN DIEGO RIVERA'S MURALS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes Diego Rivera's representation of United States industrialism in Mexico through his mural works. The following analysis examines three separate mural series created by Rivera during Mexico's post-revolutionary era to determine how and why Diego Rivera simultaneously created positive and negative depictions of U.S. industry in his works. Further, this paper compares Diego Rivera's appreciation and criticism of U.S. industrialism and its relationship with Mexico to concepts from the social science theory of path dependence. The theory of path dependence serves to explain Rivera's admiration of American modernization alongside his denunciation of American capitalism.

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Introduction

The Mexican Revolution forged a complex relationship between the United States and Mexico that lasted for decades. The United States' habit of expanding its sphere of influence to foreign nations brought with it the nickname, 'big brother'. Much like a pesky older brother, the United States has historically meddled in international affairs, inserting itself to satisfy diplomatic and economic interests. The notorious American sphere of influence reached Mexico even before the Mexican Revolution of 1910, soon becoming a primary grievance in the escalation to the bloody revolution. The United States created an overt industrial and imperialist presence in Mexico that irreversibly affected Mexican society.

The years between 1880 and 1910 marked the Mexican pre-revolutionary period, during which time the presence of United States corporations and industries was heavy in Mexico. Undoubtedly, the United States seized the opportunity to exploit its weaker southern neighbor for its vast resources and to profit from cheap labor. The "colonizing of the land was mirrored in other areas of Mexican economic and industrial life...[President] Diaz...encouraged massive foreign investment in Mexico, to be fed by a well of cheap and obedient labor. As a result, significant areas of Mexico's agricultural land as well as large parts of the country's economic and industrial infrastructure came under the control and influence of foreign owners, industrialists and speculators" (Rochfort 11).

The regime of Porfirio Diaz granted United States' investors significant leeway in the establishment and fulfillment of American business ventures on Mexican soil, inviting harsh criticism from the Mexican population. Bitterness and resentment toward U.S. industries swept

across Mexico, fueled by unfair wage discrepancies, blatant disrespect for and mistreatment of Mexican laborers at prominent American mining and oil sites. Although United States industries took unfair advantage of Mexican land and its people, such profitable business only increased modernization and industrialization of Mexican society.

The turbulence during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 summoned countless grievances from the Mexican community. As a result, this dark period gave rise to art as a medium for social and political expression. Muralism was especially prominent and its most visible practitioner was Diego Rivera.

To this day, Diego Rivera is recognized as one of the greatest Mexican muralists. Rivera had the talent to tell a story through his works, which often portrayed complex themes of the Mexican Revolution. Inspection of Rivera's post-revolutionary murals reveals important nuances that highlight the relationship between United States industry and Mexico. Specifically, Rivera uniquely depicts both positive and negative aspects of the reach of the United States' industrialism and imperialism.

An exploration of this dual representation invites analysis via the social science theory of path dependence. Rivera's admiration of American modernization, coupled with his denunciation of capitalism, support the concept of path dependence and the issues that may arise in industrial institutions.

This paper later analyzes three of Rivera's serial murals to reveal his exclusive account of the positive and negative elements of U.S. industrialism and imperialism as they correlate to path dependence theory.

Background Information

The three main axes of this analysis-- Mexican muralism in general, Diego Rivera in particular, and the theory of path dependence—will clarify the complex relationship between the artist, his work, and the implications of artistic representations of social concerns.

Mexican Muralism

Muralism began, roughly, in 1922 soon after the end of the Mexican Revolution. Initially, muralism was a tool to depict relevant or controversial messages from the government to a mostly illiterate nation. Soon, the Minister of Public Education, José Vasconcelos, introduced the concept of muralism as a distinguished public art form. He believed that public art was the best way to educate and inform a barely literate Mexican population (only 10 percent) (Moreno and Cabrera 30). Brilliantly painted on the walls of public buildings in Mexico, these murals meant to instill nationalistic pride among Mexicans at a time when civic morale was particularly low. In a time of unrest, the colorful illustrations captured public emotion to inspire much needed patriotism. Its reach was so effective that its influence spread to the United States where it found imitators.

Mexican muralism was initially controlled by the government, and heavily formulated by leading government officials of the time. In order to make these vast paintings a safe channel to broadcast important messages to the public, murals had to satisfy strict, government- imposed standards before their composition. Because of these restrictions, many muralists were forced to generate an idealized version of Mexico's past, discarding any truer historical sentiments. Still,

murals touched the entire Mexican citizenship, granting all classes of people the opportunity to scrutinize, understand, and comment on the beautiful, symbolic art, but also learn one version of history.

The murals from the post-revolutionary period in Mexico illustrate a myriad of topics like the Spanish conquest of Mexico, the role and reputation of notable Revolutionary leaders, and the significance of United States industrialism in Mexico. Given the primary intention of these murals to convey political messages to the Mexican people, Rivera effectively used the artistic parameters imposed on his art in order to express his personal opinions of the United States.

Diego Rivera

Diego Rivera's personal history provides a platform for discussion on how and why he synthesized a dual view of American industry in Mexico. Rivera's apparent fondness for American modernization clashes with his grand distaste for capitalism. Interestingly, biographical details offer an explanation for these contrasting feelings. He had both positive and negative personal experiences, which wound their way into the striking content of his works. Many aspects of his own life were equally conflicted.

Rivera came from an ethnically diverse background. He hailed from "Spanish, Russian, Italian, Portuguese, Native American, Jewish, and African" lineage (Moreno and Cabrera 6). Such complex ancestral roots wove Rivera into a strikingly complicated individual. His family was a prominent fixture in Mexican society, active in various business ventures that carried the hard-hitting influence of American industrialism into the home. Both of Rivera's grandfathers worked in

the mining sector. One operated a mine in Veracruz, while the other owned a mine in Guanajuato before a disastrous flood destroyed it. . Unlike his grandfathers who worked in the mines, Rivera's father worked as a very outspoken political activist for the liberal agenda in his community. Not a member of the Catholic Church, he strongly supported the separation of church and state. He was also an aggressive proponent of securing social and political rights for the poor. In contrast, Rivera's mother was a devout Catholic (Moreno and Cabrera 5).

