Masarykova univerzita Filozofická fakulta

Bakalářská diplomová práce

Brno 2006

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UNCLE SAM
An American Symbol

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I declare that I have worked on this final year dissertation independently using only the sources listed in the works cited.

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I would like to thank Mgr. PhDr. Tomáš Pospíšil, Dr. for his help and valuable advice.
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Introduction

Many people are aware of the existence of Uncle Sam. They may have encountered with the famous I WANT YOU poster. But not many have probably thought deeper about this symbol of the United States. The curiousness in finding out who exactly this person is (was), what this figure represents, and how it became a symbol of the United States, stood behind this BA Thesis work. The first, basic step, a curious person, who wants to learn basic elements of something would do, is to consult a dictionary or an encyclopedia. This is what the *Oxford Guide to British and American Culture* says about Uncle Sam: He is defined as “the imaginary person who represents United States and its government” (Crowther 553).

The figure of Uncle Sam, evokes number of questions. For example what exactly this unreal person, cherished by Americans, and often depicted by the rest of the world represents. What concept is behind the saying that “something is symbol of something”?

This BA Thesis attempts to examine and introduce the roots, forms, concepts and the contexts of this symbolic representation and the role of Uncle Sam as a symbol of the United States of America. Also tries to give a general introduction to the concept and functions of cultural symbols.

If we get back to the already mentioned definition of *Oxford Guide to British and American Culture*, “the imaginary person who represents United States and its government” (Crowther 553). We can say, that Uncle Sam, American national symbol, has been represented in the two main contexts, based on the function of symbol as a group identity maker and boundary marker. Uncle Sam has been viewed as representation of the government for the citizens of the United States helping them to form a relationship towards it. And also as the global representation of the United States of America.

The problem of symbols is very complex one, therefore it is necessary to clarify the problem and give a general introduction to the field of semiology. First part of this BA thesis
deals with these issues. It attempts to clarify terms such as symbol and sign, their relationship and their significance for culture. The topic and functions of national symbols is outlined with the focus on the American national symbols. Short description of Uncle Sam follows and then the history of the figure of Uncle Sam is introduced. The last part of the work deals with the representations of Uncle Sam and his symbol as a group identity identifier and boundaries marker. This is illustrated with what this figure represents for the people of the United States and how it symbolizes the United States outside its borders.
The human ability to create and use symbols, seems to be universal, some anthropologists claim that the symbol usage differentiates man from animals (Leeds-Hurwitz 29). The problem of symbols, their creation and interpretation (the relationship of the symbol and object it represents, its meaning) is a very complex one. It has been dealt with by many researchers from different fields among which are linguistics, semantics, semiotics, philosophy, sociology, and cultural anthropology. Each of these fields has certain specific approach towards the interpretation of symbols. They all emerge from the roots of work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand the Saussure. Jonathan Bignell explains in Media semiotics, An Introduction: “Saussure believed that language is made up of signs (like words) which communicate meanings, and that all kinds of other things which communicate meanings could potentially be studied in the same way as linguistic signs” (Bignell 5).

The production of signs is essential characteristics of human beings. Saussure came up with the idea that extralinguistic reality can be interpreted and analyzed by the means of language. Bignell argues, “Saussure proposed that our perception and understanding of reality is constructed by the words and other signs which we use in a social context” (Bignell 6). Lee-Hurwitz continues, summarizing the work of Levy Strauss, that sign production is inherent competency of humans, “as the work of Levi Strauss and others indicates, any aspect of human activity carries the potential for serving as, or becoming a sign: we only have to activate it” (cited in Lee-Hurwitz 29). And when sign production is activated the following step is the interpretation of a produced sign. This interpretation largely depends on the cultural
context of the interpreter. As Ivan Dubovický points out in his essay *Symbol on the ethnic borders* citing Saussure, “[Man] has the tendency to organize things into systems, with the help of which he can change the meaning” (Dubovický 21). Dubovický also mentions the importance of cultural background of people using symbols.

1.1 Sign vs. symbol

Signs are often terminologically confused with symbols. Even sometimes interchangeably used. Umberto Eco explains in his *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*: “Every sign is a symbol, but not every symbol is a sign” (Eco 18). Current textbooks of semiotics and semantics provide us with numerous definitions of the concept of the sign. Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz cites Eco’s definition of a sign: “Everything that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as something standing for something else” (cited in Leeds-Hurwitz 22). Anything can be a sign when agreed on its meaning. Hurwitz expands Eco’s definition by citing Bogatyrev: “Any item of nature, technology, or everyday use can become a sign whenever it acquires meaning beyond the bounds of its individual existence as a thing of itself” (cited in Leeds-Hurwitz 29). This says, that if the meaning is conventionally agreed among people, anything can serve to the purpose of a sign.

