

Forward by Richard A. Shweder

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All Together Now is a captivating book full of wisdom about family rituals, celebrations and holidays in the United States. It is written by a scholar who is far and away the best and most creative ethnographer of the ceremonial life of American children. In part the book is an exposition of Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah and other such occasions as understood and experienced by our children. It focuses our attention on key symbols, such as the Christmas tree or the menorah or the Easter bunny. These ceremonial symbols function as vehicles of meaning at family celebrations. They are designed to involve members of an in-group, kith and kin, children and adults (all together now) with particular historically evolved and collectively endorsed pictures of who they are, where they came from, and what they should value in life and strive to become. The book is thus also in part about the way children and adults work together to create, sustain, revise and in one way or another become participants in some tradition of belief and value.

These symbolically rich customary family celebrations may be well-known and familiar but they are described in this book as poly-semantic texts. As Dr. Clark notes, those who are all together playing their conjoined or choreographed parts at some family ritual do not necessarily experience or comprehend its scripted objects and actions in only one way or in the same way. The symbolism and potential take home messages of the occasion are always open to interpretation, engagement, debate, embrace, resistance, or misunderstanding, which is part of the process of cultural learning.

Indeed in this brilliant synthesis of Cindy Clark's decades of work on cultural learning we are invited to view the process as a two way street, a cross-generational project, cooperative in spirit but not devoid of cross-talk. It is a complex process in which adults and children strive to make sense of and (in one form or another) manage to re-produce and re-generate their own historically evolved traditions and group defining semantic markers.

Those meaning packed rituals of family life are thus rich sites for the study of cultural reproduction and creative innovation. By means of intimate face to face communications between parents and their children these occasions bind the past to the future. They are formative of denominational identities for both individuals and groups. They are remembered with both thoughts and feelings, and are thus consequential for all the participants whatever their age. And, in an eye-opening aside, prodding us to ponder its significance, Cindy Clark even reminds us of something we certainly should have noticed: that these special family occasions tend to be managed and controlled by the women in our families.

The author herself is a rarity. I have known Dr. Clark since she was a graduate student (once upon a time) in the Department of Comparative Human Development at the University of Chicago (then known as the Committee on Human Development). She writes like a humanist (fluently, gracefully) and conducts research like an anthropologist (as a participant observer who moves comfortably between the so-called native point of view of children and the perspective of an objective adult spectator). She explores topics that are grist for the folklorist (origin stories, mythic themes, enchanting products of the

collective imagination that lure us in the direction of deep existential issues) and she does so informed by her mastery of research in child developmental psychology.

Cindy Clark's spectacular scholarly track record prepares the way for this book. In her various writings she has deepened our understanding of everything from the tooth fairy to the Easter Bunny to Santa Claus to the American flag. She has studied American children's views of what it means to be an American, including their understandings of civic holidays, patriotism, and national identity. Given her great interest in the ontology of different cultural and religious mentalities she has studied aspects of meaning systems that are parochial or local as well as those that are ecumenical and universal. She understands that while one cannot live without universals one also cannot live by ecumenism alone.

Her work makes it clear how family rituals, celebrations, and holidays, are simultaneously the markers and the enablers of the differences that exist between world views and particular ways of life. She invites us to interpret and appreciate family rituals as manifestations of a people's ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and hence desirable. Reading this book one is tempted to say that somewhere in between direct or immediate experience (given to us by our five senses) and the absolute and hence universal rules of logic and reasoning stands the creative human imagination, which is largely responsible for giving shape and meaning to any particular way of life. I am also tempted to suggest that All Together Now is about the many ways the collective imagination gets carried forward in and through family life.

To its credit this book is not doctrinaire. It makes you wonder and raise questions. For example, it made me wonder about the seminar discussions I have had in recent years with graduate students at the University of Chicago about the meaning (the defining features) of "marriage." Dr. Clark writes: "When a child takes part in a wedding as a ring bearer or a petal-tossing flower girl, he or she conveys a symbolic message that marriage is linked to fertility and offspring."

Yet in my seminar discussions with graduate students I have noticed, somewhat to my surprise, that biological reproduction and offspring are never mentioned. Marriage is rarely if ever associated with building a family or having children. Even sex, love and romantic attachment do not typically come up as features of marriage. Instead, it is far more likely that marriage will be described as a partnership between two people who agree to pool their material resources so as to live a better life. When my students talk about marriage one of the first things some of them do mention is being officially entitled to visit your partner when she or he is in the hospital. Petal tossing and ring bearing plausibly evoked reproductive wishes and ideals (fertility, offspring) in the minds of family members at the wedding ceremony but the message seems to have gotten lost in translation or simply discarded as old-fashioned by the time those former ring bearers and flower girls have reached graduate school.

