

# Jean Charlot's Shield of the National University of Mexico



## Description:

Title:	National University of Mexico Shield
Author:	Jean Charlot
Year:	1924
Description:	Ribbon: Universidad Nacional, MCMXXIV Eagle with Condor holding a Shield of Latin America with the legend: "POR MI RAZA HABLARA EL ESPIRITU", (By my Race the Spirit will Speak).
Size:	Approx. 1 meter high x 80 cms wide. (39 in x 31 in) Approx.
Location:	Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), Court of Fiestas, Main Floor, South side. República de Argentina, Número 28, Centro Histórico, Cd. De México. Mex.
Place:	Now: Salón Iberoamericano (Before: Biblioteca Iberoamericana)

## Historical Background

During the government of President Alvaro Obregon (1921-1924) mural painting was actively promoted by Minister of Education José Vasconcelos, who commissioned a massive mural painting promoting Mexican heritage and culture. His first commission was to paint murals in the Preparatory School or Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, where the University Shield was painted by Jean Charlot in 1923 at the rest of the main stairway. The next project was in the Courts of the new Ministry of Education building (SEP) and another shield was painted in 1924, with a ribbon integrated with the name of the University and year of realization. The place where the shield was painted was originally the Church of the Convent of the Incarnation, built in XVII and inaugurated in 1924 as a Library and Hall of Latin American Flags, better known as a Biblioteca Iberoamericana, now Salón Iberoamericano. The shield of Jean Charlot and the mural painted by Roberto Montenegro were crucial for the inauguration of this place as a library.

Comparison between the two shields

### Shield of the National University of Mexico

1923

Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso



1924

Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)



## Philosophy of the Shield

José Vasconcelos Calderón (28 February 1882 – 30 June 1959) was an important Mexican writer, philosopher and politician and was rector of the Universidad Nacional de México in 1920. From 1921 to 1924, he was the Director of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), this is when he commissioned all the murals in the Antiguo Colegio San Ildefonso and later the murals of the headquarters of the SEP.

He designed the logo of the University with a new philosophy "The Cosmic Race", it has an eagle and a condor holding a shield showing the map of Latin America with a surrounded phrase "Por mi raza hablará el espíritu" (By my Race the Spirit will speak).

The official web page of the University display this information about the meaning of the shield and motto.



"During his rectory, José Vasconcelos provided the University with its current shield, in which the Mexican eagle and the Andean condor, like a double-headed bird, protect the deployment of the map of Latin America, from the northern border of Mexico to Cabo de Hornos, reflecting the unification of Ibero-Americans: "Our new and ancient continent, predestined to contain a fifth race, the cosmic race, in which the dispersed will be fused and the unity will be consummated".<sup>1</sup>

1.- [www.unam.mx/acerca-de-la-unam/identidad-unam/escudo](http://www.unam.mx/acerca-de-la-unam/identidad-unam/escudo)

*Por mi raza  
hablará el espíritu*

"The motto that animates the National University, (By my Race the Spirit will Speak), reveals the humanistic vocation with which it was conceived. The author of this famous phrase, José Vasconcelos, assumed the rectory in 1920, at a time when the hopes of the Revolution were still alive, there was a great faith in the Fatherland and redemptive spirit extended into the environment. It "means in this motto the conviction that our race will elaborate a culture of new tendencies, of spiritual and free essence," explained the "Master of America" when presenting the proposal. Later, he would specify: "I imagined the university shield that I presented to the Council, roughly and with a legend: (Through my Race the Spirit will Speak), pretending to mean that we woke up from a long night of oppression".<sup>2</sup>

2.- [www.unam.mx/acerca-de-la-unam/identidad-unam/lema](http://www.unam.mx/acerca-de-la-unam/identidad-unam/lema)

## **The Motives of the Shield**

In the speech (The Motives of the Shield) found in the book: José Vasconcelos y la Universidad, he declares and extends the meaning of it:

"Graphic symbol of the emergence of the Mexican soul, was the design of the new shield, whose story I am describing. Comprises the coat of arms of two inseparable elements: map of Spanish America that holds in its background, and the slogan that makes sense. Above the framework, an eagle and a condor replace two-faced Eagle of the coat of arms of the Spanish Empire of our parents. Now, in the shield, the Eagle represents our legendary Mexico, and condor reminds the collective epic of the brothers of South America people.

Represented in this way the unity of our race, was only missing ask the Verb an expression that will mark the path of the common destination. This, suddenly came to me, and was the voice of a longing prospect of the University and had to rumble by all the confines of language: the motto commitment is perhaps too ambitious.

(By my Race the Spirit will Speak), we will have to be something that means to the world. And first I said race because I have it, we have it. Our race, by blood, you know, is double, but only in Mexico, in Peru, in Ecuador, where there are Indians. In the rest of America our race is a mixture of Latin, Spanish and Italian base which does not exclude one of the varieties of man, the Brazil black, nor the Chinese of the Peruvian coast. A composite breed that will be even more in the future.

Hence the thesis of the cosmic race that is implicitly contained in the Shield and which today announce historians as Toynbee, as fatal human conglomerate in the world. But for now, you have to start remembering that we are Latin. And Latin,

drive us forward the DNA of the most prized civilizations: the Hellenic soul and the Judeo-Christian miracle, the Right of the pagan Rome and the civilizing work of the Roma Catholic.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Universidad Autónoma de México, Guadalupe Pérez San Vicente, 1979. La Extensión Universitaria, Notas para su Historia, Tomo 1, volumen VI, Pág. 59.

<sup>3</sup> José Vasconcelos y la Universidad. Introducción y Selección de Alvaro Matute, Textos de Humanidades, Colección de Educadores Mexicanos. Los Motivos del Escudo, Pág. 214 and 215.

Images:

Biblioteca Iberoamericana, now Salón Iberoamericano.



Entrance of the Salon Iberoamericano inside SEP, decorated with murals of Diego Rivera.





Mural of Roberto Montenegro "La Union de los pueblos Latinoamericanos" The Union of the Latin American People, in front of Charlot's shield.



The Universidad Nacional Shield is located at the center of two medallions, the one on the left is the Shield of the Mexican Flag, the other the Spanish coat of arms.





General view of the salon.