There have been several interpretations of signs, and theories of signs and their classifications. There are two main streams or schools of interpreting the sign. Wendy Lee-Hurwitz summarizes two main streams interpretations. “Traditionally there have been two main interpretations of signs: either they consist of a dichotomy (a two-part relationship) or a trichotomy (a more elaborate three-part relationship)” (Lee-Hurwitz 23).

The concept of dichotomy was originally introduced by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Bignell explains,
In his analysis of linguistic signs, Saussure showed that there are two components to every sign. One is the vehicle which expresses the sign, like a pattern of sound which makes up a word, or the marks on paper which we read as words, or the pattern of shapes and colors which photographs use to represent an object or person. This vehicle which exists in the material world is called the signifier. The other part of the sign is called the signified. The signified is the concept which the signifier calls forth when we perceive it (Bignell 12).

Ferdinand de Saussure thinks of a sign on the bilateral level. He offers dichotomic interpretation of sign usage and interpretation. This interpretation outlined by de Saussure explains each sign as comprised in of two parts signifier and signified. (Budil, Hurwitz) Explained in the words of Umberto Eco, “Saussure speaks of twofold entity (signifier and signified)” (Eco 14). Hurwitz illustrates this concept as follows:

The signifier is visible or in some way present (such as flag); the signified is invisible but referred to (the country to which the flag belongs and which it represents). In the other words, the signifier is the explicit aspect of a sign, present during the interaction, a material presence of some sort; the signified is the tacit element of a sign, what might be termed an “immaterial” presence, something literally absent yet functionally present because it has been invoked (Lee-Hurwitz 23).

When constructing the meaning of the sign, the signifier and the signified can not be separated form each other. “The sign is the inseparable unity of the signifier with the signified, since in fact we never have one without the other” (Bignell 12).

The authorship of the second interpretation, the trichotomic relationship, is accredited to the American linguist Charles Sanders Pierce. Umberto Eco explains that according to Pierce a sign is “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Eco 14). Pierce introduced three concepts of signs. Their difference is based on the
relationship between the signifier and signified. He introduced this system as a triad of signs: icon, index and symbol.

Iconic sign shares attributes of similarity between the object described and its description, shares the relationship of similarity or resemblance (Černý 185, Hurwitz 23). Jaromir Volek in his *Introduction to Media Studies* illustrates the concept of icon: “We know the iconic sign from everyday life. We can see it for example on the ladies/gentleman bathroom signs or in the manuals and instructions. The sound iconic sign is for example onomatopoeia” (Volek 5).

An index has the relationship of contiguity or connection. Index has often causal relationship between the signifier and the signified (Hurwitz 23, Volek 5). Bignell offers common illustration of this indexical relationship. “The shadow cast o a sundial tells us the time, it is an indexical sign which is directly caused by the position of the sun, and similarly smoke is an index of fire, a sign caused by the thing which it signifies” (Bignell 15).

In symbol, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is the relationship of arbitrariness. Umberto Eco defines this relationship as: “A symbol is something representing something else by virtue of an analogical correspondence” (Eco 130). Hurwitz offers her own definition: “Sign using an arbitrary connection between the present and the absent is a symbol” (Hurwitz, 23). There is no logical connection between the signifier and the signified, the only connection is the connection agreed on. Therefore the context is essential for analysis of the meaning of the sign. “It is the very essence of symbols that they are ambiguous. Since symbols store great deal of information in an economical manner, they may exhibit a range of meanings, depending on context of use” (Conkey and Rowntree 461).

Generally it is possible to say that anything can in certain circumstances be viewed as a symbol of certain meaning. Wendy Lee-Hurwitz offers short general list of things which can serve symbols:
Generally, the short list of what can be used as symbol includes *objects* (ranging from small ones like rings to large ones like buildings, from manufactured to found objects), *behaviors* (ranging from individual actions to elaborate community rituals), *texts* (in the sense of discourse, ranging from individual words to story cycles), *ideas* (concepts, images), and *people* (whether real of imaginary) (Lee-Hurwitz 30).

