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Honors 190

10 December 2018

A New Perspective on the Louisiana Purchase

Art influences societies and communities of people often times by just adding a new perspective. Many people grow up not being educated on multiple sides of an issue before making up their mind or decisions based on the people around them. Art is especially influential because it adds visuals that the reader can sympathize or relate to. Reading vague texts about historical events sometimes lacks connection with the reader at a sentimental level. This is where art and seeing the powerful way people express meaningful things to them becomes influential. While researching examples of how art can play a prominent role in changing perspective, the Louisiana Purchase cannot be overlooked. This historical, world-changing event that took place in the early 19th century and its effects are not fully understood by the majority of people. More often than not, when one group of people prosper, it is at the cost of another. Growing up in the United States, schools never taught children about the horrific events that were the foundation of the Louisiana Purchase. By analyzing art from this time period, people can realize the unfortunate events that are usually left untold. Haitian art and artists have told their culture's perspective of Napoleon and Jefferson's deal, and their work should not go unnoticed. It is powerful, influential, and tells the story from a completely different perspective than most people are accustomed to (McNamara).

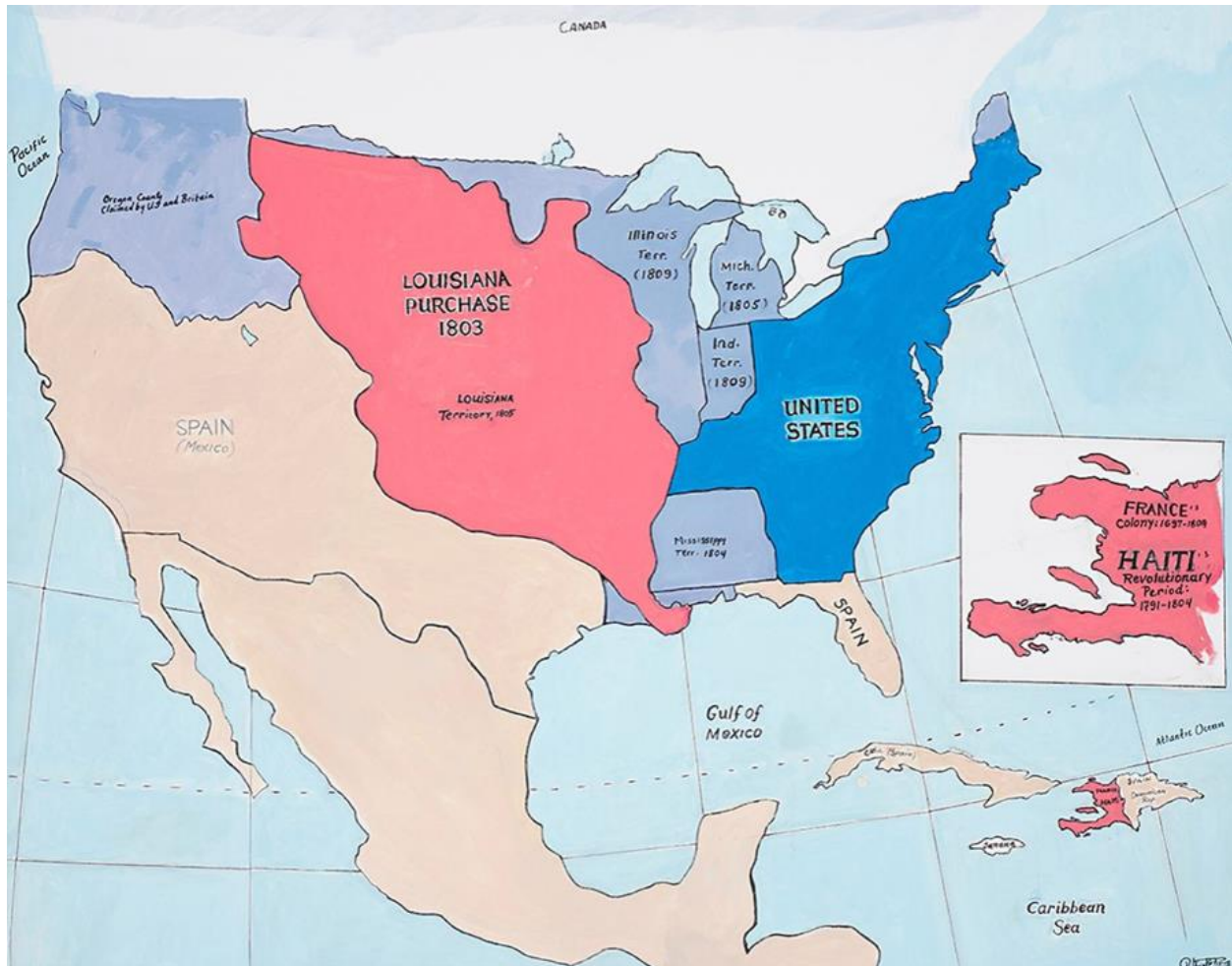
One Haitian artist, who is widely known around Lawrence and the University of Kansas community, displays the connection between Haiti and the United States in his painting which is displayed at the Spencer Art Museum. Ulrick Jean-Pierre takes more of an informative approach