Rivera himself was a very bright child, fascinated by trains, mining machinery, and all types of mechanical devices. He had a high aptitude for math and science, but also an equally captivating gift for the arts. At just 10 years old, Rivera began training at the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts in Mexico City.

During his time at the Academy, Rivera learned to imitate a number of artistic styles, emulating the works of many great European painters. Afterwards, he spent 14 years abroad, cultivating European design and refining his technique in the shadow of many influential artists of the time. Though inspired by his contemporaries, Rivera's experience abroad also refined his sense of individualism. From his process of self-discovery grew a socialist ideology, alignment with the Communist party, and the first of many tumultuous love affairs. Upon his return to Mexico, Rivera strengthened his appreciation for political activism, joining the Communist group in Mexico. He believed that political involvement and art went hand in hand. Together, "Rivera and fellow artists formed the *Sindicato revolucionario de obreros técnicos y plásticos* [revolutionary union of technical workers, painters, sculptors, and allied trades] with the common goal of perpetuating socialistic ideas through art and muralism" (Moreno and Cabrera 34).

Both Rivera's attendance at The San Carlos Art Academy and his later involvement with the Communist group of Mexico prompted him to dismantle the traditional rules of Mexican

art. Dr. Atl, an unconventional instructor at the art academy, had a major influence on Rivera. He was one of the first instructors to incorporate “new standards for the academy that broke away from the European tradition” (Moreno and Cabrera 31). His refreshing new philosophy inspired Mexican artists to finally develop an individual style, rather than simply imitate standard European techniques. The academy flourished, as “artists began to create art that represented the political and national consciousness of Mexico” (Moreno and Cabrera 31).

In this process of discarding norms, we can invoke the concept of path dependence. Despite the appeal and ease of imitation, Rivera recognized the benefit of establishing one’s own identity. He strayed from the traditional path to pursue individualism, to make significant social statements, and to inspire Mexico to similarly adopt a stronger sense of self.

Path Dependence

The social science theory of path dependence asserts “the idea that decisions we are faced with depend on past knowledge trajectory and decisions made, and are thus limited by the current competence base. In other words, history matters for current decision-making situations and has a strong influence on strategic planning” (Magnusson 16). Based in industry, politics, and economics, path dependence theory claims the existence of a standard or norm from which individuals and nations may construct their future systems or institutions. While this ‘standard’ model provides a basic framework for the subject of imitation, its objective may not always suit individual or national interests. Once an individual or nation recognizes that this idealized standard is not the optimal model to benefit their overall well-being, they seek to diverge from the path set out for them. In order to invoke these changes and achieve a better outcome, they must “reform

existing interconnected and mutually reinforcing institutions in a time-sensitive manner by prioritizing a sequence of reforms, beginning with certain core reforms” (Prado and Trebilcock 368).

The scheme of Rivera’s murals suggests the similarity between Mexico’s transforming economy and the idea of path dependence. Specifically, Mexico used American industry as the standard from which to modernize and industrialize its own society. Path dependency would suggest that Mexico used the capitalist system that the United States employed to achieve the same level of modernity as the U.S., yet Rivera recognized the flaws in the United States’ model and believed deviating from capitalism would lead to a better future for Mexico.

Murals at the Secretariat of Public Education

The following discussion considers Rivera's initial mural series at the Secretariat of Public Education building in Mexico City. Initiated in 1923 and completed in 1928, this was his first large-scale mural project, profuse in its glorification of all things Mexican. Within these courtyard paintings, "Rivera presents Mexico's recent revolution as the prologue to a proletarian one to come. He visualizes this 'progressive' tale in an iconography of Mexican geography and popular tradition that moves from the rural countryside to the city, from exploitation to liberation, from Zapatismo to the death of the Capitalist system" (Anreus 84). Critics observe that the "style, too, mobilizes the narrative as Rivera shifts from pictorial naturalism to social realism, informed by the lessons of cubism. These deliberate shifts offer the key to interpreting Rivera's political message across the cycle" (Anreus 85).

Wall Street Banquet (1928)



Figure 1. Wall Street Banquet (1928)

In the above panel, *Wall Street Banquet*, of the Secretariat of Public Education murals, a palpable anti-corporatist view against the United States projects from the image. "[Rivera] painted a group of American industrialists and their wives seated at a dinner table examining the gold ticker-tape of the stock exchange" (Rochfort 63). These polished men represent the leaders of American industry – figureheads for the industries that self-righteously inserted themselves into Mexican culture, who gluttonously exploited Mexican lands, labor, and lax foreign investment laws to establish profitable business. "Among the assembled figures are recognizable caricatures of John. D. Rockefeller [top left of the table], J.P. Morgan, and Henry Ford" (Rochfort 63). Most striking is the caricature-like depiction of these American socialites. Over-exaggerated features parallel the extravagance of American culture. In this way, "Rivera signals the social decay of United States capitalism by distorting the physiognomy of these financiers and their consorts" (Rochfort 64). Everything the United States did involves abundance and excess.

In contrast, depictions of Mexicans in other segments of the mural lack this cartoonish quality; a subtle praise of the admirable simplicity of the Mexican people in contrast with the American lifestyle. In this scene of dining American monopolists, Rivera brilliantly imparts an allusion to the fable of King Midas' golden touch. "The safe, out of which gilded ticker tape streams, resembles a mechanical ass with light bulbs for eyes and megaphones for ears. Financiers dine on champagne and stock receipts in the arid atmosphere of a bank vault" (Campbell 68). The artistic allusion to King Midas's golden touch "contrasts [American capitalists'] greed with images of socialist society" (Rochfort 64).