In the following chapter Hurwitz offers the distinction between a symbol and a sign. It is the way of interpretation and the connections necessary between the symbols which distinguish them from signs. This is the explanation of Ioan Lewis summarized by Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz:

Ioan Lewis, an anthropologist, stressed the need to consider the emotional meanings of symbols, in addition to the more commonly considered cognitive meaning. By symbols we mean, of course, something more than signs. Unlike the latter which may be so, symbols are in principle never fully self-explanatory, self-sufficient or fully autonomous. Symbols convey the meaning largely through the connections with other symbols. This then provides another distinction between symbols and other sorts of signs: Icons and indices carry emotional freight less often. (Lee-Hurwitz 25)

Convention is an important element by which a particular meaning is assigned to a particular sign. According to Hurwitz convention, “…refers to the degree of tradition of habit associated with a particular sign. […] Becoming accustomed to a particular sign apparently causes most people to “forget” or at least to overlook the role tradition, rather than logic, plays in providing the link between the signifier and signified. Convention is particularly valuable in discussions of symbols, where there is a great choice of signifier” (Hurwitz 26).
1.2 Language, Culture and Symbols

The research of signs and symbols was first narrowed to the study of language. It was Ferdinand de Saussure came up with the idea that principles of language study can be broadened to the study of whole culture. The basic assumption behind the interpretation of symbols is the idea of the structured system of reality as introduced first in language by Ferdinand de Saussure and then further developed into the fields of culture and society by Claude Levi-Strauss and other representatives of the structuralist theory. Bignell explains, “Saussure believed, that language is made up of signs (like words) which communicate meanings, and that all kinds of other things which communicate meaning could potentially be studied in the same way as linguistic signs” (Bignell 5).

Since the use and the creation of symbols is inborn competence, the other system of acquiring of symbolic relations is needed. Lee-Hurwitz claims that people acquire the meaning of symbols in their childhood as they are presented with them. “People are gradually exposed to symbols as children and gradually come to understand them trough their presentation in series of contest, learning over time what they mean to the adults around them” (Lee-Hurwitz 30).

She distinguishes between the explicit presentation of symbols to children.

Symbols are presented to the children explicitly and implicitly. Implicitly, the process is so constant to appear to breathe through osmosis-that is simply by being presented with a world full of symbols, children pick up” their meanings over time through repetition, with no one deliberately teaching the meanings. One part of why this is possible is because symbols are such basic parts of the social world, whether or not adults attend to the matter consciously, children are exposed to the symbols of their culture every time they observe or participate in any sort of formal or informal event, and they can hardly help figuring out that symbols are important (ibid.).
Children are naturally curious and thus, explicitly, adults formally describe the meanings of symbols to the future generation. Children grow in certain cultural environment and this environment shapes their understanding and interpretation of symbols surrounding them. “Symbols are a form of shorthand, encapsulating cultural knowledge in particular ways” (Lee-Hurwitz 25)

The use of symbols wholly depends on the cultural contexts. Culture expresses itself with symbols which create it. Symbol is understandable only to those who use the same code of thought, to those whose cultural model is the same or at least has close to them (Copans 72). Semiotic and symbolic activities are identical in Levy-Strauss’ structuralism: culture is an ensemble of “symbolic systems” such as language, marriage rules, economical relationships, art, science, and religion. The possibility of the mutual transformation among structure is permitted by the existence of a more profound symbolic ability of the human mind, which organizes the whole of our experience according to the same modalities (Eco 134).

Hastig and Wilson claim:”All culture is based on shared symbols, and all social and political systems are structured and expressed through complex relations of symbols and rituals. Symbols give people a cognitive map of the world. They provide order and meaning to those who recognize them, and are bewildering, in not invisible, to those who cannot decode them (Hastings, Wilson 65).
1.3 Function of symbols

The cultural symbols serve several important purposes in the life of people and nations. They offer the individual the orientation in the web of meanings in his life. They also serve as group (nation, class, municipality…) identity markers and by using symbols, these groups are able to distinguish themselves from the others.

According to Lee-Hurwitz, there are two basic answers to question what the symbols are for: “One focuses on symbols as a way of making sense of the world, this is the answer assumed in any discussion of symbols as creating a social reality. Symbols serve reflexively as a way of us to tell ourselves a story about ourselves. Symbols serve as storage containers (Lee-Hurwitz 34). Almost the same claim Conkey and Rowntree in their essay “Symbolism and the Cultural Landscape”, “It is well accepted that the storage or investment of meaning n symbolic forms is fundamental to human life” (Conkey and Rowntree 459).