in his painting titled “Map of Haiti-Louisiana Migrations”. Rather than showing how inhumane the foundation of this historical event was, he simply wanted to inform people, especially Americans, where the roots of their homeland were founded. Jean-Pierre does this by using a couple of different techniques. One aspect of this painting that makes it notable is his strategic use of color. This painting is not colored like any traditional map. The colors have a meaning which are a part of a larger metaphor within this work. Viewer’s can first see this when analyzing the similarity of color between Haiti and what was then the Louisiana Territory. Why is this significant? Jean-Pierre wanted to give people something visual to remember that the acquiring of the Louisiana Purchase was done in large part by the people of Haiti. When people see the color red on this map, they immediately notice that is in only two places: the Louisiana Territory and Haiti. This shows the viewer that there is a connection significant enough between these two places that Jean-Pierre thought it should be recognized in his painting (Jean-Pierre).

Another strategy that Jean-Pierre uses in his work to inform people more about the Louisiana Purchase was his use of different scaling of images and useful geometry. One thing that stands out to the reader immediately about this painting is the large, magnified size of Haiti in addition to its normal size. This makes the viewer think about why another larger picture of Haiti is necessary. It is simply to emphasize the fact that Haiti is the main focal point of the painting. Whether talking about Haitian migration to the United States, or Haiti’s influence on the Louisiana Purchase, it stands as the central focus of the painting. Another one of Jean-Pierre’s techniques that stand out in this painting is his use of geometry to show relationships between places. For example, there are two lines drawn out from Hispiñola and Cuba to the United States. The one from Haiti points to Louisiana, and the one from Cuba points to the southeastern region of the United States. Jean-Pierre does this to once again emphasize to the

viewer how important these countries are to the culture of these regions in the United States from past to present (Jean-Pierre).

Map of Haiti-Louisiana Migrations



<https://ulrickjeanpierre.com/current-exhibits>

Another very influential piece of art that helps change the perspective of people when thinking about the Louisiana Purchase is the painting below which depicts slaves revolting against the French during the Haitian Revolution. Unfortunately, no artist was associated with this painting and trying to find one was not successful. However, this does not change the message and significance of the painting. This painting means a thousand words and is especially

relevant when referencing how much Haitians suffered before America acquired the Louisiana Territory from France (Blakemore).

One obvious aspect of this painting is the difference of clothing and technology between the French and Haitian slaves. The French have expensive uniforms along with advanced weapons at the time. Seeing this can help people visualize just how much of an advantage the French had on Haitian slaves. Constant suffering along with millions of casualties were inevitable for the slaves. However, the persistence of their fighting over the years slowly weakened the French army enough to need the money from the Louisiana Purchase to help rejuvenate its empire (Blakemore).

Another part of this painting that makes it significant is how there are no French on the ground suffering. The only people in this painting that are depicted on the ground are Haitian rebels. This is a very important part of the painting because although the slaves weakened the French army substantially, they didn't have the numbers and technology to drive them out which costed them countless lives. The painting essentially is a metaphor for how many lives were sacrificed by the Haitian slaves in order to fight for what they believed in.

Slaves Revolting Against French Power in Haiti



<https://www.history.com/news/louisiana-purchase-price-french-colonial-slave-rebellion>

The majority of people are not familiar with the entire story behind the Louisiana Purchase. The background story is just as important as the actual event. Without the Haitian Revolution, which took a strong hit to the French army, economy, and technology, Napoleon never would have thought that they needed to sell the prosperous Louisiana Territory. Without the courageous and persistent revolt by Haitian rebels in the late 18th century, the United States would not be what it is like today. It is to those courageous slaves credit that they helped build the foundation to the United States of America. However, their suffering and sacrifices often go unappreciated and unacknowledged. That is why art can be one of the most influential tools to help give people a new perspective on this important historical event. Americans should know and acknowledge everyone who fought for their country including instances where it may have been indirect. Moreover, without the Haitian Revolution and the courageous behaviors of Haitian

slaves in the late 18th century, America would not be how it is today, and art explicitly depicts how much these rebels sacrificed.

References

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