

The Bird, the Banner and Uncle Sam. By Elinor Lander Horwitz, J. Roderick Moore, Consultant. Pp. 162, photographs, bibliography, index. Philadelphia and New York: J. P. Lippincott, 1976. \$5.95 paper.

Reviewed by Eleanor Wachs

In this year of Bicentennial hoopla, publishers, it seems, are willing to produce books that incorporate American patriotic symbols often disguised as representative of our national spirit. Elinor Lander Horwitz's The Bird, the Banner and Uncle Sam provides us with another unorthodox folklore book that can be placed on the folklorist's coffee table rather than on his bookshelf. Certainly many of us interested in America and her symbols from the beginning of the American Revolution past the War of 1812 and up to the present day are concerned with how the folk see their America. However, a majority of us (folklorists and, perhaps, social historians) should and must persist on a scholarly approach for Americana. Horwitz, though, may not have us in mind for her audience.

Claiming on the first page that "the American image is a compound of heroes and symbols, of signs and emblems," Horwitz tells us that patriotic symbols abound in American culture. And they do through advertisements (The Uncle Sam Range, Washington Crisps cereal, L & M cigarettes), to "My America," or presidential quilts to Uncle Sam posters, to red, white, and blue fire hydrants, and more. In fact, throughout the book she provides us with a picture from either a folk art collection or one of her own taking to tell us that America indeed loves its "symbols" and proudly waves them. However, one must take issue not with her cornucopia of folk artifacts and popular kitsch, but with how these items are framed.

Ms. Horwitz first begins with a discussion of the American Image, proceeds to Symbols (The Bald Eagle, The Stars and Stripes, Miss Liberty, Uncle Sam) to Patriotic Folk Heroes (18th century: George Washington; 19th century: Abraham Lincoln; 20th century: Theodore Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy; and Patriotic Folk Heroes in Action) and ends with a short list of sixteen titles as suggestions for further reading. Though apparently she has selected the proper categories for her description of Americana, the problem lies in her presentation of the materials. In each category she presents ample amounts of folk and popular art items, but she chooses to present them achronologically, which accounts for a great deal of historical springboarding on the reader's part. For example, we read on page 80 about the career of Miss Liberty as a decal on volunteer fire company engines in the later half of the 19th century, and then in the following paragraph we are told of 1840s examples. Her hodgepodge approach

within each category causes the reader to wonder about her rendering of the material itself.

However, the greatest disturbance of The Bird, the Banner, and Uncle Sam is Ms. Horwitz's misuse of cogent folkloric terms. On page 113 she asks: "What is a patriotic folk hero?" and replies with: "There is no generally accepted definition." And then three pages later provides us with a superficial definition omitting the word "folk": "A patriotic hero is someone who makes us proud of our country and of being Americans." Moreover, readers may wonder which "authorities" Ms. Horwitz has consulted since the book does not have any annotation. Often the reader is taken aback, for instance, when she tells us that "one authority on patriotic symbols sees the embroidered flag on the seat of a young man's jeans as evidence of true love of country." But who was that "one authority," Ms. Horwitz? Besides the question of sources, she describes her photographs in rather saccharine tones. For example, in her section concerning patriotic folk heroes, where she again includes George Washington, Horwitz comments on a George Washington whirligig: "This simple late nineteenth-century whirligig once turned its arms with every breeze, gladdening the heart of the creator." The whirligig appears on the same page as her comments, as does the majority of her descriptions about the artifacts shown.

The Bird, the Banner and Uncle Sam does raise some interesting questions. Why do Americans love and produce such folk art and popular culture items? Any analysis must be done by the individual reader since the author declines to comment.

Needless to say, and harsh criticism aside, the book does have some merit; the photographs are clear, the color insert exceptional and one does marvel at her collection which, for example, includes paper cuttings, lithographs, quilts with presidential designs, folk carvings of Lincoln and Uncle Sam, posters of Miss Liberty, needlepoints of Washington, a presidential toilet seat with the bald eagle, scrimshaw, patriotic tattoos, a red, white and blue airplane and house. The Bird, the Banner and Uncle Sam is a nice book to glance at and still wonder: what do these artifacts, which she insists on calling symbols, tell us about our country.