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The Robber Barons of Show Business: Traveling Amusements And The Development of the American Entertainment Industry, 1870- 1920

Madeline Steiner

THE ROBBER BARONS OF SHOW BUSINESS: TRAVELING AMUSEMENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY, 1870-1920

by

Madeline Steiner

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Accepted by:

Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, Major Professor

Mark M. Smith, Committee Member

Thomas J. Brown, Committee Member

David Suisman, Committee Member

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, traveling amusements such as circuses, minstrel shows and Wild West shows were the most popular forms of entertainment in the United States. This study argues that advancements in transportation and technology inspired managers of traveling amusement companies to create new business models that transformed popular entertainment from informal, local productions into modern commercial spectacles. These amusement companies were capitalist enterprises, significant not just in the cultural arena but also in the growth of American business. These amusement companies traveled nationwide on the newly expanded railroad system, sporting elaborate sets and props and larger numbers of employees than ever before. Traveling amusements linked together audiences in disparate areas of the country, creating the first semblance of a shared, national popular culture based not on written text but on performance. By the turn of the century, a small number of troupes dominated the industry as the smaller, regional troupes could no longer compete. Show business impresarios established business patterns that influenced later developments in the entertainment industry, including trends toward standardization, reliance on middle managers, merger and consolidation, and use of modern labor and advertising techniques. There is no denying today that entertainment corporations and media conglomerates make up a crucial segment of the American business landscape. This dissertation argues that traveling amusement corporations occupied a similarly significant position at the turn

of the twentieth century and established business practices that initiated the rise of the American commercial entertainment industry

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INTRODUCTION

In the late nineteenth century, as railroad tracks connected the American coasts, mechanical assembly lines sped up industrial production, and stock market speculation increased, many people dreamed about making money. The following message from a small handheld pamphlet should not, therefore, seem too out-of-the-ordinary:

> This is an age of commerce. During no other period in the history of the world have the industrial and financial affairs of man attained such magnitude and power. The monopolization of commodities, the control of industries, and the combination of capital have resulted in a nation of trusts the power of which is felt in every corner of the globe. The aim of the great financiers is concentration. It is the belief of the average business man that only by these methods of co-operation can any enterprise reach more than moderate success.[1]

This passage reads like it could have been plucked out of Andrew Carnegie's famous "Wealth" article; however, the actual context of this quote is surprising. This comes from a pamphlet advertising the Ringling Brothers Circus. One might expect a circus advertisement to focus on elephants or acrobats, but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this casual discourse on industrial capitalism was commonplace in the entertainment world.

Although traveling amusements have all but disappeared from the entertainment market today, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, traveling amusements such as circuses, minstrel shows, and Wild West shows were the most popular forms of

[1] Ringling Bros. Advertising Pamphlet, n.d., Microfilm, Reel 1, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Pulic Library (Hereafter BRTC, NYPL).

entertainment in the United States.[2] Prior to the proliferation of moving pictures and recorded music, Americans' only option to see and hear performances was to attend live events. Although traveling theatre and music groups existed since the country's founding, no live entertainment group truly became a national phenomenon until the post-Civil War railroad age. This study argues that traveling amusements were responsible for bringing the entertainment industry in to the world of industrial capitalism.

By the late nineteenth century, minstrel shows, circuses, and Wild West shows drew in massive crowds. In 1867, there were at least sixty professional minstrel troupes in the United States and blackface entertainment was so popular that even during the Civil War, Union soldiers put on minstrel shows to entertain their compatriots. As far as circuses, the largest ones showed twice daily, and sometimes even three times, to around 10,000 audience members at a time.[3] In the age of the railroad circus, patrons eagerly awaited "circus day" when the big show arrived in town. In some areas, school districts gave children the day off for the circus, and some companies closed shop to give employees a chance to enjoy the three-ring spectacle.[4] When the Barnum and Bailey circus paraded through the streets of New York City in 1888 so many people gathered

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[2] Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture & Society Under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Robert M Lewis, *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America 1830-1910* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Robert C Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

[3] Toll, *Blacking Up*, 149; Peter C. Luebke, "'Equal to Any Minstrel Concert I Ever Attended at Home': Union Soldiers and Blackface Performance in the Civil War South," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 4 (December 2014): 509–32; Jerry Apps, *Ringlingville, USA* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2005), 57.

[4] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 2.

along the route that in one crowded spot along the parade route, a 62-year-old man "was pushed down by the throng. His skull was fractured."[5] During the Gilded Age, people were anxious and eager to attend traveling amusements. Spectators rose before the sun to watch the mammoth circus trains unload and set up the temporary tent cities that were circus lots. Describing the "wonderful fascination" of circus day, one columnist described a man who "wakened by some boyish freemasonry, he escapes in the early morning by the window and a convenient roof, and betakes himself to the railroad yard, there to sit shivering on the top of a sidetracked freight-car straining eager eyes down the track. It may be his fortune to see the trains come in."[6]

The owners of the largest traveling amusement companies were the giants of the entertainment industry. For example, at the time of his death in 1906, James A. Bailey of the Barnum & Bailey Circus had amassed a fortune, with reports stating he left his widow $8 million, the equivalent of $232.5 million in 2021.[7] Traveling amusements were big business. In fact, it was during the late nineteenth century that the term "show business" first appeared.[8] This was not lost on observers at the time, as major news outlets frequently reported on business developments in the amusement world. The *Tribune* called circuses a "financial goldmine."[9] When P.T. Barnum and James Bailey became

[5] "The Greatest Show: Crowds to See the Parade of Barnum and Bailey's Circus," *The New York Times*, March 11, 1888.
[6] Charles Theodore Murray, "On the Road with the 'Big Show,'" *The Cosmopolitan*, June 1900, MWEZ + n.c. 4251, BRTC, NYPL.
[7] "James A. Bailey Dead," *New York Dramatic News*, April 21, 1906, Clipping, T-CLP James Bailey, BRTC, NYPL.
[8] Lewis, *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville*, 2; John Springhall, *The Genesis of Mass Culture: Show Business Live in America, 1840 to 1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.
[9] "P.T. Barnum Dead," *New-York Tribune*, 1891, Clipping, Barnum Papers, NYPL.

partners in 1887 the *New York Times* quickly dispatched a reporter to interview Barnum. While Barnum played cribbage with his grandson, he informed *Times* readers that with this merger he and all his business associates had "become so thundering rich."[10] Traveling amusement impresarios publicly demonstrated the money-making potential of the entertainment industry.