Many things get lost in translation even as new meanings are invented for key holiday symbols and family rituals. All Together Now made me reflect, as I have in the past, on the interpretive fate of the Jewish Hanukkah holiday among secular and Reform Jews in the United States. The basic biblical story is inspired by the military victory of Jewish religious fundamentalists and their insurgency (the Maccabee uprising) in the Second Century B.C.E. against the Syrian Greek ruler Antiochus IV. It was a movement

in opposition to a tyrannically imposed Hellenizing humanism of that era which sought to uplift the Jewish population and free them from what even some members of the community viewed as religiously based superstitions. The uprising as described in the Book of Maccabee was a defense of parochial Torah based customs (prohibitions on what you could eat, mandated no work days, neonatal male circumcision, restrictions on interactions, including inter-marriage, with members of non-Jewish groups) and a conservative resistance movement against Hellenization. Most of the secular and Reform Jewish families I knew growing up, including my own, have managed to bleach the holiday of these provocative meanings and now interpret and celebrate the insurgency as a just and heroic cause motivated by a conception of human rights and liberty akin to that expressed in the free exercise clause of the First Amendment to the US Constitution.

Depending upon the occasion and the context (including the political context) the invention of new meanings for holiday symbols can take many complex and even hybrid forms. Germany is the home of the Christmas tree. During an academic year I spent at the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin several of the visiting fellows from Germany and around the world engaged in a lively conversation about whether it would be acceptable to have a gathering where we collectively decorated a Christmas tree in the main hall of the Institute on Christmas Eve. (Out of respect for religious and ethnic differences the tradition had been officially abandoned a few years earlier). The staff of the Institute loved the idea as did most of the many German scholars in residence. The Israelis one quickly and somewhat surprisingly discovered had no particular objections. There was strong support for the idea from American Jews with German origins and family immigration histories going back to the mid-19th century. They had themselves grown up celebrating Christmas in the United States and decorating a Christmas tree every year as a major family ritual. One visiting Jewish scholar did resist the idea until it was suggested that he hang a menorah on the tree. Perhaps not everyone showed up for the holiday celebration that Christmas eve but as I recall all sorts of personal and collective symbols from around the world, including a menorah, got hung on a very tall Christmas tree, which at least for that evening became a glowing and warm ecumenical symbol conveying solidarity, tolerance and the mutual embrace of variety.

To its great credit All Together Now is a book that is attentive to the twists and turns and ironies (the complexities) that arise when one tries to interpret other people's key symbols, or I suppose when surprising new meanings get introduced in the face of received truths. Dr. Clark writes: "If American rituals seem obscure or puzzling to cultural outsiders, this is not surprising in light of the obscured multiplicity of meanings, whose significance is not entirely visible even to native participants." That comment prompted me to reflect on a story I was once told about an American visitor to Japan who entered a department store in Tokyo (or was it Kyoto) during Christmas season. There, as the story goes, he discovered an eye-catching Christmas display featuring "Santa Claus Nailed to a Cross." The story itself may well be an urban legend - the account I heard was second-hand. But whether true or not the image is hilarious to many, and that is how I experienced it initially. Subsequently I have discovered that not everyone thinks it is funny and the story can be a vehicle for a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. The teller of the story of course anticipates that his or her listener knows that the passion of Christ and the story of Santa Claus are not parts of the same story, even if it is true

that both stories are salient features of the Christmas season. In my own perhaps now outdated experience years ago conjuring the image of Santa Claus nailed to the cross in a seasonal display in a Japanese department store I noticed the following range of reactions and interpretations: The image as a humorous and wicked parody of capitalism and the commercializing of the Christmas spirit; the image as a powerful illustration of hermeneutic over-interpretation and the hazards of all too generously crediting others with coherency in their beliefs and practices; the image as an offensive (not funny!) neo-colonial disparagement of the Japanese, portraying them as innocents or yokels who lack a basic knowledge of the Western ways they are assumed to be eager to embrace; the image as a brilliant artistic creation of a new iconic figure or super-hero called "Santa Cross"; and finally, in stark contrast this, shrewd, stopped in ones tracks, anti-heroic but highly analytic reaction. "Could it be", I was once asked after recounting the story, "that the image of Santa Claus nailed to a cross arose because the Japanese speakers in that department store rely on a phonetic system in which the English 'L' sound (as in Santa Claus) and the English 'R' sound (as in Santa Cross) are not distinguished! The interpretive act is indeed puzzling, hazardous, and fraught, but also full of wonder. And "Wonder" could be Cindy Clark's middle name.