People use symbols as way of conveying considerable amounts of information in a small space or a short time. “Through symbols, culture is shared, stored, and transmitted over time” (Miller 15). Through symbol people create a social reality for themselves an overlay of meaning laid across the natural world. But symbols not only comprise the information about group’s identity, they help to form it and define its boundaries and exclude strangers.

Symbols often express/convey the individual identity of people. Bill Nichols in his work *Ideology and the Image* cites the Oxford English dictionary for the entry for a word to represent, and then continues.

Represent: to stand for or in place of something else, to bring clearly before the mind (OED). To represent with images is to symbolize, and symbolization is basic to intercommunication. By means of symbols we can enter into processes of communication and exchange with one another. Symbols […] represent us in these
processes. They act as delegates; stand for, or in place of, that to which we refer. They even stand for us; symbols are our own representatives. (Nichols 1981, 1)

The use of symbols to delimit territory and control space is human universal.

The definition of outsiders, their exclusion and internal cohesion are effected the use of symbols (Conkey and Rowntree 462).

The ones sense of belonging to a certain group is defined through the use of symbols. Or as Samuel P. Huntington mentions, people adopt and then redefine their personal identity in groups. (Huntington 33). Symbol usage is important element of this group identity formation. Wendy Lee-Hurwitz argues that, “Displaying symbols is one way of announcing a particular identity or affiliation with a particular group, whether that be a national, occupational, corporate, religious or gender based” (Leeds-Hurwitz 34). This identity markedness can be viewed from the other perspective, the outside perspective. “It is also a case that markers of identity simultaneously serve a diverse function, indentifying who we are not, thus defining group boundaries” (ibid).

The point here is that there are many symbols and rituals which transcend differences among people in a society, serving to integrate disparate classes, occupation, ethnic groups, regions and religions. Other symbols and rituals serve other purposes, differentiating these same groups, thereby creating overlapping and competing expectations of loyalty, compliance, assimilation and conformity. (Hastings, Wilson 67). Wilson and Hastings also observe that, “Symbols are among the most important elements of politics which tie people to other people whom they will never meet, and to institutions of which they will not have direct experience” (Hastings and Wilson 65-66).
2. National Symbols

National symbols play an important role in the lives of the countries, governments and citizens around the world. They comprise the meaning of the countries; often carry the ideology of the country. They provide the means of showing affiliation. Their use is often institutionalized by some form of law or governmental action. The Wilson’s and Hastings observation from previous chapter is most certainly true. “Symbols are among the most important elements of politics which tie people to other people whom they will never meet” (Hastings and Wilson 65-66). One may see a stranger, but may feel closer to him, when he sees little flag pin on his coat.

The most common of national symbols are the flag, national seal, and coat of arms. Many countries include national animals, plants, figures, persons. For example the usage of animals depends on their abundance in the country or the mythological qualities they may represent, with which often citizens or governments desire to affiliate with (symbols and celebrations, iffousa.org) National symbols and the rituals connected with their display make the formation of national identity easier and more explicit. According to Hastings and Wilson,

“The point here is that there are many symbols and rituals which transcend differences among people in a society, serving to integrate disparate classes, occupation, ethnic groups, regions and religions. Other symbols and rituals serve other purposes, differentiating these same groups, thereby creating overlapping and competing expectations of loyalty, compliance, assimilation and conformity. (Hastings, Wilson 67).

Well known ritual connected with American national symbol: the flag is the reciting of The Pledge of Allegiance "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to
the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." (symbols and celebrations, iffousa.org)

2.1 American national symbols

American citizens are famous for their extensive usage of their national symbols. They display these symbols all over. The flags are hanging in front of the houses even on ordinary day. They multiply on national holidays. Samuel P. Huntington says that since the end of Civil war are Americans fixed to their flag. Stars and stripes play the position of religious idol and the flag is for Americans much more important symbol of national identity than for the other nations (Huntington 15).