Traveling amusements began the process of consolidating the manufacture and distribution of entertainment products that would grow even more significant once these products became tangible in the form of films and records. A close analysis of the history of traveling amusements reveals that it was these live entertainments, not later recorded media, that first established a national popular culture, forming an "imagined community" of entertainment-goers across the American continent.[11] This community was a benefit to amusement owners; a vast sea of eager consumers. However, in creating this national audience, amusement owners also established audience expectations of entertainment products, not only in terms of content, but also production and distribution methods. Amusement proprietors divorced business management from creative production. They created large, extravagant spectacles that reached many patrons in a short period of time. They provided constant novelty in a predictable format through the use of new technologies and labor management strategies. They created brands centered on the owner's public image. And they created large corporations through mergers and

[10] "Barnum & Bailey Join," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1887, Barnum Papers, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center, Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin (Hereafter CWM).
[11] The concept of "imagined communities" comes from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

acquisitions, consolidating control of the entertainment industry in the hands of a few. These practices are visible in every form of entertainment since the Gilded Age. The owners and managers of traveling amusements created the foundation on which today's multi-billion-dollar entertainment industry is built.

In the existing work on traveling amusements, scholars tend to focus on only one form of amusement at a time. This study diverges from this pattern by focusing on the industry as a whole. Despite obvious differences in form, circuses, minstrel shows, and Wild West shows shared many features, particularly in regards to business structure and in the daily operations of managing a large traveling show.[12] Entertainment entrepreneurs such as J.H. Haverly often owned more than one type of traveling amusement at once, formally incorporating their businesses and centralizing control. Other employees in the business, particularly company managers responsible for the daily operations of the traveling show, took jobs with different touring companies for different touring seasons. Owners and managers acknowledged their indebtedness to one another in correspondence and memoirs, and occasionally collaborated both within the same category of amusement and across the wider field of traveling shows. Analysis of the business of traveling amusements therefore cannot focus solely on one category of entertainment, but must consider the connections among individual persons and companies within the industry.

[12] In this study, I use the term "traveling amusements" to refer to circuses, minstrel shows, and Wild West shows. These were certainly not the only form of mobile entertainment as touring theatre and musical groups existed since the country's founding, and the Gilded Age did see other traveling diversions such as Chautauqua lectures, Uncle Tom shows, burlesque, and patent medicine shows. While these may literally be "traveling amusements," they do not fit within my definition of that term for this study due to the issue of scale, in terms of the physical size of the show as well as financial figures and representation in the press.

Concentration on a single form of amusement provides useful analysis of the form and function of these various entertainments and their symbolic importance in American society; however, these amusements did not exist in isolation and it is necessary to consider the connections between them.

The owners of traveling amusement companies used the same business strategies as their contemporaries in the oil, railroad, and steel industries such as standardization, mechanization, and both vertical and horizontal integration. Amusement owners, influenced by the growing popularity of scientific management techniques in industrial manufacturing, created hierarchical management structures that allowed them to quickly and efficiently put their shows in front of as many audience members as possible, in all parts of the country. For the first time, audiences across the nation could see the exact same show in the same season, making these entertainment companies national brands, unlike earlier shows that were either permanent fixtures in one urban location, or small touring companies limited to one geographic region. Prior to the expansion of the railroad, the difficulties of traveling by wagon made national tours unfeasible. Minstrel show manager M.B. Leavitt noted that in 1859 his first minstrel troupe, a wagon show, only performed in towns near Boston, "taking care not to go too far away in case it should be expedient to walk back."[13] After the proliferation of the railroad, amusement impresarios recognized that this new mode of transportation was an opportunity to expand their audience drastically.

[13] M.B. Leavitt, *Fifty Years in the Theatrical Management* (New York: New York Broadway Publishing Co., 1912), 22.

Once amusement impresarios perfected their systems of transportation, advertising, and management, they could easily swap in different performers each season, standardizing their products while giving audiences the sense that they were witnessing something brand new. By standardizing the production process, amusement impresarios created entertainments that were both predictable and novel. Historian William Leach argued that one of the characteristics of late nineteenth century consumer capitalism was a "cult of the 'new.'"[14] As variety entertainments, traveling amusements offered audiences something novel each season while maintaining the same basic form. Proprietors could hire new acts, purchase new animals, and include new songs each year, but keep the same tents, bleachers, and rail cars. As Leach identified, constant novelty was a key part of creating a nation of consumers and getting audiences to return year after year. Traveling amusements introduced patrons to exotic animals, providing many Americans with their first glimpse of creatures like elephants, hippopotamuses, and giraffes. Large circuses regularly featured an international "ethnological congress," where audiences gazed on people from "strange and savage tribes" from African, Asia, and the Middle East in racist and Orientalist displays of white supremacy.[15] Minstrel shows followed a highly-prescriptive three-act formula, but proprietors frequently introduced new songs and variety acts and assured audiences of their "new and absolutely

[14] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, 1. ed (New York: Vintage books, 1994), 4.
[15] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 118; Jacob S. Dorman, *The Princess and the Prophet: The Secret History of Magic, Race, and Moorish Muslims in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2020).

funny repartee, jokes, and conundrums."[16] These were new and exciting acts, particularly to patrons outside of urban centers, where zoos, museums, and permanent theaters were scarce. All of this novelty was packaged according the new "commercial aesthetic" of the late nineteenth century, using the "visual elements of desire," creating luxurious spectacles full of motion, color, and light that captured audiences' imaginations.[17] Through strategic planning, traveling amusement proprietors created entertainment products that easily fit within the new consumer culture of the late nineteenth century by creating a standardized production process that still allowed for novelty and wonder.

In addition to standardization, traveling amusements pioneered corporate branding of entertainment, a practice which has been evident in all forms of entertainment since. Due to amusement proprietors' skillful branding, audiences knew what to expect when they attended a Barnum circus or a Haverly minstrel show. J.H. Haverly, considered the "Barnum of minstrelsy," assured his audiences in bold letters on his advertisements that "the public can, and have always put faith in the 'Haverly's,' which is, in their eyes, a tried and true organization of superior merit."[18] Similarly, an 1895 article from the Los Angeles Herald reminded readers that "Haverly's has always had the best."[19] This branding was not centered around a performer or writer, but the shows' owners and producers. In the same way, audiences today have brand associations with certain media production companies. We know what to expect when we turn on a

[16] Souvenir Pamphlet, Haverly's New Mastodon Minstrels, c 1883, 430, Seq. 133, American Minstrel Show Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (Hereafter AMSC, HL).
[17] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 8.
[18] J.H. Haverly Courier, October 1898, 430, Seq. 20, AMSC, HL.
[19] "Los Angeles Theater," *Los Angeles Herald*, 1895.

Disney movie or a show produced by Shonda Rhimes. Traveling amusement advertisements often featured the show's owners more prominently than they did performers, and sometimes they didn't even mention the content of the show at all.