Each pictured man represents a key investor in American industry in Mexico. Rivera's disapproving representation of these capitalists exposes his plea to Mexico to shun capitalist society. The marked differences in his depictions of American and Mexican men underscore Rivera's belief in the diametrically opposed values of American capitalists and the humble Mexican people.

According to Douglass North, one of three key implications of path dependence is that "at the individual level, the institutional structure inherited from the past may reflect a set of beliefs that are impervious to change, either because the proposed changes run counter to that belief system or because the proposed alteration in institutions threatens the leaders and entrepreneurs of existing organizations" (Prado and Trebilcock 354). Rivera returned to Mexico after the Revolution to see that a huge influx of American industry had launched businesses on Mexican soil. "In the aggregate, American firms owned 75 percent of all the mines in Mexico and over 50 percent of the oil fields in 1914" (Sweetman 9). As modernization and capitalism began to revolutionize Mexico, American capitalists collected sizable profits from their business endeavors. This set a precedent for American ventures in Mexico, as investors reaped tremendous benefit from the flourishing industries that diminished traditional Mexican culture.

Rivera's vision holds that the United States is a society governed by elitists, by greedy capitalists unwilling to relinquish their wealthy dominion for humanitarian investment. Still in the infancy of modernization, he believed that Mexico could discard capitalist ideology and avoid the birth of a nation stratified by measures of wealth.

Our Daily Bread (1928)

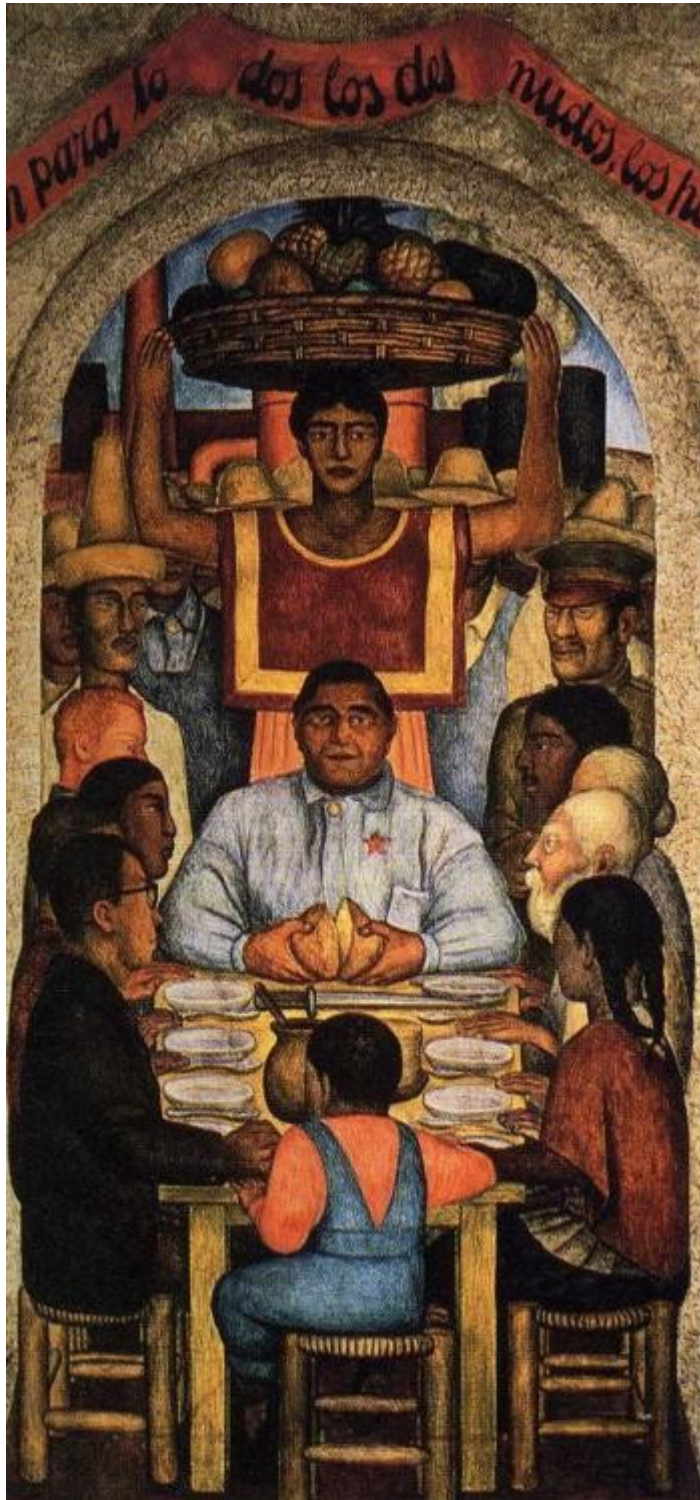


Figure 2. Our Daily Bread (1928)

In contrast to the greedy American capitalists depicted in Rivera's *Wall Street Banquet* is the scene, *Our Daily Bread*. In this image, "the Tehauna's pose echoes the industrial architecture behind her... industrial modernity will be grounded in the 'authentic' values and 'deep' Mexico, which she represents", for "in this world, social differences cease to matter because an egalitarian political order and a socially just economic system enable a hybrid society" (Rochfort 67). Rivera's garish portrayal of the American feast strikingly contrasts with this modest Mexican meal. The proximity of these dissimilar scenes juxtaposes the essence of capitalism with Rivera's vision for an achievable Mexican future. A red star on the left breast of the man heading the table symbolizes the hypothetical presence of a Communist system in the foreseeable Mexican future.