The extensive and dense use of national symbols in the United States can be historically attributed to the need of establishing the affiliation with the new country. The country composed of immigrants had the need of self-expression. The emigrants who cut their bonds, desired to establish new ones. The symbols and the rituals connected with them were the way how to start to feel at home in new environment. Hastings and Wilson explain,

In some cases the rituals of the powerful and the powerless link (state/newcomers) them together, in what each believes to be for common good. Such linkages certainly inspire many in a nation state, wherein the state attempts to build a nation out of disparate cultures through its programs of political socialization, education and mass arts and media (par Rabinowitz 1998). For example, there is a heady mix of symbols invoked when Americans ‘pledge allegiance to the flag of United States of America’ hand over heart, eyes on the stars and stripes. Regardless of their meanings, this ritual and its symbols function as alleviating and integrating device of the American ‘nation’ which is constructed as a civic entity and is not defined ethnically (Hastings, Wilson 67).
American citizens did not build their identity on the ethnic grounds but on the civic one, which is certainly the reason of their strong patriotic feelings and the need for national symbols and their display. Hastings and Wilson put it this way: “The point here is that there are many symbols [...] which transcend differences among people in a society, serving to integrate disparate classes, occupation, ethnic groups, regions and religions. Other symbols and rituals serve other purposes, differentiating these same groups, thereby creating overlapping and competing expectations of loyalty, compliance, assimilation and conformity” (Hastings and Wilson 65).

Thus the usage of symbols in the United States has its foundation in the history of young nation and their culture as well. Besides the national symbols every state has its own symbols. The symbols of United States represent all the good virtues. “The United States has many symbols that represent freedom, courage, bravery, our country and independence (thinquest).

The usage of the national symbols in the United States became common and widespread after the Civil war. This was due to the need to display the affinity to the newly reunited nation, on the side of Union. Michal Faber points out in his essay about patriotic covers of this era.

Frequent recurrence of the Stars and Stripes accompanied by the American eagle, despite the different positions and sizes of the various slogans, does not represent a significant departure from the basic emblem. Symbolic subject encompass American heroes, male designs, female designs, eagles, flags, and shields. Liberty bells, verses, Globes, cannons, or hands with flags. Designs of national symbols mostly reveal how the Union projected itself as the genuine representative and preserver of the ideals of the Founding Fathers. (Fabre 223).
American national symbols are The Flag, The Great Seal, Liberty Bell, The Bald Eagle, 4th of July.

2.2 Predecessors of Uncle Sam

There were several symbolic figures representing emerging America, later United States. The young country was searching for symbols to represent it right from the beginning. Most significant are Pocahontas, Columbia, Yankee Doodle, and Brother Jonathan.

The authors of the Capitol Project give characterization of early symbols in America on their web page dedicated to Uncle Sam. According to them, the early symbols of the Americas were often naturalistic and/or animalistic. They were concepts rather than real figures. They propose that this was because of the wild character of the new country and it’s undiscovered lands. It was also, however, a land associated with the feminine characteristics of the unknowable. The savage, wild person, was the first human icon of the New World, and was most often female. The Indian Princess, Pocahondas, specifically, was a popular signifier of the New World. When the were more white people coming and the land was not unknown as before, the Indian Princess begun to lose her sense of the alien and was increasingly portrayed as a typical European woman (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/SAM/home.htm).

Indian princess Pocahontas went through interesting change when she gradually transformed to white lady Columbia, named in the honor of Christopher Columbus. Indian girl Pocahontas was among the first symbols of America, later as Alton Ketchum puts it “her pigmentation faded and she became Columbia, clad in classic white robes” (Ketchum 20). Now she guides the American values, “In her other role as the Goddess of Freedom on the top of the Capitol in Washington” (ibid).

Colonization and the expansion of European civilization into the New World brought to America a tradition of male iconography which was representative not of a concept, but of
a type of individual. Spawned in initially in the New England area, the new American icon represented popular opinion -- both at home and abroad -- of the average American citizen.

With the expansion of the printing press and transportation, when the newspapers with the information from the Old World to the New and the other way around, the need for a cartoon of average American emerged.

“The expansion of the idea of this myth of the "average" American man was assisted by the advancements in the media which transmitted the symbols. While they were initially transmitted only through oral traditions, songs, and plays, this did not allow for a standardized concept of the characters like Yankee Doodle and Brother Jonathan, the foundations of American male symbols” (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/SAM/home.htm).

This image got it standardized picture as well as broad distribution due to the spread of the printing press. The authors of the Capitol Project continue, that the subsequent result of these new technologies was a tradition of symbols which were simple both visually and analytically. The goal of this new kind of symbol was the quick recognition and comprehension by a wide ranging audience which encompassed with largest possible segment of the society. This lowest common denominator was much more easily swayed by a simple and cleverly written cartoon than the most brilliant and complex of speeches (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/SAM/home.htm).