For amusement impresarios, the men who owned the largest traveling companies, this was a successful tactic. Today, names like Carnegie and Rockefeller are associated with the title "captains of industry," but this term also applies in the entertainment industry. Image was everything to amusement owners. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, traveling entertainment was highly stigmatized. This began to shift by mid-century and, as cultural historians have noted, late nineteenth-century entertainment producers went to great lengths to ensure audiences that their shows were respectable, educational even. What historians have not yet explored in great detail are the ways in which amusement owners' *personal* branding was a vital part of this project. Highlighting their own personal respectability was a means of increasing public confidence in the quality of their shows, and one major way that amusement impresarios accomplished this was by emphasizing their talents as businessmen. The term "showman" also came in to wider use during the nineteenth century, typically referring *not* to the players, but instead describing the men behind the scenes running the business. Likewise, amusement owners were called "impresarios," a lofty-sounding term with roots in the world of Italian opera. This foreign term, associated with what was becoming a "high class" form of entertainment and its frequent use in the press demonstrates the growing respectability of the entertainment industry during the Gilded Age. Showmen were deeply entrenched in the Gilded Age spirit of acquisitive capitalism, fashioning themselves in to celebrity businessmen among the likes of Carnegie and Vanderbilt.

In the historiography of nineteenth century amusements, scholars have placed greater analytical emphasis on the content and meaning of these entertainments than on the production and business contexts. Scholars have described how traveling amusements "shaped and were shaped by" social and political concerns of the day. Janet Davis has written of the circus' impact in shaping Americans' attitudes toward gender, science, and nation. Louis Warren described the ways in which Buffalo Bill created a fictional image of "The West" that simultaneously represented audiences' desire for adventure and domesticity. Eric Lott explored the complexities of minstrel shows' caricatures of black lives and the messages of "love and theft" therein.[20] These works are essential for understanding why these popular culture products were popular; however, greater exploration of the production contexts of these amusements is needed. David Paul Nord argued that "much of the edifice of popular culture scholarship rests on the notion that popular art forms—mass magazines, books, films, songs, etc.—reflect the values, interests, or characteristics of the *society*, or that they at least reflect the values, interests, or characteristics of the *audience*," but we must also turn our attention to the priorities of popular culture producers.[21] Jackson Lears has also raised issue with many cultural historians for placing too great an emphasis on audiences and their agency.[22] The implicit questions in the scholarship that Lears and Nord critique are "How did popular culture

[20] Davis, *The Circus Age*; Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 20th-anniversary edition ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[21] David Paul Nord, "An Economic Perspective on Formula in Popular Culture," *Journal of American Culture* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 17.
[22] T. J. Jackson Lears, "Making Fun of Popular Culture," *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1417–26.

help its audiences to fit in, to get along, to muddle through?" or "What does the content of cultural products reflect about the audience and its desires?"[23]

These are important questions; however, as Lears and Nord noted, they ignore the power of producers. This is the great difference between "mass" and "vernacular" culture, mass cultural products were created *for* consumers. As Nord argued, it is a fallacy to say that demand for these products preceded the supply. It is a worthy pursuit to explore how audiences manipulated cultural products to suit their interests; however, we must consider the producers' intentions as well. David Suisman, in his study of the creation of the modern music business, justified his work's emphasis on producers rather than consumers by noting that the development of this industry was "not a consumer-driven phenomenon," it was "driven instead by a new commercial class of music makers."[24] The same can be said of traveling amusements. The existing work on traveling amusements does acknowledge that these were commercial entertainments; however, this scholarship needs greater nuance. In this study, I explore producers' objectives and how their monetary goals influenced the form and content of traveling amusements.

This focus on producers also reveals how traveling amusements, and Gilded Age popular culture more generally, reinforced the values of the new industrial capitalist society. The immense popularity of traveling amusements made them powerful cultural forces. They shut down entire towns the day they arrived and commanded regular attention in mainstream news media. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony provides a useful framework for this discussion. Traveling amusements presented elements of

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[23] Lears, "Making Fun."
[24] David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 15.

industrial capitalism to their audiences in a way that was lighthearted and entertaining. I argue that the hegemonic influence of traveling amusements lay not only in the implicit messages broadcast through the content of the amusements themselves, but also in the narratives amusement impresarios created regarding the behind-the-scenes operations of their shows. In the 1940s, Adorno, Horkheimer and the Frankfurt school began exploring the structure of the culture industry, characterizing mass media as "mass deception."[25] In their Marxist conception of popular culture, the culture industry was a dominating force that "robbed the individual of his function" and made entertainment audiences in to passive consumers of whatever messages capitalist producers put forth in their cultural texts. Scholars since the "cultural turn" of the 1980s have moved away from these totalizing views of mass culture proposed by the Frankfurt School and explored audiences' agency. In scholarship on traveling amusements, historians such as Davis, Warren, and Lott have explored how subordinate groups including working class individuals, women, and people of color used the carnivalesque atmosphere of traveling amusements to help make sense of the changing world around them.[26] I argue that to fully understand the impact of popular culture it is necessary to not only explore the ways that audiences interpreted cultural texts, but also to consider the hegemonic influence coming from producers,.

When it comes to commercial entertainment, producers "form the boundaries of what the less powerful can do."[27] This study analyzes those boundaries within the sphere

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[25] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
[26] Davis, *The Circus Age*; Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*; Lott, *Love and Theft*.
[27] Lears, "Making Fun," 1423.

of traveling amusements which, I argue, become even more clear when looking at amusement producers' off-stage activities. Amusement impresarios used public displays of systematized manual labor to promote the benefits of scientific management. They created brands around their own image that conflated capitalist acquisitiveness and pursuit of profit with manliness and respectability. And they lay the foundations of a consolidated entertainment industry that would only intensify throughout the twentieth century, creating even more solid boundaries around audience choice. The cultural messages implicit in the structure of the traveling amusement industry served to legitimate the values of industrial capitalist society.

Capitalism is a key theme in this dissertation. In recent decades, the "history of capitalism" has become a popular area of analysis with significant implications for the history of popular culture that have yet to be explored. History of capitalism is a subfield with fuzzy boundaries. As Steven Mihm described it in a roundtable discussion in the *Journal of American History*, "The history of capitalism attempts to see capitalism from multiple angles using multiple methodologies."[28] The specific subjects of various studies of the history of capitalism have ranged from financial systems, to histories of specific companies such as Walmart, to more abstract notions such as the concept of "risk."[29] Popular culture and the theoretical concepts that motivate cultural history are largely absent from this body of work, despite practitioners' declaration that they seek to use

[28] Sven Beckert et al., "Interchange: The History of Capitalism," *The Journal of American History* 101, no. 2 (September 2014): 503–36.
[29] Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012).