Rivera's suggestion of Communist ideology in Mexico challenges path dependence theory's construct of 'switching-costs'; the idea that once a social institution is established, the cost of changing models is high. Path dependence theory indicates that America's capitalistic industry in Mexico would "lock in the power of a small elite whose vested interests then hold back efforts to increase competition and enhance fairness" (Prado and Trebilcock 368). American entrepreneurs with ownership of lands and businesses in Mexico would never approve any economic system other than that of capitalism be used by Mexico. Given the vested interest in capital gain, "in terms of political economy considerations, switching costs may be high for those who benefit from the institutional *status quo*" such as those pictured in *Wall Street Banquet* as the prominent American capitalists (Prado and Trebilcock 370). However, Rivera did not

believe that the ‘switching costs’ for Mexico from capitalism to Communism are too high. The Communist system in place in *Our Daily Bread* suggests that Mexico is capable of overruling the small percentage of elite American capitalists in Mexico to establish a system more beneficial for the entirety of Mexican people.

In the eyes of Rivera, the foreign industries imposed in Mexico brought modernization at the cost of the exploited laborers of the bourgeoisie. He believed Mexico should act quickly to escape the clutches of capitalism that would entrench the nation in huge socioeconomic discrepancies.

Mechanization of the Country (1926)



Figure 3. Mechanization of the Country (1926)

In the final segment of the Secretariat of Public Education mural, there is a scene titled *Mechanization of the Country*. This segment focuses on an idealistic future for Mexican society. Rivera “reintroduces the golden hues from the Court of Labor in a utopian image of Mexico's industrialization” (Anreus 176). In the bottom left of the image, “a priest, a federal soldier, and a capitalist [are] struck down by an allegorical figure of the proletariat wielding a red thunderbolt” (Anreus 177). These three, respectively, depict corruption in the Catholic Church of Mexico, the supporters of the venal Diaz regime, and capitalists (constituents of the elitist sectors of both American and Mexican societies) who benefitted from industrial business ventures in Mexico. The red color of the lightning bolt again alludes to a Communist party that Rivera envisions as Mexico’s salvation, a resolution to the trio of obstacles stifling Mexico’s potential greatness.

In the upper right corner of the mural “a worker, a peasant, and a revolutionary soldier” stand unified (Anreus 178). The trio frames a background image of Mexico’s imminent industrial future, methodically depicted with “a dam, airplanes, a railroad, and electrical wires... Rivera argues that the country will be mechanized” (Anreus 178).

In this segment of the mural, Rivera at once acknowledges and rejects the developmental role of capitalism in Mexico. He expresses a deep-rooted concern for Mexico’s well-being. To him, capitalism is not the only (or best) route to industrializing and modernizing the country. Though unconventional, his proposition seems to be for a Communist system of government in conjunction with tasteful modernization as the best outcome for Mexican society. The scene *Mechanization of the Country*, along with the other panels in the Secretariat of Public Education mural, “surveys Mexico's many regions and telescopes its complex poetical history into

stylistically coded scenes that demonstrate the artist's wide knowledge of Western art and his commitment to a modern industrialized, but socialist, future” (Anreus 181).

Rivera proposes that Mexico relied on the idea of path dependence to model its economy after American society. Tasting the promise of successful American industry within its nation, some Mexican leaders and citizens craved the development of a capitalistic economy. Rivera rejects unthinking the hunger for foreign industrialism. Rivera warns about the exploitation and abusive power of foreign investors as well as the imminent socioeconomic gap imposed by capitalism. In doing so, Rivera urges the Mexican people to reconsider choosing pure capitalism as Mexico’s economic system. He believes that the U.S. model-- despite being a powerful capitalist society-- should not sway Mexican interests away from sensible economic pursuits. With color and rich sentiment, Rivera appeals to the good sense of his countrymen to ignore such capitalistic ventures.

The Detroit Industry Murals

During and after the Revolution, many Mexican leaders looked to the United States for a role model to overhaul the Mexican economic system. Another of Rivera's murals, *Detroit Industry*, presents itself as a love letter to modernization. Rivera lived in Detroit from July of 1932 to March of 1933, during which time he crafted scenes for The Detroit Institute of Arts. Rivera soon cultivated an appreciation for the Ford Automotive Company. His childhood fascination for technology and machines resurfaced as he examined the inner workings of these great new machines and the men who toiled to build them. Though a self-proclaimed adherent of socialist policy, Rivera could not hide his awe at the power of American modernization. Still, his admiration for this thriving industry in Detroit could not mask an innate disdain for social disparity. Rivera sympathized with these blue-collar automotive workers who, within the climate of the Great Depression, were faced with "reckless capitalists who abdicated moral economy" in order to survive during this difficult economic period (Downs 185). Rivera painted an idealized world for the workers in these murals while, in reality, Rivera was experiencing "Detroit during depression when half of people were working but two-thirds were living at poverty level" (Downs 25). The automotive workers represented a fragment of the larger working middle class who supported the interests of the elite. Thus, each panel of the Detroit Industry mural series reflects Rivera's "knowledge of modern technology, understanding of ancient belief systems and ability to synthesize through analogy, [that machines] are a modern icon of American technology" (Downs 18).

The sequence of these paintings is reminiscent of Rivera's *History of Mexico*, since it depicts a subject in its beginnings stages progressing to the present and future states. This

methodological technique is critical to understanding and comparing messages in Rivera's murals. The structure of his works reflect "the east [as] the direction of beginnings – the rising sun, the origin and abundance of life. The west [as] the direction of endings – the setting sun, death and afterlife, and the last judgement. The north [as] the direction of the absence of light, darkness, and the interior world. The south [as] the direction through which the sun travels every day and represents light, the exterior world, and the surface of things" (Downs 20). The symbolism in these cardinal directions seeps through the themes of Rivera's paintings.