These easy to print and easy to spread images were especially useful, “They also allowed for the possibility of reaching the illiterate and foreign-born. Democracy had expanded political power to new groups. It was up to the cartoonist to expend them political understanding” (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/SAM/home.htm).
Yankee Doodle was the first of these standardized and easy spreading images symbolizing America. “Her (Pocahontas’) male counterpart was Yankee Doodle. The brash youth in the song riding on a pony”, as characterized by Ketchum (Ketchum 21).

When finally Yankee Doodle grew up, after the Revolution, there was no difference between him and Brother Jonathan. “Maturing of Yankee Doodle and his merge into Brother Jonathan was to represent “the Growing American nation” (Ketchum 20).

All these symbolic figures had one thing in common. They were regional representations, more than the national ones. “Previous symbols, such as Yankee Doodle and Brother Jonathan originated and referred specifically to New Englanders. “While foreigners associated these figures with the nation as a whole, internally they were linked to the North” (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/SAM/home.htm). This gap was filled by symbolic figure of Uncle Sam.
3. Uncle Sam

The story of Uncle Sam as national symbol begun in the war of 1812, but he was officially recognized only in 1961.

3.1 The definition in terms of denotation.

Denotation, defined by Jaromir Volek, is the first stage of the creation of the meaning. It has got it’s referent in external reality (Volek 2). Wendy Lee-Hurwitz defines denotation in this way, “Denotation refers to the explicit, obvious, straightforward, first meaning of a sign” (Lee-Hurwitz 27). The term denotation is used in the contrast with the term connotation, which means, “The related term refers to the implicit, conventional second meaning of the sign, imposed by specific culture (ibid.). In the case of Uncle Sam, the denotation is the picture (figure) of a man. If pictured in a whole figure, as a tall man. He is portrayed as middle-aged, older man with white hair. On some pictures he wears a goatee beard. If interpreted in terms of connotation, it can be viewed as the obvious resemblance of Abraham Lincoln. Another denotative attribute of the figure of Uncle Sam is his top hat. The colors of his outfit are red blue and white, in combination with stars and stripes, attributes of American flag. This connotates the symbolization of the American patriotic values. Alton Ketchum describes the process of making Uncle Sam’s image.

As for visual evocations of Uncle Sam, the earliest Albert Matthews had been able to find had been an 1852 cartoon by Frank H. T. Bellew. Actually, the earliest appeared twenty years earlier. It was an unsigned lithograph issued in 1832 entitled 'Uncle Sam in Danger'. [...] Like most cartoons of the period, this is an attack on Jackson. He has just opened a vein in the right arm of the seated Uncle Sam, who is smooth-shaven, rather young, and attired in a striped robe. A later version elaborates the theme. Uncle Sam is older, and his robe is definitely the American flag (Ketchum 24).
By carrying all the denotative attributes of United States, Uncle Sam’s image conveys in his figures the meaning of the symbol. Thus fulfills the “storage” function of symbol. His image “stores” all the denotative information about the United States.

3.2 History of Uncle Sam.

Although figure of Uncle Sam is non living, several historians have proved that there lived a person who was the predecessor of this now US national character. As the authors of Uncle Sam: An American Autobiography web page project mention, “Like many mythological and symbolic figures, Uncle Sam has origins in actual fact and, in this case, an actual man (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/SAM/home.htm.).

Alton Ketchum has conducted an extensive research of the portraits of Uncle Sam in the fifties which led him to the origins of this character. This led him to the writing Uncle Sam, The Man and The legend. He found and proved the connection with the living person and the symbolic figure. Ketchum decided to follow the lead of a folk tale that “the character of Uncle Sam had originated in Troy, New York during the War of 1812” (Ketchum 21). The search for the origins of Uncle Sam was uncertain at first. It took several years of extensive research in the archives of American Antiquarian Society, but the author of this research was successful and was able to prove all the bibliographical data.

Americas “favorite uncle” was born in Menotomy (now Arlington) Massachusetts, on September 13th 1766. This place is one of the most significant places in the American history. The revolution fights took place here. He spent his childhood in Massachusetts and New Hampshire as a seventh child of the family. In the age of 21 he decided to make a living, earn a fortune and he moved with his brother Ebenezer to Troy, New York. This town was due to its strategic position a center of navigation and industry. Brothers established a brick-yard on the side of Mount Ida above the town. They used the empty space in the market and profited
considerably. In 1973 they started a meatpacking business. His business as well as his family
grew considerably. He also went into groceries, dry goods and distilling business. (Ketchum
21-22).

