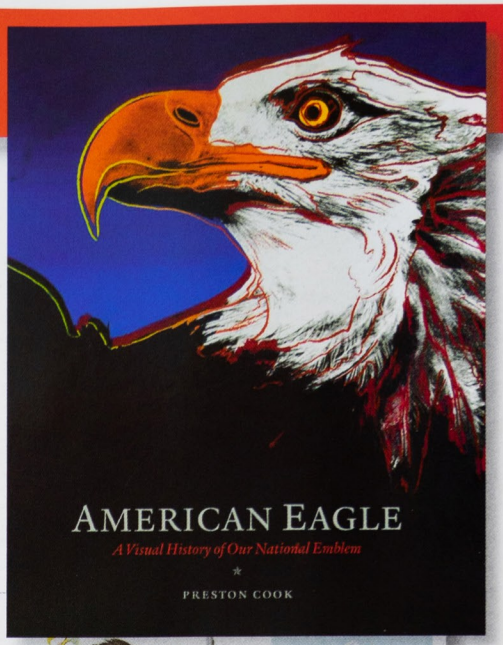
Big River Book Reviews



American Eagle: A Visual History of Our National Emblem

By Preston Cook, Goff Books, San Francisco, 2019; 264 pages, hardcover, $75.

Preston Cook has been collecting bald eagle objects for over 50 years. This large-format book (11 by 14 inches) has images of 1,300 objects from the collection, which exceeds 25,000 pieces.

The bald eagle is truly iconic in the U.S., representing patriotism and courage. As such it has been used extensively to class up everything from government documents to sweet potatoes. Its use in the official seal of the U.S. is often exploited to add an air of legitimacy to political campaigns and commercial products. It's fun to see a visual history of stylized eagles changing over the years and how they have been exploited. Who wouldn't want to identify with its superpowers, both the real ones and the ones we Americans have endowed it with?

The real ones are pretty impressive:

> "The live bald eagle is a natural wonder. It can fly from thirty to fifty-five miles per hour, soar up to ten thousand feet, and stay aloft for hours. It can dive at one hundred miles per hour. Its eyesight (the "eagle eye") allows it to spot a moving rabbit almost two miles away or a fish from several hundred feet. An eagle flying at an altitude of one thousand feet can spot prey across almost three square miles."

This book's illustrations show eagles in comic books, badges, government documents, awards, tattoos, postage stamps, campaign buttons, mastheads, art, toys, etc. It's organized into themed chapters, such as Military & War, Politics, The Natural Eagle, and Culture & Entertainment. The images in each chapter are arranged in roughly chronological order.

The author donated his collection to the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minn., which exhibits some of it and is raising money, in part, to create a permanent home where more of it can be displayed. Revenue from sales of the book will help fund the expansion.

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(Images from American Eagle: A Visual History of Our National Emblem, by Preston Cook, www.americaneaglecollection.com.)