While these murals clearly depict a history of the Detroit automobile industry, Rivera manages to parallel the emergence and growth of the automobile industry to the Mexican Revolution. There is an ostensible "similarity of historical context between Mexico City of the 1920s and Detroit in the 1930s. Detroit was racked not by revolution but by the effects of economic collapse" (Downs 19). Rivera brings this theme to light.

The North Wall



Figure 4. The Red Race (1932)

In a fresco titled, *The Red Race*, Rivera paints a pair of “gigantic hands emerg[ing] from a volcano on the north wall... They grasp metals used in the production of steel... symboliz[ing] mining in particular and the aggressive human drive to capture the riches of the earth” (Downs 56). These ‘greedy hands’ are reminiscent of Rivera’s previous work in a mural at Chapingo Autonomous University called *Fertile Land*, where he depicted scenes cultivating and harvesting land (Moreno and Cabrera 68). In the above image, Rivera obliquely refers to the United States’ exploitation of Mexican resources with its gluttonous mining and drilling for minerals buried beneath Mexican soil. The hands in this Detroit mural may clench fistfuls of America’s natural resources, but they suggest Rivera’s concern for the exploitation of resources in his own homeland.

With the onset of industrialization, path dependent theory suggests that companies, institutions, or nations will use “investment allocation to further their economic goals” to create a dominant system (Roemer 430). Rivera witnessed Ford Automotive Company’s investment in and use of American resources to establish a commercial dynasty. Mexico saw similar economic investment as American oil and mining companies rooted themselves in Mexican soil. According to capitalist doctrines of the United States, this foreign investment marked the beginning of growing industrialism in Mexico.



Figure 5. Self-Portrait inside Production and Manufacture of Engine and Transmission (1932)

The above image from the north wall is a magnification of a section in the mural, *Production and Manufacture of Engine and Transmission*. Like many of Rivera's other works, this scene includes a hidden self-portrait. Rivera frequently incorporated himself into his murals, often camouflaged as a worker or indigenous person, to exhibit empathy and build rapport with the Mexican commoners. However, in the Detroit murals he used an idealistic style by painting "himself as an ambassador of cultural revolution" (Downs 89). For the first time, Rivera did not paint himself as one of the working class. The self-portrait of Rivera and his position among the worker's in this mural represents how he "he saw himself as the link between the Latin American south and the industrialized North bringing vision of the continuity of culture in the Americas" (Downs 95). Rivera's fervent belief in art's emotional power of persuasion demonstrates his role as 'ambassador'.

The specific appearance of Rivera in this section speaks to a deep-set theme of the Detroit murals. He looks wearied, forlorn, and dejected as he gazes onto a factory worker. The concentration of his focus represents a "man of progress, a modern visionary", but Rivera's sullen face reflects a struggling capitalist society (Downs 101).



Figure 6. Production and Manufacture of Engine and Transmission (1932)

Along the bottom of the north wall, Rivera illustrates an assembly line. Like efficient cogs in a machine, all of the assembly line workers are portrayed in a very positive outlook. Their dogged determination fuels the machinery with which they labor. His depiction of a racially diverse mix of workers offers a coy political remark; “a Marxist hope for the future power of the working class” (Downs 65). Rivera creates an image of equal treatment of all races in a society where the social class system is obsolete.

In the previous portion of the north wall, Rivera’s self-portrait depicts him with a despondent demeanor as he looks onto a labor line of the Ford Automotive Company. In contrast, Rivera seems to admire the harmonious relationship between the line and the workers in the above scene. These contradicting views of industrialism demonstrate Rivera’s simultaneous

skepticism of the prospects for the emergent laboring class, as well as an appreciation for the collaboration between hardworking men and modern machines.

Path dependence theory asserts that the rules and structure of an institution as well as those chosen for managerial, leadership, or laboring roles may be imitated. “The economic dominance of certain ethnic groups in many developing countries may be explained by a number of factors, including differences in individual preferences and abilities, discrimination, variations in social capital, and increasing returns to scale, and that these factors are often self-reinforcing, creating a form of path dependence” (Prado and Trebilcock 352). In the Detroit murals, Rivera creates an imaginary, diverse workforce with access to the bright opportunities brought by modernization. In reality, white ethnic dominance pervaded Mexico due in part to American capitalists naming their own businessmen managers of newly developed industries. A note in reference to this practice at one major American mining company in Mexico: "todos los mayordomos superiores de la empresa eran norteamericanos, únicamente algún mexicano podía ser ocupado esporádicamente en responsabilidades de menor jerarquía" (Monlina and Zavaleta 7). As Rivera predicted, if Mexico fails to confront the American-imposed status quo, racial domination will persist, and Rivera’s vision for equality and opportunity among the indigenous Mexican people will dissolve.

The South Wall



Figure 7. Mead L. Bricker in Production of Automobile Exterior and Final Assembly (1932)

While the murals of the north wall portrayed industrial working conditions, Rivera's south wall murals introduce representations of Ford management structure and other societal classes. In this scene of the south wall mural piece, Rivera illustrates one of Henry Ford's assistant managers of production, Mead L. Bricker. He appears angry and overbearing, menacingly positioned behind the linemen as he peers over weary workers' backs while they toil. Bricker "was known for speeding up the [assembly] line... [to get] the most out of the worker for the least amount of time and the least payment" (Downs 116). Visibly critical of Bricker's treatment of his workers, Rivera expresses his sentiment towards similar labor exploitation in

Mexico. The representation of the treatment of the Ford Automotive workers and the Mexican laborers hired by American capitalists echo each other pictorially.



