

Analysis of the coronation of napoleon essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Coronation that Shook the World The Coronation of Napoleon by Jacques-Louis David is imposing in its dimensions. It stands at twenty feet by thirty feet and is displayed in the main gallery of the Louvre museum in Paris. David began this work of art after being orally commissioned by Napoleon in September of 1804. The painting came to its completion November of 1807. The sole fact that the painting took three years to complete demonstrates something about the magnitude and scale of the painting.

This was all done on purpose of course in order to record this significant moment in the emperor's life. Works of art are not entirely meant to be aesthetically pleasing The Coronation of Napoleon was commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte in order to magnify the image of one man: himself. As stated in the book, Art History by Marilyn Stokstad, the coronation was a grandiose event lasting about three hours in length but Napoleon commissioned his personal artist, David, to record the event for prosperity. This painting shows David's interpretation of an event that clearly was the beginning of a historically significant period in history. One man is represented as emperor and a form of demigod all at once.

Through the various artistic techniques used by Jacques-Louis David, we can infer the importance and historical significance of Napoleon Bonaparte. The first aspect that is significantly noticeable in the painting is that of the occupancy at the cathedral. The ceremony took place at the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the most famous cathedral in France. Stokstad's book states that it was a cold day in Paris and the temperature inside the Cathedral was warm due to the fact that there were so many bodies present.

David wanted to emphasize this in the painting in order to demonstrate Napoleon's popularity. He does this by portraying every person in detail and David cuts the painting off at some point, but he leaves the continuation of the crowd to the viewers' imagination. In the painting one notices that the contrast in lighting and perspective places Napoleon at the center of all the viewers, in and out of the painting. What is interesting about this is that Napoleon is standing royally, while Pope Pius VII sits behind him anxiously watching.

On any other occasion the Pope would be the center of attention while everyone, even an emperor, watches anxiously. David clearly wanted to point this out in the painting to show Napoleons importance over the Church. This may not be the way that David personally felt, but because he was painting it under Napoleon's commission David wanted to please the emperor. The fact that Napoleon was emperor is clearly noticeable. The painting shows him standing authoritatively over his wife Josephine, who is kneeling in a somewhat submissive fashion as Napoleon is going to crown her.

It was a custom of that time that the Pope would coronate the monarchs himself but the fact that Napoleon is doing it shows that the clergy will not control him as the monarchs before him were. David was a supporter of the French Revolution and this may be his political influence on the painting even though Napoleon was a son of the Revolution as well. We can also see that the way that Napoleon was dressed in the painting shows that he was emperor and there was no doubt about it. On Napoleon's head are the laurel leaves that were custom of the Roman imperial rulers to wear.

This crown was a symbol of power and strength. Napoleon is also adorned with a red silk cape that is embroidered in gold. The usual color of royalty at the time was purple but Napoleon broke away from this mold. Once again showing David and Napoleon's revolutionary ties.

In the background we see that the Cathedral's walls are also draped in red silk with embroidered gold. This shows David's attention to detail in the painting in that the draperies are matching with what Napoleon and his wife Josephine is wearing. David models the environment of the painting to Napoleon's ego. The attention to the detail in the background appropriates the background to the event that is being portrayed. The social-political aspects of this painting are hard to miss.

The painting portrays the way that Napoleon wanted to rule over his empire. He wanted to be the center of it and the center of all decision-making. David was commissioned to paint this in order for people to look upon the painting and remember how important the man in the center is. The painting portrays Napoleon as an absolute monarch, which couldn't be farther from what he intended to be. This was done by David as a form of political propaganda, in order for anyone who looked upon this painting at that time would really get an idea as to the importance of Napoleon.

This mystifies the one man who was not an absolute monarch but a contemporary, ordinary emperor who reshaped the way government by creating administrations and reshaping government more into what it is today. Works Cited Strokstad, Marilyn. Art History. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc. , 2005.