"multiple methodologies." The history of capitalism emerged from a desire to merge elements of business history, economic history, and social (especially labor) history to produce more complete analyses of what Mihm called the "elephant of capitalism." This genealogy explains the initial lack of cultural history methods; however, it is time to consider the benefit of utilizing elements of cultural history to write the history of capitalism. If, as participants in the *JAH* roundtable wrote, historians of capitalism seek to answer "larger questions about everyday life," it is necessary to consider how popular culture, a force that quite obviously shapes everyday life, operates within- and contributes to capitalism.[30]

Cultural history will add greater nuance to the study of the history of capitalism, but the inverse is also true. Angus Burgin noted that many historians of capitalism "leverage the motion of their subjects to identify unexpected connections, to bring together modes of historical analysis that are otherwise kept separate."[31] Throughout this study, the idea of motion operates on several levels. In a literal sense, traveling amusements were moving objects, portable tent cities that traveled across the continent and overseas. To perpetuate this motion and make it profitable, amusement proprietors had to engage with the growing capitalist infrastructure of the nation; communication networks, financial markets, transportation and manufacturing systems. In a more macro sense, the business landscape in which traveling amusements operated was also in motion as entertainment proprietors had to respond to changing technological developments, the swings of the stock market, and shifting public attitudes toward business and

[30] Beckert et al., "Interchange."
[31] Beckert et al.

businessmen. This motion, on both levels, certainly fostered "unexpected connections" worth exploring; circuses influenced railroad policy, showmen became politicians, European royals attended the Wild West Show, and live entertainment affected the legal definition of a "commodity." The literal and figurative motion of traveling amusements illustrates the entertainment industry's significance within the emerging industrial capitalist order of the Gilded Age.

My perspective on the history of entertainment is also heavily influenced by the relatively new subfield of media studies labeled "production studies." Scholars in this field are interested in "how media producers make culture, and, in the process, make themselves into particular kinds of workers in modern, mediated societies."[32] Scholars like Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John T. Caldwell have argued that "the off-screen production of media is itself a cultural production, mythologized and branded much like the onscreen textual culture that media industries produce."[33] Traveling amusements made several kinds of workers; the impresario, the middle manager, and the common laborer, and each played a role in fashioning the entertainment industry in to a capitalist enterprise. To analyze the production of traveling amusements, I explore entertainment-makers' social networks, labor practices, management techniques, and community and identity-building practices. The methodology of production studies, with its focus on uncovering the role of entertainment producers (broadly conceived) in not only creating culture, but shaping political economy provides a useful framework for explaining the impact of traveling amusements in the history of American capitalism.

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[32] Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell, eds., *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 2.
[33] Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell, 2.

Furthermore, production studies scholars will find traveling amusements a particularly enlightening subject in the way that they self-consciously displayed the production process. For audiences, seeing how the show operated was part of the fun. Every aspect of putting on the show was on display; the set-up, take-down, travel, even such mundane activities as feeding laborers. This "operational aesthetic," as Neil Harris termed it in his study of P.T. Barnum, made industrial production highly visible and was part of traveling amusements' hegemonic function in legitimizing industrial capitalism.[34] My work is part of production studies' goal of finding a balance "between describing media workers as the creators of popular culture and as functionaries in the service of capitalism."[35]

This production studies perspective means that I am less concerned with the meaning of traveling amusement performances than I am the meaning of their structural operations. While certainly not discounting the importance of understanding why patrons found traveling amusements so captivating and the effects these shows had on their understanding of themselves and the world around them, I am more interested in this study in exploring exactly *how* these shows came to be such cultural phenomenon. This means that readers searching for detailed descriptions of what occurred on stage or in the sawdust ring will find this study lacking in that department, and I point those readers toward the resources in my notes and bibliography. While my primary focus is on the producers of traveling amusements, this is not to discount the experience of their

[34] Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum*, Phoenix ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
[35] Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, 2.

audience. I defer to my colleagues in media studies, cultural history, and literature for much of the interpretation of the content of traveling amusements and the significance of these entertainments in shaping audience perspectives on such topics as race, science, and imperialism. In this study, I am interested in audience in more aspirational terms. These entertainment impresarios aimed to create shows that appealed to the broadest possible audience. They spoke self-consciously of their goals to create entertainment that appealed to the masses. This was not *l'art pour l'art*, but entertainment carefully designed with profitability in mind. Because of this, amusement owners' relationship with their audience took on a new significance. This was a dynamic relationship. Amusement owners both responded to trends, providing audiences with more of the types of amusement they already enjoyed, while simultaneously innovating on those trends and thus creating new audience desires that were so successful they became expectations for generations to come. Traveling amusements had a great impact on American culture due to their size and scale. Therefore, the work on the content of traveling amusements will be greatly enhanced by a thorough understanding of the behind-the-scenes management decisions that created the infrastructure allowing these shows to reach such a broad audience and have the massive cultural impact that scholars recognize today.

One of the most significant effects of capitalism on the entertainment industry was the separation of managerial and creative labor. Alfred Chandler first put forth the idea of the "managerial revolution" in Gilded Age business in his landmark 1977 study, *The Visible Hand*. Absent from Chandler's work, amusement impresarios were part of this revolution, organizing impressive managerial hierarchies in their businesses, delegating responsibilities, including creative work on the shows themselves. During this

time, the role of a company "manager" changed dramatically. Prior to the 1870s, managers of entertainment companies were often actors themselves and performed a haphazard range of duties within the traveling troupe including director, performer, writer, designer, and booking agent. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, following trends in other businesses, occupations within the entertainment industry became increasingly specialized, particularly within large traveling companies where organization was essential to transporting large volumes of people and equipment while adhering to tight train schedules. While the specific duties of the manager still varied slightly from troupe to troupe, the men who held this position at the turn of the century were no longer creative producers. They now delegated the responsibilities of directing shows, performing, conducting music, and constructing costumes and sets to subordinates specifically trained in these areas. Traveling amusement proprietors helped create the role of the "producer" as conceived of today in theatre and film. Amusement impresarios were shrewd businessmen who handled budgets and logistics, negotiated deals with railroad and utility companies, and devised new strategies for increasing revenue. "Manager" was used broadly, referring to both the owners of the shows as well as their subordinates in management positions. I use the term "manager" in this dissertation to refer to any individual in a management position and use "owner," "proprietor," "impresario," or "middle manager" when further clarification of roles is needed.

My work does not fit cleanly in to either a "top-down" or "bottom-up" model of industry analysis. Putting on a show required an extraordinary amount of work from individuals at all levels, but what was unique about traveling amusements, and what makes them so significant in the history of the entertainment industry, was their

development of a large, hierarchical management system that resembled that of other large manufacturing plants. This study of the industry analyzes the actions of individuals at all levels, especially the middle managers who, as the higher-level decision makers who actually traveled with the shows, often had a greater hand in organizing the daily operations of traveling amusements than the proprietors. The technological requirements of moving a large show led to more specialized manual labor roles. These workers were organized in units supervised by a manager, who in turn reported to another manager, so on and so forth up the chain to the proprietor, many of whom did not travel with the show but managed their affairs from a central office in a major city.