Figure 8. Tour Group- Production of Automobile Exterior and Final Assembly (1932)

In another section of the south wall mural, Rivera paints a crowd of visitors on tour of the Ford manufacturing facilities. They watch judgmentally as the factory workers assemble sundry parts of the automobile. Rivera casts the crowd in a negative light while simultaneously glorifying the hardworking laborers. The smug, middle-class citizens of the tour stand perched above the blue-collar employees, hovering much like the overbearing Bricker over the sweaty

backs of the men below. The crowd has come to inspect the facility and the men who create the automobiles the privileged bourgeoisie will drive with snobbish unconcern.

The West Wall

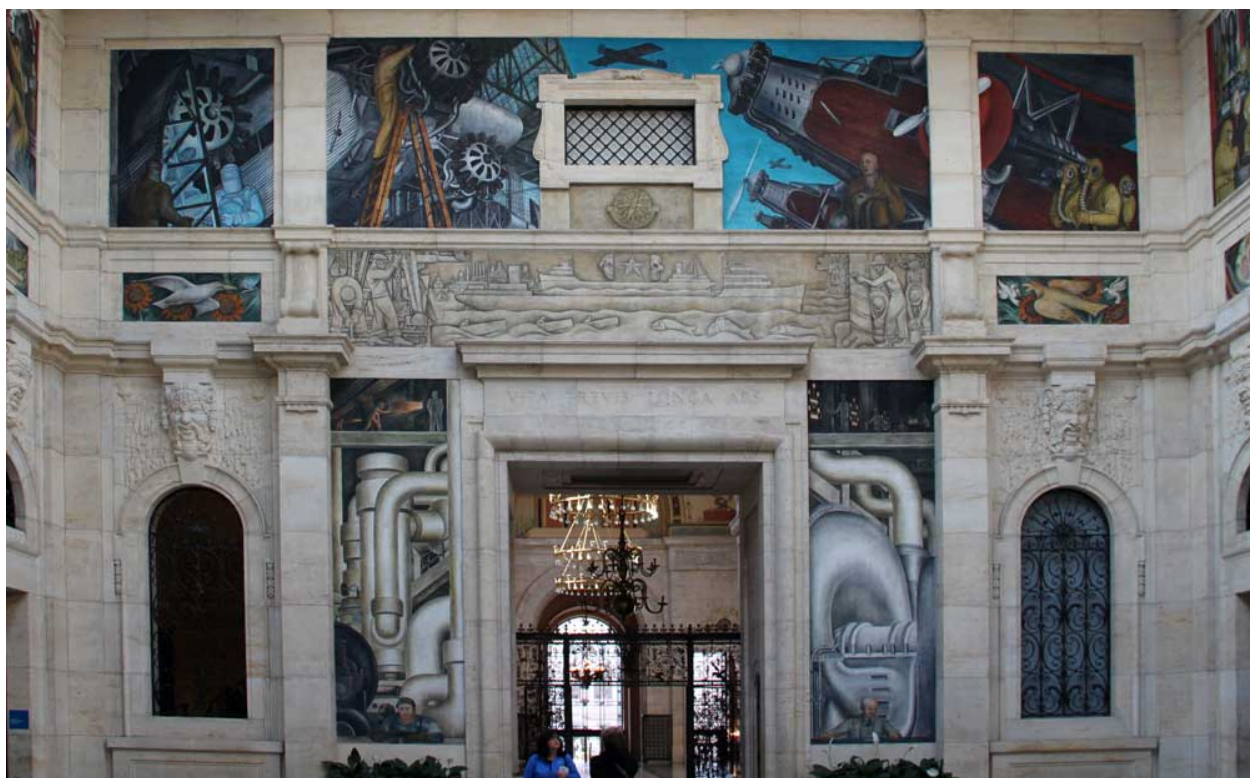


Figure 9. West Wall (1932)

The west wall of Rivera's Detroit represents a literalization of Rivera's simultaneously negative and positive images of industrialism. The left-hand bears all positive attributes while the right-hand side depicts negative counterparts.

A specific theme perpetuated in the Detroit mural series is aviation technology. In addition to its production of masterful automobiles, the Ford Motor Company also manufactured

aircraft. In this scene, Rivera “specifically shows the constructive and destructive uses of aviation” (Downs 123). He also employs his signature characterization of the cardinal directions through a “clear statement about constructive and destructive uses of technology with passenger planes on the symbolic [east] side of the saved and war planes on the symbolic [west] side of the damned” (Downs 123).

“Below the passenger planes is a dove feeding on a lower species. Below the war planes is a hawk feeding on its own species”, mimicking the constructive and destructive nature of humans and their use of modern machines (Downs 124). By using these two dissimilar bird breeds, Rivera comments on “the existence in nature of species who eat down their food chain as well as those who prey on their own kind” (Downs 124). These birds are a continuation of Rivera’s illustration of both the good and bad effects of modernization and capitalism. Rivera uses the dove to cultivate feelings of peace and harmony while the hawk conjures feelings of violence and conflict.

At the bottom section of the west wall are the large portraits of ‘the worker’ and ‘the manager’. While the image above makes it hard to see, the worker is drawn with a hammer in hand and a red star on his left glove. These additional details position the worker as a part of the Communist party. On the opposite side, the machine behind the manager, drawn as a giant ear, subtly shows the manager’s tendency to monitor all of the workers very closely. The worker and the manager represent the powerhouse of the company with the worker as “the production of energy and the manager as the controller of energy” (Downs 126). Rivera paints these two men identical in size to imply that both labor and management have equally critical roles in the company.

The entire west wall is a series of “dualities in technology, nature, and humanity and in the relationship between management and labor” that can be looked at in a vertical linear manner (Downs 128). The passenger plane, dove, and worker on the left all represent the good that has arisen from industry and modernization in the U.S. whereas the right side with the war plane, hawk, and manager suggest the downfalls that have occurred as a consequence of American capitalism. Rivera shows that humanity is in control of the advantageous or damaging direction that modernization can take.

