

I chose to review John Updike's Review "It Was Sad" from the October 14th issue of "The New Yorker". In the review, Updike examines several works concerning the tragedy of the Titanic. He cites these works, I feel, to support his own opinion about the event, and the different accounts of what really happened.

Updike spends some time disproving the belief that the upper class male passengers heroically sacrificed their own seats on the lifeboats for those less fortunate than themselves. He even points out, who he feels, are the real heroes in this catastrophe. This shows he is writing from a moral perspective, relating to these works.

He definitely takes the position of the lower class of American society as this time in history, and even brings up the topic of racism and sexism in the recall of the event. It seems that the ships crew and the lower class passengers were the most courageous in the eventful two and half hours it took for the ship to totally go under. He provides quotes from the various selections, one being the statistics of death, by class. These statistics show that, in actuality, more of the upper class passengers survived than the lower classes (by both percentage, and total people).

Updike also examines, in depth, the cultural effect of the sinking of the Titanic. The thought that a ship declared unsinkable going down on its first voyage was at the very least, shocking to the public. Who could look at invention and progress in the same way? Updike seems to point out that the public at this time is naive and quick to make idealistic judgments.

He also refers to the passengers moral standpoints, describing the decisions they made not only during the ship's final hours but also during the whole trip. To further prove his point, he gives the testimony included in one of the books, concerning a Senator who heard the screaming of the suffering passengers but made no attempt to rescue them. The people on that half filled life boat refused to return for other, offering the excuse that they could have been injured by the crowd. He gives other similar examples of such acts.

It seems to me that Updike not only wanted to review the events of the disaster, but also make a statement about social classes and their values. I feel that he presented an accurate description of the American cultural scene at that time.

