



DEMONIZING THE ENEMY

Although British appeals to nationalism and the glory of empire certainly did their part, the First World War could not have been won without a certain amount of fearmongering. Despite the ruling royal family of Britain being German in origin and Germany's having been a British ally in earlier wars, notably against Napoleon, the enemy had to be portrayed as less than human. In many posters, "the Hun" is portrayed as a fierce and uncivilized adversary. This display case contains examples of the British government's attempts to alert the population to their impending danger.

The first poster, a political cartoon, dated 1915, depicts Kaiser Wilhelm II as a terrorizing, monstrous creature that fires tank shells from his mouth, thus portraying the German war machine and Kaiser as threats to national sovereignty and human rights. Depicting the Kaiser in control of all land, sea, and the skies played on British fears of losing important trade routes to the East, specifically India. Echoing notions of a massive German empire, the poster "The Prussian Octopus" (1915) portrays German sovereignty as two sprawling octopi covering formerly independent nations. In the upper-right corner are details of German territorial acquisitions since 1740. The octopi evoke a deceptive creature with large reach, characterizing Germany as a sinister nation with an influence extending throughout Europe.

The final poster in the case illustrates the threat closer to home. Its message is simple: support war bonds. The illustration suggests that failing to do so will result in Germany enslaving Britain's working class. This implication that German victory in the war would dramatically alter the livelihoods of working men and their families provided a valuable incentive for enlistment. Thus, by demonizing the enemy as a ruthless sovereignty, British officials created a powerful motivation for young British men to support the war effort.

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