In the Detroit mural series, Diego Rivera paints a considerable number of dualities embodied by the Detroit automobile industry as well as general dualities found in American industry as a whole. All of the dualities existing in this mural add to the overall idea that the American capitalist system, while providing awe-inspiring inventions and technological progress as seen in the automobile industry in Detroit, has also experienced a negative side—mainly, in its inequalities between employee and supervisor.

As was mentioned before, Rivera painted this arrangement of murals while the United States was experiencing the Great Depression, and it invites comparison between the U.S. crisis and the crisis of the Mexican Revolution that had occurred in the 1920s.

In the theory of path dependence is the idea of ‘critical junctures’. Path dependence theorists explain ‘critical junctures’ as the “brief moments at which opportunities for major institutional reforms appear, followed by long stretches of institutional stability. Junctures are critical because they place institutional arrangements on particular paths or trajectories, which are then very difficult to alter” (Prado and Trebilcock 358). Throughout this mural and many of Rivera’s other works, Rivera recommends a systematic change. In the case of the Detroit murals,

Rivera pinpoints the Great Depression as the ‘critical juncture’ that is providing an opportunity for American society to invoke changes into its working institutional system. As this mural displays many similarities to Rivera’s work in *The History of Mexico*, it is clear that for Rivera, Mexico’s ‘critical juncture’ is the Revolution. In both of these societies, Rivera believes that the citizens should capitalize on the opportunities presented to them at times of crisis and implement changes for the betterment of society as a whole.

Palacio Nacional Murals

Diego Rivera completed the following compilation of murals at the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City between 1929 and 1935. The entire artwork expresses the complete history of Mexico from its pre-Hispanic past up until 1930. Therefore, it was collectively titled, *The Epic of the Mexican People*. This enormous mural contains many panels, each depicting a different time and influential event that shaped the course of Mexican history. Many of the later time periods represented in this mural reference the United States' industrial influence on Mexico. Being that Rivera was an idealist, his '*History of Mexico*' reflects past, present, and even possible future outcomes for Mexican society as he poetically reinvents it in his own terms. Across the complete mural, Rivera depicts figures and details that present "a nationalistic theme in which he presents the ancient civilizations as the true answer for Mexico" (Moreno and Cabrera 69).

The History of Mexico from the Conquest (1935)

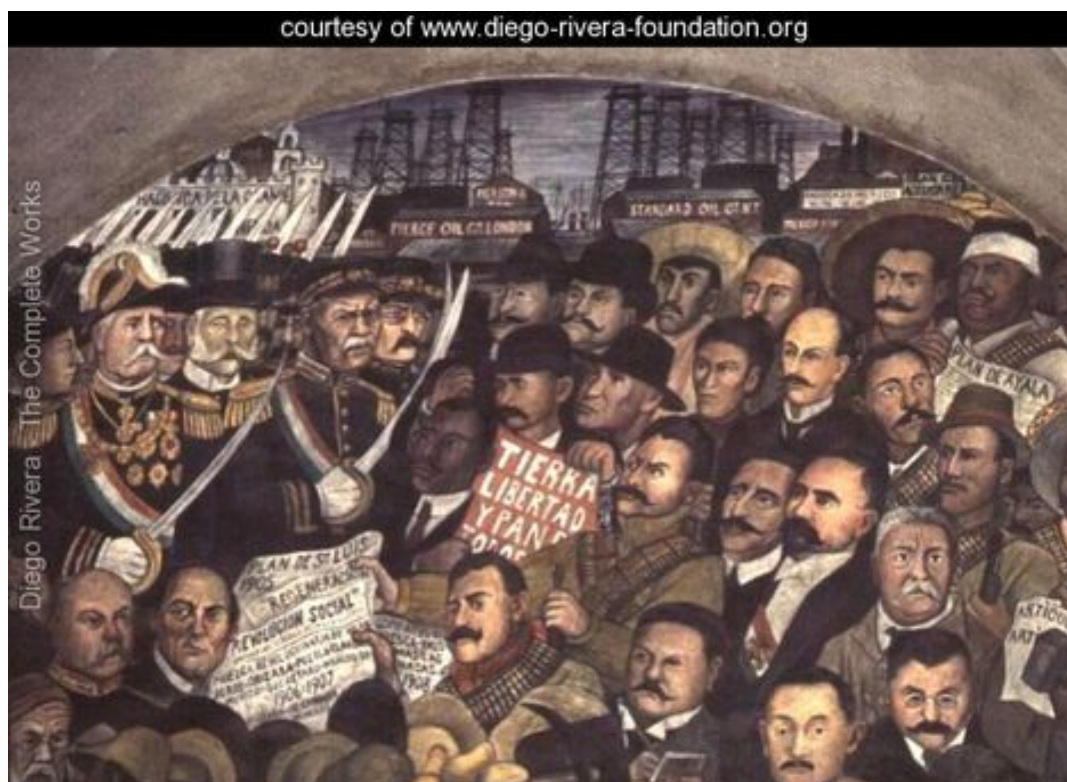


Figure 10. The History of Mexico from the Conquest to 1930 (1935)

One of the most explicit representations of the United States' industrial influence in Mexico occurs in Rivera's mural panel, *The History of Mexico from Conquest to 1930*. In this panel, Rivera chooses to portray his "protagonists to the confrontation of Díaz. Figures such as Zapata, Otilio Montaño, Carranza, Vasconcelos and others, are set against a backdrop at the top of the arch containing imagery of oil drilling rigs" (Rochfort 90). These oil drilling rigs are a direct reference to the foreign oil companies who took advantage of Mexico's vast amount of natural resources. "The rigs form an ambivalent setting, symbolizing the modernity that Porfirio Díaz sought during his dictatorship, the annexation of that modernity by foreign powers against

which in part the revolution fought, and the idea of the modern epoch which the revolution fought itself heralded" (Rochfort 90). In the background of this mural, the words 'Pierce Oil London' and 'Standard Oil Co.' are painted on buildings sitting directly in front of the oil rigs. Rivera incorporates both England and the United States in this painting as an integral part of Mexico's history.

