A Visitor’s Guide to The Epic of American Civilization

The Epic of American Civilization represents the most ambitious public work undertaken by the renowned Mexican muralist during his years in the United States. Despite its “epic” title, Orozco conceived of the mural not as a narrative but as a work structured around an “American idea,” specifically a representation of a continent characterized by the duality of indigenous and European historical experiences. He used the reserve reading room’s symmetrical west and east wings—devoted to pre-Hispanic and post-conquest civilizations, respectively—to create historical and cross-cultural parallels and to suggest the cyclical nature of human conflict, self-sacrifice, and regeneration.

2. Snakes and Spears

1. Migration

3. Ancient Human Sacrifice

4. Aztec Warriors

5. Coming of Quetzalcoatl

6. The Pre-Columbian Golden Age

7. Departure of Quetzalcoatl

8. The Prophecy

9. Totem Poles

10. Machine Totems

11. Cortez and the Cross

12. The Machine

13. Anglo-America

14. Hispano-America

15. Gods of the Modern World

16. Symbols of Nationalism

17. Modern Human Sacrifice

18. Modern Migration of the Spirit

19. Chains of the Spirit

20. Modern Industrial Man I

20. Modern Industrial Man II

20. Modern Industrial Man III