

Six Features of Popular Stereotypes

(from *Capt. America & the Crusade Against Evil*)

1 – Identification of the person or movement with one side of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. Dualism of the late biblical variety is essential for mutually exclusive categories (cowboys vs Indians, etc.).

2 – Behavior (a): The good are marked by a defensive stance, while the bad are offensive and aggressive.

3 -- Behavior (b): The good behave cleanly and fairly and have a clean appearance, while the bad are dirty and behave unfairly.

4 – Behavior (c): The good are law abiding and the bad are lawless. The villain openly flouts the law, while the redemption hero always attempts to be non-violent but upon provocation may “take the law into his own hands” to save the impotent and incompetent (but still innocent) community.

5 – Attitudes (a): The good are faithful to ideals, while the bad refuse to repent for their sinful behavior, despite being given opportunities to do so. The hero never seeks the accolades of the community, acting only out of principle.

6 -- Attitudes (b): The good guy maintains his humility even in the face of the arrogance of his antagonist. He derives no pleasure from his violent retribution. His trust is not in himself but in the cosmic source of justice. Humility involves avoiding any objectionable emotion or motive. The villain loses control of his emotions.

These six features of contemporary American stereotypes of good and evil interlock so that **when one of them appears, the others are automatically evoked**. The negative features evoke a reverse image by which one tends to compare himself favorably with every adversary. The stereotypes provide the set of conventions by which characters in comics, movies, books and politics are identified as belonging either to God or the Devil. They are so deeply rooted in the American mind that the complexity of moral reality comes pre-processed as the product of the stereotype.