

Ritual America
Secret Brotherhoods and their influence on American society
A Visual Guide

Adam Parfrey and Craig Heimbichner
Feral House, 2012, \$29.95
<<http://feralhouse.com/>>

This is a big book. With 335 pages just a fraction under A4 sized, this weighs over 4 lbs. It is indeed a 'a visual guide' with hundreds of fascinating illustrations, photographs of, cartoons, spoofs, and advertisements for America's..... well, the authors refer to them as 'secret brotherhoods'. But most of them – Shriners, Elks, Oddfellows, Masons and all the other smaller examples – as shown by all the pictures, weren't really secret. The authors acknowledge this in the heading of their introduction: 'The not-so-secret secret life of America'.

The book's problem is that it was clearly done by fitting words round the pictures and the resulting text is fragmented and not very helpful, I suspect, unless you know something about this subject already. The authors would have been better writing a text and using the pictures to illustrate it.

On the odd occasion when some detailed explanation would be useful – e.g. the alleged Masonic influence on the layout of Washington DC – we don't get it. Nor do we get much analysis of these groups' significance (though how could it be measured?). And what are Aleister Crowley, Jack Parsons, Wilhelm Reich, Ron Hubbard and and Madame Blavatsky doing in this?

But it is a tremendous collection of pictures.

Robin Ramsay