



Are you surprised to see car sharing as a subject of propaganda? What's your reaction to each poster? How does looking at these images as propaganda, rather than as advertisements or marketing material, influence your view of their message? Would the message promoting car sharing have more influence on you if you were already considering doing it?

The Messages in Propaganda

There's an Internet meme known as Godwin's Law of Nazi Analogies that states: "As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one."¹

With the common use of Nazi name-calling these days, it's hard sometimes to remember that during World War II when people talked about Hitler and the Nazis, they were talking about actual Nazis. Hitler was a popular figure used by American and European government propagandists, as can be seen in the poster on the left promoting car sharing. Although it doesn't invoke Hitler, the Minnesota Department of Transportation also wants to get people carpooling with its Greater Minnesota Commuter Challenge and is promoting the cause using propaganda posters as well.²

WHAT are these posters saying?

What message is the World War II poster on the left trying to convey? What is the message of the poster on the right from the Minnesota Department of Transportation trying to say?

WHY are they sending the message?

Why are these two groups sending these messages? What is their goal in trying to persuade you to carpool?

HOW do you and your classmates interpret these messages?

How do you react to messages like these? How do arguments today comparing someone to Hitler differ from those made during the World War II era? How do the arguments for carpooling during World War II differ from arguments today? Do you think one is more persuasive than the other? Why?

¹Mike Godwin, "Meme, Counter-Meme," *Wired*, October 1994, www.wired.com/wired/archive/2.10/godwin.if.html.

²Minnesota Department of Transportation, "The Greater Minnesota Commuter Challenge," 2012, www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/commuter/commute.html.

