



This is an American propaganda poster from World War I. Its purpose was to persuade the United States' young men to join the United States Army in order to fight the Germans.

This image does much to help us understand World War I-era America. We learn, first of all, that the Germans were viewed as cruel, savage, and barbaric. We know this because the gorilla is clearly meant to be a German, with his club labeled 'Kultur' (a German word) and a Germanic helmet. Second, it is clear that the war had already wrought terrible destruction by 1917. We can tell this based on the background of the image, where we can see all the ruins in what is obviously supposed to be Europe. Third, it is obvious that the government is trying to motivate potential soldiers by playing on their fears of what might happen if Germany wins—an invasion of the U.S., and possible rape and pillage of the country. We can see in the image that the German gorilla has clearly left Europe, crossed the ocean, and arrived in America, where he has already taken possession of a white woman who represents 'liberty.' Finally, it's seems that literacy may not have been quite as widespread then as it is today. This is suggested to me by the fact that the poster uses only a few, very simple words. I can imagine that even if a potential soldier couldn't read at all, he might still understand the message.

Moving on to the "big picture," this image illustrates at least one way in which America has not changed very much over time: The tendency to portray those who are seen as "different" as animal-like and/or savage. In

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the mid- and late-19th century, for example, there was blackface minstrelsy, which portrayed African Americans as childish, inhuman, and ape-like. See the image on the next page for an example. During the age of imperialism, at the turn of the 20th century, the entire notion of the “White Man’s Burden” was based on the idea that non-white peoples were inherently inferior. We recall the original Rudyard Kipling poem that “named” the White Man’s Burden, in which he describes the non-whites as “half-devil, half child.” The “Mad Brute” image, of course, fits with the theme, portraying the Germans as gorillas like it does. During World War II, the Japanese were often portrayed as yellow-skinned, treacherous snakes, as in the propaganda poster shown on the next page. Today, we see Muslims being portrayed in the same way, at least among some Americans. Dr. Ben Carson, while running for president this year, at one point compared (some) Muslims to dogs, declaring, “If there’s a rabid dog running around in your neighborhood, you’re probably not going to assume something good about that dog, and you’re probably going to put your children out of the way.”

At the same time, the image can also be used to illustrate one way in which America has changed over time, namely that we’ve gone from being a bit “weak” and/or a “victim” to feeling very strong. If we look at the image on the last page, we see that Spain is portrayed as a huge, barbarous savage, with the sailors of the *Maine* as Spain’s innocent victim. Similarly, the “Mad Brute” image portrays things in much the same way, with Germany as a huge, fearsome gorilla and the U.S. as the gorilla’s unwilling and overmatched victim. By World War II, however, things seem to be a bit more equal. We see in the comic book cover that Captain America does not appear to be intimidated by Hitler at all. By the latter days of the Cold War, America was feeling quite mighty indeed, as indicated by several of the movies of that era, like *Top Gun* and *Rocky IV*, where the Americans dominate the Russians. Today, Americans are generally confident that we are the most powerful nation in the world. This is reflected in Donald Trump’s inaugural address, when he said, “America is totally unstoppable. There should be no fear -- we are protected, and we will always be protected. We will be protected by the great men and women of our military and law enforcement and, most importantly, we are protected by God.”

← **First example from other eras that illustrates larger theme (image)**

← **Second example that illustrates larger theme (poem)**

← **Explanation of how this image first with larger theme**

← **Third example that illustrates larger theme (image)**

← **Fourth example that illustrates larger theme (quotation)**

Note that this “larger theme” is successful because it connects **FIVE separate examples together, each of them from a different era (1800s, early 1900s, 1917, 1940s, and today)**

← **Larger theme: How America HAS changed**

← **First example from other eras that illustrates larger theme (image)**

← **Explanation of how this image first with larger theme**

← **Second example that illustrates larger theme (image)**

← **Third example that illustrates larger theme (movies)**

← **Fourth example that illustrates larger theme (quote)**

Note that this “larger theme” is successful because, once again, it connects **FIVE separate examples together, each of them from a different era (1898, 1917, 1940s, 1980s, and today)**