In this work, I acknowledge and analyze the work of proprietors like circus men Barnum and Bailey, as well as minstrelsy's J.H. Haverly and co-inventor of the Wild West Show, Nate Salsbury. I also place great importance on the manual labors who literally put the show on the road and the impact of their labor in creating a community of showmen. But in addition to these individuals at the top and the bottom of the corporate structure, I also aim to uncover the impact of the system-builders who have faded from memory: the middle managers. Some of these men (and, aside from costumers and occasionally cooks, they were all men, and nearly always white men) were known figures in the industry at the time, particularly the higher-ups; the accountants, publicists, heads of advertising. There are more primary sources available related to these more white-collar managers than there are for department heads in more manual labor roles such as riggers, canvasmen, or baggage-horse handlers. Proprietors entrusted all managers and department heads to make decisions and recognized their value to the organization. Commentators said of James Bailey that "the keynote of his success lay in his most

wonderful ability to choose and manage men most capable of carrying to successful execution his business plans and ideas," revealing both Bailey's organizational prowess as well as the necessity of his choosing capable managers.[36]

In most cases, managers were not college-educated, but lifelong showmen. Many worked their way up the corporate ladder from the bottom. Even James Bailey, who ultimately monopolized the industry, ran away from home as a child and joined a circus as a billposter and worked his way to the top. In this way, traveling amusements were unlike other Gilded Age industries where middle managers were college-educated employees, skilled workers from the start. Still, traveling amusements were part of the growing industrial capitalist order. Proprietors used hierarchical management structures to operate their multi-unit firms. Although unique in many respects, they were not an industry apart and the glamorous veneer of show business should not exclude traveling amusements from consideration as part of the history of industrialism and capitalism.

Despite this study's focus on the off-stage activities of amusement owners and managers, it is still useful to take a moment to discuss where traveling amusements came from and what they looked like. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Americans witnessed a transformation in entertainment. Entertainment was highly responsive to changing social, political, and economic conditions. The rise of new technologies, increase in urban populations, growing racial tensions, entrenchment of Victorian social mores, and development of a robust consumer culture all impacted the form and function of entertainment in the Gilded Age. A brief history of traveling shows in the United

[36] "Great Showman Is Dead," 1906, T-CLP James Bailey, BRTC, NYPL.

States is thus necessary for establishing the context in which the traveling amusement industry flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Theaters existed in the United States since its founding, and small, roaming groups of players and musicians were not uncommon. As historian Lawrence Levine argued, the division between "highbrow" and "lowbrow" entertainment as conceptualized today did not exist at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[37] Americans of all backgrounds regularly attended the theatre, and in fact, Shakespeare was perhaps the most popular playwright.[38] There was some social stratification in the structure of the theatres themselves, with wealthier individuals paying a higher price for private boxes away from the rowdier crowds in the "pit" at the front of the theatre or in the top-level galleries where gambling and prostitution were hidden from view. Although the social groups may not have mixed, all enjoyed the same entertainments on stage. Between the acts of a play, the theatre would often entertain audiences with a musical number, comedy act, or even an exhibition of human oddities or "freaks" while the players changed scenery and rested. Robert Toll argued that this was the origin of variety shows in the United States and established a taste for novelty acts that later led audiences to traveling amusements.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the folks in the pit began to exert greater control over the shape of their entertainment. As urbanization ramped up and greater numbers of Americans flocked to cities, the number of theatres in major cities grew and

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[37] Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).
[38] Robert C. Toll, *On With The Show: The First Century of Show Business in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

prices for lower-tier tickets dropped to an affordable rate for most urbanites. The number of non-elites attending the theatre grew, and there is strength in numbers. Antebellum theatres were known as rowdy places where audience interaction was the norm. The crowds booed and hissed at villains, clapped along to their favorite tunes, and demanded players repeat favorite speeches or songs as many times as the audience requested without care for how this interrupted the flow of the play. The number of American-written plays also increased in the early nineteenth century, featuring character archetypes that represented the "common man;" the quick-witted Yankee, the heroic backwoodsman, and the tough, urban B'howery B'hoy. Along with American plays came an American musical style as composers such as Steven Foster developed a toe-tapping musical style divorced from European orchestral tradition. The simultaneous development of these more populist plays and songs led to the creation of the first uniquely American form of entertainment; the blackface minstrel show.

In the early nineteenth century "Ethiopian delineators," white performers who painted their faces black to play African-American characters, were already a common feature on the stage. In 1828, one such performer, Thomas D. Rice created a new sensation when he performed a song-and-dance number on a New York Stage titled "Jump Jim Crow." Allegedly, Rice came across a handicapped Black man in a market singing this song and performing a shuffling dance step. Rice learned the music and dance steps, and even claimed to have purchased the clothes off the man's back to give audiences an "authentic" representation of this piece of African-American culture. "Jump Jim Crow" was a hit and inspired a number of copycat performances. Eventually Jim Crow became a stock character, a lazy, stupid slave. Jim Crow's legacy extended even

beyond the stage, becoming the slang term for the ruinous regime of racial segregation that oppressed Black Americans for decades. After "Jump Jim Crow" exploded on to the scene, the blackface musical number became a common staple for any variety entertainment.[39]

In 1844 in New York City, a group of four blackface performers calling themselves the Virginia Minstrels premiered the first show that consisted entirely of blackface performance, establishing the minstrel show as a genre of its own.[40] Originally these were all-male, all-white companies although there were some troupes of female performers and by the late nineteenth century several Black minstrel companies gained significant popularity as will be discussed later in this dissertation. Over time, minstrel shows developed a formulaic structure. The shows consisted of three acts. In the first, a group of blackfaced performers and one non-blackfaced "Interlocuter" took simple wooden chairs and formed a semi-circle on stage. They performed musical numbers, including many Steven Foster standards and other "plantation melodies" and songs supposedly originating from Black musicians. The men on the ends of the circle played stock characters named "Tambo" and "Bones," named after the musical instruments they played, the tambourine and rhythm clacker bones respectively. Tambo and Bones cracked jokes, pestered the Interlocuter, and interacted with the audience, making the first part of the show typically a high-energy affair. The second act, the "olio," was a variety show. The novelty acts of the olio ranged from comic "stump speeches," to classical operatic numbers, to acrobatic acts, to exhibitions of "educated pigs." In the final act, audiences

[39] Toll, *Blacking Up*.
[40] Toll.

were treated to a short comedic play, often called a burlesque at the time. Minstrel shows trafficked heavily in racist stereotypes. The stock characters of the minstrel stage, the ignorant Jim Crow, pretentious freedman Zip Coon, hypersexualized Jezebel, and overbearing-yet-maternal Mammy have continued to negatively affect representations of African Americans in pop culture ever since.[41]

After the Virginia Minstrels' debut, minstrelsy exploded in popularity and Americans formed hundreds of minstrel troupes across the country. Major cities had several performance halls dedicated entirely to this genre with house troupes that performed six days a week for years on end. Professional minstrel groups made small regional tours, typically in the Northeast. In rural areas, local men, or sometimes groups of children, with musical talents would put on minstrel shows for friends and neighbors for special occasions. In theory, there was little barrier to entry as putting on a minstrel show required no equipment aside from musical instruments, several wooden chairs, and a container of burnt cork; however, as I argue in this dissertation, as traveling amusements grew in popularity, several big-budget minstrel companies mounted highly elaborate spectacles and made national tours, crushing smaller competitors and leading to a field dominated by only a handful of recognizable troupes. This industrialization of minstrelsy would not have been possible without their sister amusement genre, the circus.

