

French schoolchildren invited to draw their impressions of the United States

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They choose fast food, fat people, and Bush in a tank.

In January, a cartoon festival was held in the town of Carquefou, just outside of Nantes in the northwest corner of France. Students of all ages competed in a contest to illustrate their vision of the United States. They drew obese Americans devouring Coca-Cola and McDonald's hamburgers. They drew the Statue of Liberty with fangs or in chains or being run over by a wicked Uncle Sam on a motorcycle. And they drew George W. Bush: Bush riding a tank to war; Bush taking over the world; Bush as a liar; Bush as a monster.

(I love the drawing of ravenous overweight superheroes.) The French image of the United States as the land of hamburgers and obesity extends beyond the minds of schoolchildren. It's also one of the salient features of "Belleville" (a thinly-disguised New York City) in the Academy Award-Nominated animated film *The Triplets of Belleville*. (Note: I saw *Triplets* and found it unsatisfying.)

(In another case of blog synchrony, Eric Gunnerson discussed the frustrating trend of "size inflation".)

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