Rivera's chooses to paint the American oil company in the background of a painting that focuses on the political and military leaders who contributed to one of the bloodiest periods in all of Mexican history. This specific panel focuses on the time period leading up to the start of the Revolution. Rivera is able to depict the importance of the American oil industry's ability to develop parts of Mexico and its push to modernize the economy. However, Rivera also makes it clear that these companies generated the grievances that sparked a revolution that wreaked havoc on a nation. By including the oil companies in the background of a panel whose focus seems to be on the former president, Porfirio Diaz, Rivera is linking Diaz's dictatorship to American business tycoons. Although the American (and British) company referenced here contributed to both positive and negative developments in Mexico, they were key parts of Rivera's vision of Mexico's history.

Rivera sees the close-knit relationship that Diaz formed with American investors as having a negative impact on Mexico. After the discovery of oil in Mexico in 1901, homegrown Mexican industry should have developed, rather than allowing foreign investment to take advantage of this newfound resource. By labeling the oil fields in this depiction of Mexican history as foreign companies, Rivera addresses Mexican businesses' failure to capitalize on the favorable conditions that these natural resources had created for Mexico.

Part of the idea of path dependence in industrialization focuses on the issue that industrializing nations can get “locked into the pattern of industrial investments” (Thomas 771). Rivera’s depictions pinpoint this issue, recognizing that-- through the Diaz regime-- Mexico fell into this trap. During the time period represented in this mural section, the Diaz regime allowed foreign nations overwhelm Mexico’s largest industries with “American investment exceed[ing] one billion dollars” by 1912 (Sweetman 9).

With this monopolistic foreign investment, Mexican industry became more and more dependent on foreign nations to keep their own economy running. Diaz became a bystander to American dominance in Mexican markets as the U.S. disregarded Mexican laws to act in its own self-interest, profiting from Mexican land and labor, similar to the idea of ‘self-reinforcing sequences’ that explains path dependence. In ‘self-reinforcing sequence’, the “‘initial steps in a particular direction induce further movement in the same direction such that over time it becomes difficult or impossible to reverse direction” (Mahoney 512).



Figure 11. Class Struggle (1935)

In the image above Rivera continues to present the sort of path dependency that he sees as a risk for Mexico. In this panel, *Class Struggle*, Rivera has painted Karl Marx, one of his ideological leaders, in a position of power and pride in the top section of the mural. The banner held by Marx challenges the problem of the caste system and fighting between social classes. Marx is pointing to Mexico's future -- a utopian nation where productive agricultural and industrial economy rule society.

Standing behind him to the right are the people-- the workers. Under him are the villains-- corrupt clergymen, military men, and ruthless capitalists. Businessmen examine the ticker tape while a priest fondles a near-naked woman. Above Marx there is a rising sun--in contrast to the

descending one of the opposite Quetzalcoatl mural, a sign of the luminous world to be born when following the precepts of Marx (Downs 170). The U. S. businessmen above the corrupt priest are from left to right: John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Harry Sinclair, William Durant, John Pierpont Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and Andrew Mellon. These men, known as pioneers of American capitalism, are painted in a position beneath Karl Marx, indicating Rivera's opinion that the ideas of Communism are superior to those of capitalism. The panel to the right of the businessmen includes the "unholy triumvirate with government, represented by Plutaraco Elfas Calles in the center, flanked by a general who seems to be on the phone, and a bishop" (Downs 172).

Path dependence stresses the main idea that "history matters and the past influences the future" (Mahoney 507). Yet, Rivera believes that the future can change if Mexico chooses to part ways with its history: with the capitalist culture of America that has heavily influenced its society. Rivera promotes the use of Karl Marx's teachings of Communism to advance Mexican society in the best ways possible.

As mentioned in reference to the *History of Mexico* mural panel, the issue of 'self-reinforcing sequence' plagued Mexican society due to the influence of U.S. industry. In this section of the mural, *Class Struggle*, the mythical, idealistic future that Rivera envisions is a critique of the idea of 'self-reinforcing sequence' because Rivera believes that the direction in which Mexican society is headed can be changed. He believes Communism to be the answer for change.

Conclusion

Up until the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the United States made a strong and lasting impact on Mexico. American businessmen established many corporations there because of Mexico's vast natural resources. The United States introduced Mexico to both industrialization and modernization at the price of the exploitation of Mexico's land and laborers.

In order to deal with the grievances generated by the United States' intrusion along with the other changes taking place during this volatile time, the Mexican people turned to art as a means of voicing their thoughts and opinions. Muralism became an effective form of social and political propaganda. Diego Rivera best utilized this art form truly to capture the essence of the Revolution and the multitude of factors that influenced this crucial time in Mexican history.

In these three mural series, Rivera's consummate skill presents itself as he cleverly portrays, within single mural sets, both the advantages of United States industry and the flaws of that system. Rivera's depictions of United States' industrial influence on Mexico coincide with the ideas of 'switching costs', 'critical junctures', 'advantage of the status quo', and many other articulations of path dependence theory. Throughout all of these works Rivera makes it clear that, like his brand of muralism, Mexico should create its own identity and forge its own path to modernity rather than relying on the capitalist example of modernity provided by the United States.

Rivera's works demonstrate art's ability to comment on simultaneously contradictory visions of one subject. Rivera's own experiences influence his belief that Mexico should draw from the expertise of United States industry while implementing Communist principles into Mexican society; his murals show how art has the ability to act as a medium for social and political change.

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