[41] W. T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); Lott, *Love and Theft*; William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Yuval Taylor and Jake Austen, *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip-Hop* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012); Toll, *Blacking Up*.

Circuses have an ancient history with origins in Roman hippodromes and colosseums. The modern circus began taking shape in Britain in the 1760s with Philip Astley's equestrian exhibitions that featured trick-riding acts as well as tumblers and clowns.[42] In the 1790s, this type of entertainment came to the United States with John Bill Ricketts who entertained the likes of George Washington in his indoor, permanent circus buildings. Initially, the only animals in these circus performances were horses, but eventually, circus men combined their exhibitions with another popular form of amusement; traveling menageries of exotic animals. These menageries traveled in wagons and exhibited in local barns and other rural buildings, but as they started to feature circus and variety acts they quickly outgrew these structures, and managers invented "portable barns," what would ultimately become the famed circus "big top" tents. These combined circuses and menageries traveled by wagons, and the road and turnpike improvements in the early nineteenth century made travel easier and more expedient than ever before. The shows continued expanding and eventually the separate side-show tent became a staple of circus grounds. Here, before the main event, patrons could wander the tent and see magicians, human oddities, or blackface comedians.

The circus continued to expand, and in 1871 William Cameron Coup devised a system to transport his large show by rail, ushering in the Golden Age of traveling amusements as will be explored in detail in Chapter One. After circuses successfully transitioned to rail travel, minstrel shows followed, and in the late nineteenth century, a new form of amusement, the Wild West show, developed and was designed from its inception as a traveling show. While permanent theatres continued to thrive in major

[42] Toll, *On With The Show*, 51.

cities, traveling shows allowed rural patrons to experience professional, high-budget entertainment. Traveling amusements continued the democratizing process in popular culture as discussed by historians such as Levine and Toll, and for showmen this was an incredibly lucrative process.

Prior to the period examined in this dissertation, circuses and minstrel shows were not necessarily considered "family friendly" entertainment. The rowdy nature of theatrical performances led many to perceive places of entertainment as sites of vice in the early nineteenth century. One of the most significant developments in Gilded Age entertainment is the shift in public perception of traveling amusements from dubiously moral and sometimes scandalous entertainments to shows suitable for ladies, gentlemen, and children of all ages. This was a highly-regulated process, and while the result seemed like an "opening up" of traveling amusements to a broad audience, this still required the imposition of fairly strict limits. Amusement owners policed audience and employee behavior, prohibiting cursing, drinking, and gambling. The largest amusements even hired Pinkerton detectives to reassure patrons of their safety. Traveling amusements also operated within the world of Jim Crow, and made efforts to maintain the racial status quo. Black circus-goers were forced to sit in segregated sections of the audience or only permitted to attend shows on certain days. In some Southern territories, traveling amusements had to make accommodations for local Jim Crow laws, such as in Louisiana where a 1914 law required "racially segregated entrances, exists, and ticket windows at circuses and other tent shows."[43] Traveling amusements, with ticket prices ranging from twenty-five cents to two dollars, were also more expensive than many other

[43] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 33.

entertainments such as dime museums and nickelodeons. While Davis noted that many patrons, particularly those in rural areas that did not have access to cheaper amusements, simply saved up money all year for "Circus Day," the cost of attendance was still a prohibitive factor for some.[44] Thus, while traveling amusements' appeal to women and children was in some ways democratizing, making what was once "low" culture acceptable for the middle class, traveling amusements also wielded cultural hegemony by maintaining the race and class-based discriminatory status quos of the Gilded Age.

The reshaping of traveling amusements as sites of middle class leisure, as I argue throughout this study, is the result of several factors including new technology, new organizational structures and labor management techniques, modern advertising capabilities, and the capitalist ethos of the Gilded Age. The following chapters explore each of these factors in-depth, telling the story of how a handful of large traveling amusements came to dominate the entertainment market at the turn of the twentieth century, and the effects of this monopolization on the shape of the entertainment industry to come.

This study is organized thematically. I chose the order of the chapters to correspond with a rough timeline of the major developments in the traveling amusement industry, although there is some overlap between chapters. The story of the growth of the amusement industry thus begins in Chapter One with the invention of new technologies for transportation, communication, and printing which were a significant causal factor in changing the form and content of traveling amusements, as well as the behind-the-scenes operations of managing the increasingly large shows. Use of these technologies

[44] Davis, 34.

necessitated new forms of labor management, which I explore in Chapter Two. Amusement owners adopted many techniques of the "scientific management" movement that their contemporaries in manufacturing developed to increase the scale of their businesses. This analysis of labor management thus places traveling amusements firmly within the narrative of the development of industrial capitalism and demonstrates the hegemonic influence of traveling amusements' presentation of scientific management. The following chapter explores the impact of these new labor practices on the workers themselves and their development of a unique "showman's culture," arguing that the struggle between managers attempting to implement greater workplace discipline, and laborers' efforts to maintain their cultural traditions is an example of "negotiated loyalty."

Amusement managers' efforts to control the personal lives of their subordinates was not only a tactic to increase efficiency and output, but part of their larger project of "cleaning up" the reputation of traveling shows. In Chapter Four, I explore these efforts to change public perception of traveling amusements, and the lengths to which owners of amusements went to out-do their competition. Entertainment impresarios cultivated a public image of themselves as successful businessmen to project a sense of respectability, and by association, tell audiences that their amusements were respectable as well. The extent to which amusement owners highlighted their *business* and not creative endeavors demonstrates that these men viewed themselves as capitalists first and artists second (if at all). The richest showmen used their capital to increase the size of their organization, drawing in larger audiences with their grand spectacles and pushing smaller competitors out of the business. While some large shows negotiated mutually beneficial non-compete

agreements with one another, others sought to eliminate competition completely through mergers and acquisitions. This is the subject of Chapter Five. This chapter follows the career of circus man James A. Bailey, of Barnum & Bailey, as he formed a near-complete monopoly of the amusement industry by forming partnerships, and eventually buying out, other showmen. When Bailey died in 1906 and the Ringling Brothers purchased all his amusement holdings, they effectively controlled the traveling amusement industry, further solidified in 1929 with John Ringling's acquisition of the American Circus Corporation.

Unfortunately, by the time the Ringlings garnered this monopoly, traveling amusements had lost much of their market power. The audiences that once spent all year waiting for "circus day" now attended movies and vaudeville performances regularly. Blackface performers were absorbed in to vaudeville or smaller tent shows and traditional minstrel shows ceased to exist. The final chapter of this dissertation discusses not only the decline of traveling amusements, but also the continued impact of traveling amusement on these later entertainment products. Many of the men who began in traveling amusements later moved on to successful careers as producers in vaudeville and Hollywood.

