The Bostonians in Distress

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Description

The picture of Bostonians in Distress is attributed to Philip Dawe and was published by Robert Sayer and John Bennett in a London newspaper on 19 November 1774. The picture is a symbol of the aftermath of the Boston Tea Party and the consequences the American colonists had to suffer for raising a rebellion against the 'powerful' British. The picture was published in a London newspaper and was a presentation of the British point of view of the situation.

However, the picture was well-received by both sides of the rivalry. This is because the British loathed the colonists for their disorganized revolt and weaknesses and adored their power over them, while the Americans saw this as a true depiction of their suffering and the laws and regulations set by the British to exploit them.

Analysis

The first thing to notice in the picture is the prominent cage where the Americans are shown as disorganized, poor, and suffering while the British soldiers are feeding them fish from the basket. Other prominent objects in the picture are the cannons facing the "Liberty Tree." There are soldiers and British troops in the background, which highlights the strength of the British army.

The picture shows daytime, as indicated by the bright colors, and the sky is in a light blue shade with a number of clouds that are seen in daylight. The colorist has used light tones of red, yellow, and blue to highlight the power (red), joy (yellow), and depression (blue) of the colonists. The overall appeal of the image is emotional. Even though the combination of the bright colors is a depiction of noise, it also shows the chaos that existed at the time it was created.

The Americans in the cage are depicted as distressed humans who are hungry for the resources (in this case, the fish) of the British. One of the men who stands strong at the back holds a transcript, which is a portrayal of their irrelevant and outrageous demands, considering the British point of view. On the other hand, the Americans are also shown to be helping each other. The colonist at the left of the cage is feeding his fellow colonists, which shows their unity in times of distress (Dawe, P., 1774).

There are several themes discussed in the picture through the different principles of art, such as the contrast of emotions used between the despair of the colonists and the joy of greed of the British.

Moreover, the rhythm and movement of the British soldiers and troops are evidence of their unity and power over the disorganized American colonists, who are constantly failing.

Interpretation

The picture was published right after the Boston Tea Party was held, and the tensions between American colonists and the British grew. The picture shows the viewpoint of the British regarding the American rebellion. However, the colonists also thought of the print as a true representation of how they were treated poorly by the British.

The picture appeals to the audience with an emotional factor using the hues of depression and shapes that portray cruelty from the American point of view, while from the British point of view, it is a symbol of their greatness.

The picture has a very strong appeal to its audience on both sides of the rivalry. The artist's intention was to shed light on the crisis after the Boston Tea Party and the distress between the colonists and the British. The picture strikes an emotion of sympathy for the American colonists who were oppressed by the British through laws and regulations that were exploiting them and their resources (National Archives, n.d.).

The work named "Boston in Distress" sets a mood of tension and sympathy for the American colonists. The British might see this as a symbol of power, but the American colonists who struggled to achieve their independence see this as a very painful portrait of their emotions.

The picture highlights men's primary weakness, which is hunger and the need for survival. This is shown through the weak and distressed Americans who fell for the fish offered by the British. The picture was meant to depict the greatness of the British Empire, which had won many battles, and the emerging revolt was not any different. Moreover, one of the most prominent objects shown is the man exchanging his transcripts for the food provided by the British. This is another depiction of the weakness of the American colonists.

Even though this piece of art was a portrayal of the British point of view, the artist has shown sympathy for the American colonists and shows their suffering, which ignites the feeling of pain among American viewers.

Judgment

The picture of "Boston in Distress" holds a significant position in history as it was an attempt at comforting the British public, who were worried about the increasing tensions between the American colonists and the British Empire while they were also in debt. On the other hand, it was a significant moment for the colonists to realize the injustice of the British and the power of their unity (British

Museum, n.d.).

In the modern day, it is a creative summary of the sufferings of the founding fathers and the fighters of freedom and independence. It is also an excellent example of how the British viewed ‘power’ during the early 17th and 18th centuries. Hence, the overall theme of the picture is one but can be viewed in multiple ways by different audiences. I saw the picture as a beautiful piece of art that marked an important event in American history. The picture reminded me of men’s biggest weakness, which is hunger and helplessness. At the same time, it sheds light on men’s nature when it comes to power and the authority to exploit the weaker opposition.

The picture holds a significant place as it is a painful reminder of the oppression of the American colonists and their struggles. On the other hand, it teaches the audience about history and how it is influenced by opinions and interpretations of an event.

References

Dawe, P. (1774). *The Bostonians in distress*. Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004673300/

British Museum. (n.d.). The Bostonians in distress. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-4467