



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
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William Gropper's America Its Folklore

Stock#: 77842
Map Maker: Gropper
Date: 1946
Place: New York
Color: Color
Condition: VG+
Size: 32.5 x 22.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The Map Banned By Congress as "Un-American" During the McCarthy Era

Lively pictorial map of the United States, painted by noted radical artist William Gropper, which would become the subject of scrutiny by Joseph McCarthy, Roy Cohn, and the anti-communist obsession after World War II.

The map is a fine combination of oral and literary American Folklore, famed for both its popularity among librarians and teachers in the late 1940s and ultimately, its fall from grace during Joseph McCarthy's reign, ending with its being banned following a Congressional hearing led by Roy Cohn.

Ironically, during World War II, Gropper's artwork for the US Treasury Department and the White House's Office of War Information brought Gropper a personal thanks from President Franklin Roosevelt, "giving pictorial form to specific war information objectives" through propaganda posters and paintings. As noted by *Atlas Obscura*,

Between 1946 and 1953, the State Department's Overseas Library Program collected and distributed some 1,744 copies of William Gropper's America: Its Folklore, a colorful depiction of 61 legends, tall tales, and literary heroes—characters like super-sized cowboy Pecos Bill in New Mexico, steel-driving phenom John Henry in Alabama, and witty trickster Br'er Rabbit in Georgia—superimposed over a familiar projection of the Lower 48.

The purchase was part of postwar efforts to disseminate "facts and solidly documented explanations of the United States." Based on a painting Gropper completed in 1945, the 34-



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by-23-inch pictorial map was published by Associated American Artists, and sold by mail order—\$5.00 unframed, \$14.50 mounted—in the New York Times, Life, and other popular publications. An accompanying 16-page brochure told viewers more about Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, and their folkloric ilk.

* * *

But the cartographic darling fell from grace in the spring of 1953, when attorney Roy Cohn toured State Department libraries around the world as part of his and Senator Joseph McCarthy's crusade against Communism. Cohn identified William Gropper as one of the "fringe supporters and sympathizers" whose supposedly Communist-directed works had infiltrated the Overseas Library Program. Gropper was promptly subpoenaed to appear before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations—and earned the dubious distinction of being among the first blacklisted artists in McCarthy-era America.

The following is an excerpt of Roy Cohn's examination of Gropper, who would invoke the Fifth Amendment during questioning:

Mr. Cohn: *Are you the William Gropper who has prepared various maps?*

Mr. Gropper: *I don't understand that question. Prepared various maps?*

Mr. Cohn: *Did you prepare a map entitled "America, Its Folklore"?*

Mr. Gropper: *Have you got the map here?*

Mr. Cohn: *No; I don't have the map here. Did you prepare a map entitled "America, Its Folklore"?*

Mr. Gropper: *I painted a map on American folklore, yes.*

Detailed Condition:

Very minor holes in four furthest corners of margins, where tacked. Denoyer-Geppert Co. label in the lower right corner.