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Imperial Federation, Map of the World Showing The Extent of the British Empire in 1886.

Stock#: 101795
Map Maker: Graphic Co. / Crane
Date: 1886
Place: London
Color: Color
Condition: VG
Size: 30 x 23 inches (including text)
Price: Not Available



Description:

The Apex of British Colonial Power - From A Socialist Perspective?

This is Walter Crane's 1886 map of the global British Empire, one of the all-time classics of persuasive mapmaking.

The map was produced as a supplement to the London magazine the *Graphic*, on the eve of Victoria's 1887 Jubilee. The map features an image of the world on Mercator's Projection with Britain's colonial territories rendered in pink and the rest of the world in a neutral tone. In the upper-right corner is an inset map of the British Empire 100 years earlier, in 1786, (conveniently, this was just three years after Britain officially lost the territory that would become the United States). Probably the most engaging aspect of the map is its extensive border illustrations in Crane's characteristic Pre-Raphaelite style. There are stylized men and women from all over the British Empire, representing the diversity of humanity and nature overseen by the personification of Britannia, who sits at the center, on a globe supported by Atlas. On the top three maidens hold the banners "Freedom", "Fraternity", "Federation".

At first glance, the map appears to be a straightforward celebration of Britain's colonial might. Indeed, that is how it was interpreted by Brian Harley in his 1988 essay "Maps, knowledge and power." This interpretation was substantially questioned by Pippa Biltcliffe in her 2005 *Imago Mundi* essay on the map. In that essay, Biltcliffe identifies Crane as the artist of the map (which had previously been thought to be anonymous), based on the inclusion of his signature crane emblem and initials in the extreme lower-left of the image. And, as Biltcliffe explains, Crane's involvement in the project substantially complicates the



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notion that this was intended by him as a simple piece of imperialistic propaganda. For Crane was a socialist, a member of the Social Democratic Federation, and later a Fabian. Why would someone with those ideological commitments engage in colonialist boosterism? Biltcliffe's article is well worth a read, but the answer relates to how modern viewers impart their own understanding of modern ideologies onto those of the past. While Crane was opposed to many aspects of capitalism and commercial imperialism, he, like many of his fellow travelers in Britain, did see the Empire as a conduit for progressive social changes they wished to see imparted in the rest of the world.

Biltcliffe summarized her reinterpretation of the Crane map as follows:

An analysis of the 1886 Imperial Federation Map indicates how, as Harley proposed, this map articulates a language of imperial power. I have briefly suggested how the socialistic outlook of Walter Crane, and fuller consideration of the context in which this map was produced, open up the map to other readings. While the map extols the virtues of empire, within the same cartographical space is a reformist appeal for the revision of imperial policies, suggesting a plural and diffuse play of power across what might otherwise be viewed as imperialist propaganda. The evidence offered by the India and Colonial Exhibition's blue map reveals the intertextual context in which Crane's map must be situated. Crane's possible reworking of this latter map highlights the interplay between cartographical forms propagating a diverse range of imperial messages. It is likely that further research will bring to light other contexts and alternative understandings to aid the interpretation of this celebrated map, and others like it.

The Imperial Federation League

The Imperial Federation League was a political organization active at the end of the 19th century that sought a radical reorganization of the British Empire into an "Imperial Federation", with the disparate polities joining together into formal "representative" shared governance. The organization was founded in 1884 by W.E. Forster, with branches in British colonies the world over. Their first concrete accomplishment was in the calling of the First Colonial Conference in 1887, at the time of Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Domestic politics in the U.K. shifted in the 1890s and the IFL program was summarily rejected by Prime Minister William Gladstone, essentially ending the organization.

Detailed Condition:

Some very minor imperfections not affecting the main map image.