In this study, I focus on the largest amusement companies, recognizing that their experiences do not represent the majority, but that is precisely the aim of this project. I am interested in how the largest became the largest, and the effects of this growth. To select which companies to emphasize, I identified traveling amusement companies with a national presence, determined in part through analysis of trade publications such as the *New York Clipper* and *Billboard* as well as company records. Route books were a wealth

of information for this study. Traveling amusement companies created and published route books which functioned as a souvenir and travel diary for each touring season. Although the precise information in each route book differs from year-to-year and company-to-company, almost all include a full employee roster as well as a daily diary of noteworthy events that occurred on the road. At various times, route books included attendance figures, information about the weather, calculations of miles traveled, photos, and articles or poetry written by company members. Route books were given or sold to company members and sometimes other fans and collectors. Although these were company publications, and therefore some of the information may be censored or skewed to give a favorable representation of the company, route books provide a look at larger trends in the industry, as well as a record of what daily life was like on the road with a traveling amusement.

This study privileges owners and managers of traveling amusements above artists and performers. This cadre of amusement impresarios was composed almost entirely of white men. Few of them came from wealth. They embodied the "rags-to-riches" narrative of Gilded Age popular literature, which was certainly part of their public appeal. Readers will notice that while the subject of this study is the traveling amusement industry as a whole, circuses do appear more frequently than minstrel shows and Wild West shows. The reason for this is twofold. In practical terms, there are larger collections of surviving records from circuses than other amusements. The archival collections related to traveling amusements generally consist primarily of advertisements and newspaper clippings. Collections of business and financial papers, and managers' correspondence are fewer, and the largest of these collections concern the circus. The circus was also physically the

largest type of traveling amusement. It was circus men who initially developed the devices and systems that facilitated easier rail travel, which minstrel shows and Wild West shows then adopted. Furthermore, minstrelsy began to decline earlier than the circus, ironically because of the growth of the industry. As minstrel show owners innovated, increasing the size of their shows, purchasing competing companies and merging performers together in to casts of hundreds, the form of the minstrel show deviated so much from tradition that the boundaries of the genre became fuzzy. With little differentiating these modern minstrel shows from vaudeville, the former was absorbed in to the latter while circuses and Wild West shows remained distinct genres.

In 1960, Albert F. Mclean Jr. described vaudeville as the "turning point between the scattered, informal, and generally itinerant entertainments of the nineteenth century such as the circus and the minstrel show, and the highly organized and specialized 'show business' of today."[45] This comment wholly misrepresents Gilded Age traveling amusements. It was traveling amusements, not vaudeville, that were the turning point. Although there were some "scattered, informal" local circuses or minstrel shows, Mclean ignores the fact that the most well-known circuses and minstrel shows were indeed "highly organized," modern business entities, reliant on strictly-controlled industrial labor processes, centralized management, and deeply intertwined with financial markets. Vaudeville peaked in popularity after the heyday of traveling amusements, and in fact many vaudeville managers actually started their careers and had their business training on the road with circuses and minstrel shows. These were not simply frivolous amusements

[45] Albert F. Mclean Jr., "Genesis of Vaudeville: Two Letters from B.F. Keith," *Theatre Survey* 1 (1960): 82–95.

run by fly-by-night carnies, but carefully managed corporate entities that lay the foundation for the rise of the capitalist entertainment industry in the United States.

As noted in the brief history of American entertainment above, commercial entertainment did exist prior to the Gilded Age, but these were local, not national, endeavors. Popular culture was national in the sense that people across the country consumed the same performance genres, books, or songs, but it was not until the rise of the traveling amusement company that audiences from coast to coast could watch the same performance, forming an "imagined community" of spectators. This made for a national popular culture unlike anything before. This industrial capitalist entertainment industry did not develop in the United States until traveling amusement companies took to the rails at the turn of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 1

"WHAT STEAM, ELECTRICITY, AND A MILLION DOLLARS CAN DO"

An 1897 promotional pamphlet for the Ringling Brothers circus boldly stated, "Modern attractions require modern methods for their presentation."[46] For traveling amusements, this modern method began with the railroad. As the railroad expanded across the American countryside it "annihilated time and space," so the common historical analysis goes. Historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch described the impact of the railroad on travelers' consciousness and perception of the world around them, noting how the plethora of new visual and physical stimuli created by rail travel contributed to the development of "panoramic perception."[47] With the velocity of the train blurring the traveler's view of the foreground outside the car window, the viewer no longer perceived himself as being part of the landscape, but as an outside observer. Furthermore, the proliferation of telegraph lines in the late nineteenth century, erected along train tracks as a means for conductors and station operators to quickly communicate, impacted traveler's perception of the space around them, as they now had to look past the technological intrusion of the wires to take in the countryside. The traveler viewed the landscape" *through* the apparatus which moved him through the world. That machine and

[46] Pamphlet for Ringling Bros. Circus, 1897, MWEZ + n.c. 4050, BRTC, NYPL.
[47] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century: With a New Preface*, 2014 Edition (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2014).

the motion it created became integrated into his visual perception."[48] Schivelbusch and other cultural historians and theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Jonathan Crary have made compelling cases for industrial technology and urbanization's effects on human vision, perception, and consciousness. These arguments demonstrate the power of technology in shaping human relations and the human body, contributing to historiographical conversations on both the impact of technology and of popular culture on American economics, politics, social relations, and daily life. These conversations are again combined in analysis of traveling amusements. New technologies, most notably the railroad, accelerated the growth of the amusement industry and altered the form of traveling amusements themselves.

The panoramic perception engendered by rail travel was reflected in the new, enormous three-ring amusements that would not have been possible were it not for technological advancements. A different act took place simultaneously in each ring in the now-expanded amusement tents, requiring new modes of perception as audiences shifted their attention back and forth across the tent, witnessing performances that, like the telegraph lines outside train windows, combined the natural, in the form of the human body, with the spectacle of technological apparatuses. One reviewer for the Times of London wrote of the overwhelming nature of Barnum's three-ring circus saying that "with everything in full swing from one end of the huge hall to the other, a novel sensation of wonderment creeps over the observer, who is distantly reminded of the great

[48] Schivelbusch, 64.

'machinery in motion.'"[49] What this reviewer called the "kaleidoscopic variety" of traveling amusements hinged upon new technologies. The increased carrying capacity of the railroad led to the expansion of the circus from one ring to three. In minstrel shows, casts lists grew from around eight performers to over a hundred. Amusement owners utilized new technology to create grand spectacles.

Revolutionary mechanical inventions such as the railroad and telegraph shaped the ways in which the traveling amusement business was conducted as well as the look and feel of these entertainments. The mechanical acceleration of the railroad expanded the amusement market and unified audiences across the country as amusement proprietors made national tours in a single entertainment season for the first time. In addition to utilizing technologies created by others, many amusement impresarios were active tinkerers and innovators, developing new machinery specific to their industry and adapting existing machinery to better serve their needs. Technology was not the only, nor the most important cause of the growth of the traveling amusement industry in the late nineteenth century. Scientific management, new ideas of celebrity, a cadre of talented businessmen, a push for respectability, and national economic circumstances all played a significant role as well. However, it makes sense to begin this study with a look at how new technologies affected the amusement industry, as their effects were immediate and obvious. Due mainly to the railroad, traveling amusements grew both in terms of physical size of their shows, as well as in terms of audience. Through use of the railroad, steam printing, electricity, and telegraph, amusement impresarios created audience expectations

[49] *Times* of London, November 12, 1889, reprinted in P. T. Barnum, *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader: Nothing Else Like It In The Universe*, ed. James W. Cook (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 228.

that entertainment would be standardized, well-advertised, easily accessible, and spectacular.