When the 1812 conflict broke out were the E&S Wilson able to compete for
governmental contract for war supplies. Ketchum describes the situation of the times.

War Department records show that a general contract was issued to one Elbert
Anderson to supply all rations for the army in New York and New Jersey for one year.
The Wilsons got the meat portion of that contract. It was agreed that all barrels were to
be stamped 'E. A.' for Elbert Anderson and 'U.S.' for United States. The 'U.S.'
abbreviated the usual marking, which had been 'U. States' (Ketchum 21-22).

The way how the abbreviation from the barrel came to be the nick name for the symbol of the
United States was described in by a correspondent in the New York Gazette on May 12th,
1830.

This work fell to the lot of a facetious fellow in the employ of the Messrs. Wilson,
who on being asked by some of his fellow workmen the meaning of the mark..., said
that he did not know, unless it meant Elbert Anderson and Uncle Sam... The joke took
among the workmen, passed currently and 'Uncle Sam' himself being present, was
occasionally rallied by them on the increasing extent of his possessions... It originated
precisely as above stated, and the writer of this article distinctly recollects remarking,
at the time when it first appeared in print, how odd it would be should this silly joke,
originating in the midst of beef, pork, pickle, mud, salt and hoop-poles, eventually
become a national cognomen.' (cited in Ketchum 22).

Official document exists which proves the connection between Samuel Wilson and the
character of Uncle Sam symbolizing United States and the government of the United States.
This document is a newspaper article which cited Wilson’s relatives reported in the New York
Sam Wilson had a large family, many nephews and nieces who all lived in the town of Troy. Because of his business and his kind and happy nature, he was very popular locally. Therefore it seemed that almost everyone in the town called him ‘Uncle Sam’ (Ketchum).

He died on July 31st, 1854. Ketchum cites the local newspaper *The Albany Evening Journal* which wrote following article:

'UNCLE SAM' - The death of Samuel Wilson, an aged, worthy and formerly enterprising citizen of Troy, will remind those who were familiar with the incidents of the War of 1812, of the origin of the popular sobriquet for the 'United States'. Mr Wilson was an extensive packer, had the contract for supplying the northern army with beef and pork. He was everywhere known as 'Uncle Sam', and the 'U.S.' branded on the heads of barrels for the army were at first taken to be the initials of 'Uncle Sam' Wilson, but finally lost their local significance and became throughout the army the familiar term for 'United States'...(cited in Kethum 23).

“Uncle Sam had been around for 148 years before the U.S. Congress decided to do anything about him. When definitive evidence of Samuel Wilson's identity as the original of Uncle Sam became widely known, the citizens of Troy sought permanent recognition for their famed fellow townsman” (Ketchum 23). In the 1961 government passed the official resolution which officially recognized Samuel Wilson of Troy. As cited in Ketchum.

As a result, Congress passed a Joint Resolution on September 15th 1961, recalling Uncle Sam’s origin, and stating that Uncle Sam was evoked ‘out of the needs of a young nation’ and that since ‘no Congress action has ever been taken to make…the symbol of “Uncle Sam” official and permanent: Therefore be it Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring) That the Congress salutes “Uncle Sam” Wilson of Troy, New York, as the progenitor of America’s national symbol “Uncle Sam”(Ketchum 25).
These are the first known representations and uses of Uncle Sam as national symbol. As described by Ketchum. “The earliest known use of the term 'Uncle Sam' in print was in a broadside which gives evidence of having been printed in the spring of 1813. Under the crude woodcuts are two mentions of Uncle Sam. One is in doggerel under the cartoon of 'Bonapart' - 'If Uncle Sam needs, I'll be glad to assist him” (Ketchum 25).

The other known representation is from March 1813, its original is “In The Library of Congress, whose curators believe it was printed in northern New York State, possibly Troy or Albany” (Ketchum 24).

The next reference, which for many years was taken to be the first, appeared in the Troy Post for September 7th, 1813. 'Loss upon loss, and no ill luck stirring but what lights upon UNCLE SAM's* shoulders, exclaim the Government editors in every part of the country.' (The asterisk refers to a note at the end of the piece: 'This cant name for our government has got almost as current as 'John Bull'. The letters U.S. on the government wagons, etc., are supposed to have given rise to it.'

