

**The Impulses That Led to the *Heart of Darkness*:
An Exploration of the Human Condition in the Victorian Age as Compared to the Modern Era**

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The hypocrisy of the Victorian Age seems to have helped to motivate Conrad to write *Heart of Darkness*. During the Victorian Age, the British Empire rose to its height. The British considered themselves the model of the civilized world, spearheading the industrial revolution and setting the moral example for the rest of the world. However, beneath the surface of this great empire laid millions of subjugated people. Britain controlled lands in Africa, India, and Australia where the native populations were subjected to British rule. It is during this time that the British Empire expanded to control 25 percent of the world. The *Heart of Darkness* reveals the “darkness” of the “civilized world” and the “light” in the “savage world.” It shows that evil exists even in the things we ultimately view as “good” and shows how goodness exists in those things we define as purely “evil.” It completely changes the world-view of the Western reader, perhaps calling for political and social change.

During the Victorian Age, the industrial revolution brought with it the rise of the middle class. Many of the poor industrial workers rose up to the middle class and began to demand more freedoms. England was ruled by the Aristocracy and the legitimacy of the Aristocracy as the ruling class was brought into question by the new working class. Americans, today, share this concern for individual freedoms as well as question the motives of the political leaders.

Americans also share the Victorian concern for decency, even though television and fashion have evolved to be more revealing. Americans today censor media more than European nations. Meanwhile, Americans produce the same sort of hypocrisy as the Victorians. The Victorians faced a problem with prostitution, which was brought to light by the Jack the Ripper killings. While Americans try to present their moral values of abstinence and media censorship as the best programs, we are faced with teen pregnancy and illegal pornography which lurks the internet. Among the great moral evils is the American rationalization of suspending due process for terrorist and contemplating

the use of torture to retrieve information from these terrorists.

During the Victorian Age, the rise of the middle class eventually led to more democratic forms of government in the world, which eventually led to women's rights and civil rights. Today, our rights have been brought into question again since the terrorist attacks of September 11th. The United States government has restricted freedoms of Americans, and the middle class is struggling to maintain the high standard of living while facing increasing costs without increases in work benefits. Then as well as today, prostitution continues to be a problem in our society, exposing the vulnerability of our poor. However, today sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV which did not exist in the Victorian Age, are threatening people of all walks of life, but spread heavily through promiscuity within our great abstinent society.

Hypocrisy still exists in our era as it did in the Victorian Age. Today, high crime rates expose the problems with our countries inability to provide for the poor. The attacks of September 11th show the vulnerability of the most powerful nation on the planet. Constant media coverage of social events and the war in Iraq expose problems within our society that might not have been seen during the Victorian Age. The studies done by professors and political analysts reflect today's society in both a positive and negative light. Today, films and documentaries expose problems in society but also bring about controversy.

The problem of evil in today's world still exists. In a world where we are horrified by the evils of the past, such as the holocaust and slavery, we still subjugate millions by trading with nations which do not have child labor laws, use torture to retrieve information from terrorists, and pass laws restricting the rights of American citizens in the name of national security. The same amount of evil exists today as it did a century ago and as it did two thousand years ago. Evil changes form throughout the centuries but never disappears entirely. It exists by covering behind the greatness of an exemplified nation and can only be pushed out.