3.3 Two symbolic contexts of representations of Uncle Sam

The American Symbol of Uncle Sam has been portrayed, discussed in the two main contexts. This is in accordance of the concept of symbol as a boundary marker and identity maker. As the authors of the Capitol Project, project state “He has been an symbol with which Americans could identify. On another level, Uncle Sam has helped to define the relationship between the American people and their government” (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/SAM/home.htm). Globally is Uncle Sam associated with the nation as a whole. “While Uncle Sam is globally associated with the nation as a whole, for many Americans Sam is a symbol specifically of the federal government. He is comparable to a kinder, gentler, Big Brother” (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/SAM/home.htm).
Uncle Sam helped defining the relationship of Americans with their country and government. The Symbol of Uncle Sam represents for the citizens of America their government and establishes their relationship towards it. This figure represents, comprises American values by its denotative qualities, which are the stars and stripes, the attributes of American flag. The figure of Uncle Sam therefore often displayed, together with the flag, on different occasions where Americans show their patriotism and belonging to the American nation expressing their loyalty towards the government. Alton Ketchum found in his research “the earliest known use of the term ‘Uncle Sam’ in print was in a broadside which gives evidence of having been printed in the spring of 1813. Under the crude woodcuts are two mentions of Uncle Sam. One is in doggerel under the cartoon of ‘Bonapart’- If Uncle Sam needs, I’ll be glad to assist him” (Ketchum 23). This supports the citizens-government relationship representation. The most significant representation of Uncle Sam as the government of United States is the famous recruiting poster from WWI painted by James Montgomery Flagg. (figure 1)

Jim Zwick comments on a poster web page mastered by him (http://www.boondocksnet.com/gallery/us_091100a.html ) that, probably no image from World War I is more familiar in the United States today than James Montgomery Flagg's recruiting poster featuring a pointing Uncle Sam and the slogan "I Want You for the U.S. Army." Widespread use of the poster during World War I and World War II made Flagg's Uncle Sam the definitive image of the American icon throughout most of the twentieth century. A popular book and magazine illustrator whose work had appeared in Life, Judge, and other illustrated magazines, Flagg also created the artwork for other posters used during the war, several of which are included here. (Zwick)
America was represented by Uncle Sam outwards as well. He has served as a concept of the United States as a country in the perception of the rest of the world.

When portrayed in this boundary formation context within the United States, he often served as representation of their relationship towards the other countries, especially those with which were United States involved with.

The concept of Uncle Sam as representation of the United States as a country in the perception of the rest of the world can be also illustrated by the BBC interviews with the European WW2 veterans who when talked about the United States used the term Uncle Sam.

“It happened at the time when allied forces including Uncle Sam, were helping us the Brits, driving the Burma campaign as they had previously done at the time of the North African landings in 1942. Or as the other veteran says: “They would give away - or sell for a pittance-many of the items of personal equipment and apparel provided by Uncle Sam.

The projection of the global perspective of Uncle Sam is illustrated by Jim Zwick right at its beginning, during the first expansionist era. “Portrayed as straddling the world or bloated with the world in his stomach, Uncle Sam's image changed to reflect the country's new status as a world power with overseas colonies. Later interventions in Panama's revolution for independence from Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Haiti, and other areas also led to modified interpretations of Uncle Sam's role, now as a guardian of the Western Hemisphere or a global policeman wielding his army and navy as a "big stick." (Jim Zwick). ) This guardian role towards rest of the world (some foreign countries in this case) is illustrated in (figures 2-3).
Conclusions

Uncle Sam has been and still is important figure in the American history, culture and society. He serves as a national symbol on different levels.

This BA thesis deals with the concepts of cultural and national symbols and tries to illustrate the American National Symbol of Uncle Sam, and how this figure fits into the concept of these signs. This symbolic figure has been discussed/presented/portrayed in number of occasions. These displays are in agreement with it’s function as a national symbol, that is the representation of the United States on the outside. By this figure have the United States identified globally. And also, for American citizens this figure represents their government, and helps them to form their relationship towards it.

The topic American cultural symbols and symbology is very complex one and difficult to grasp and it would require much more space, than the limit of BA Thesis allows. Therefore this BA Thesis work’s challenge was to attempt to extract the main issues and give a short and condensed introduction to the problem.
Figures:

Figure 1. James Montgomery Flagg, *I want you...*
Figure 2: “Uncle Sam Strictly In It”
Performing His Duty


Figure 3: “Performing His Duty.” *Brooklyn Eagle*. Jan 1902.
References


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