In the 1940s, Adorno and Horkheimer wrote that the culture industry under late capitalism constituted a dominating force in society largely due to the technological developments that enabled mass production of entertainment goods and services.[50] Although Adorno and Horkheimer were speaking primarily of mass media such as radio and film during what Walter Benjamin termed the "age of technological reproducibility," late nineteenth century traveling amusements pioneered the process of creating a national culture industry borne of repetitive, mechanical processes.[51] It may seem paradoxical on the surface to consider live entertainment a mechanical product; however, the technology and industrial management systems employed behind-the-scenes in the traveling amusement industry were as standardized as any Hollywood studio system. Although bound by the timeliness of live performance, traveling amusements nevertheless used new technologies to create standardized products and an entertainment monopoly similar to those recognized by Adorno and Horkheimer.

Traveling amusements were the first semblance of a national popular culture based not on written text, but performance. Later, recorded sound and motion pictures would create an even more robust "mass culture," but traveling amusements initiated this process in the post-Civil War era. Although this form of culture was not physically reproducible on a mass scale in the way that a tangible object such as a reel of film might

[50] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.
[51] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

be, the technological systems developed by amusement impresarios made it so that their live shows could be reproduced in cities across the country at an unprecedented speed. For the first time, an audience in New York and an audience in San Francisco could see the exact same show in the same season, creating a shared set of cultural experiences, and, for entrepreneurs, a nation of eager entertainment consumers. Managers' adoption of the latest technology and their own mechanical tinkering and innovation initiated the process of industrializing entertainment, leading to the development of a national popular culture decades before Benjamin's "age of mechanical reproducibility." New technology made the live entertainment experience in to a product to be sold.

Although both circuses and minstrel shows were popular forms of amusement prior to their use of the railroad, an individual performance group's travel was limited. As far as minstrelsy, few antebellum minstrel troupes traveled at all. By the nineteenth century, New York City was already the epicenter of the professional entertainment world. As historian Robert Toll described, when the nation's first true minstrel troupe, the Virginia Minstrels, debuted their act in New York City in 1843 they were an instant success. Both professional and amateur performers across the nation quickly formed their own groups and adopted the format of the Virginia Minstrels' shows leading to the canonization of the traditional tripartite minstrel show. The most popular minstrel troupes would book stays at a New York theater for the entire 28-week theatrical season and by the 1850s, specialized "minstrel houses" in major cities focused their business on just this one form of amusement. Some troupes became so connected with a particular theater that

they booked consecutive runs of over a decade.[52] With this success, the most well-known minstrel troupes did not need to travel.

Those amusement troupes that did roam were generally local groups traveling within a small geographical region. Trade papers that listed minstrel troupes' itineraries demonstrate that touring routes were limited. In 1862, a weekly edition of *The New York Clipper* updated readers on several troupe's whereabouts: Sanford's Minstrels planned to visit "various towns in Pennsylvania," while Morris Brothers, Pell & Trowbridge's Minstrels played a series of "one night only" gigs in cities across Maine, and The Morris Minstrels spent their time visiting smaller towns in New York state.[53] Much of the decision to keep tours small was based on finances. Minstrel manager M.B. Leavitt noted that the ability to return home after a performance kept the manager from having to pay lodging expenses for performers.

In the earliest days of the American circus, companies did not travel much at all. In the colonial period, circus men built semi-permanent wooden arenas for their performances, resulting in long stays in urban areas to cover building expenses. In 1825, the circus business experienced its first transportation revolution when Joshua Purdy Brown began performing in a canvas tent.[54] This reusable performance space reduced the capital investment needed to put up a circus, and allowed for greater ease of travel as companies could now fold up their performance arena, load it on a wagon, and haul it to the next location. Although circuses traveled farther and more frequently than their

[52] Robert C Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 32.
[53] "Negro Minstrelsy," *New York Clipper*, July 5, ci1862.
[54] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 16–19.

minstrel show counterparts, prior to the 1870s these one-ring "dog and pony shows" generally traveled in rural areas. Unlike amateur minstrel shows, amateur circuses were not incredibly common, due in part to both the specialized skills of circus performers and the amount of capital required to purchase equipment for stunts, livestock, and exotic animals. Since smaller, rural areas did not have circuses of their own, visiting shows were highly anticipated attractions and circuses met with great success as entire town populations turned in to eager patrons on "Circus Day."[55]

Although minstrelsy was arguably the more popular entertainment in the early nineteenth century, it was circuses that developed the patterns that set the traveling amusement industry on the path to becoming a modern capitalist enterprise. While minstrel troupes rented local theaters and halls for their performances, circuses carried their own performance spaces with them. Unlike minstrel shows, where a troupe could stage a full performance with only a few chairs, musical instruments, and a container of burnt cork, circus acts often required specialized equipment for stunt performances as well as the cages, pens, feed, and personnel that came along with an animal menagerie. As historian Janet Davis noted, these requirements lead to increased division of labor and the hiring of employees for non-performance jobs. Wagon circuses hired "advance men" to ride ahead of the show and advertise future performances as well as manual laborers to facilitate travel. Davis described this system as "a prototype for the giant railroad circuses later in the century."[56] As the circus took advantage of new transportation technology in

[55] Davis, *The Circus Age*; Gregory J Renoff, *The Big Tent: The Traveling Circus in Georgia, 1820-1930* (Athens, GA: University Of Georgia Press, 2012).
[56] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 17.

the late nineteenth century, both the size of the shows and the specialization of labor increased.

Beginning in the 1850s, some circuses began to experiment with using the railroad to make some of the longer "jumps" between stops on their tours. These shows were small affairs, traveling without a sizeable menagerie, sideshow, or large cadre of decorative wagons used for a street parade before the "big show." Details about these early shows are sparse, but historians Parkinson and Fox concluded that early railroad circuses generally did not hire their own passenger or sleeper cars; circus personnel would ride with other paying customers in the usual cars, putting their equipment in communal baggage cars, and the troupe stayed the night in local hotels. Parkinson and Fox write that although circus men experimented with the railroad in the 1850s, they were ultimately still wagon shows that just occasionally used the railroad. These shows maintained a large enough number of wagons and stock horses that, if necessary, they could easily switch back to traveling overland. It was not until the 1870s, that the largest shows switched over entirely to rail, leading to monumental changes in both the operations and form of the circus.[57]

While some circuses attempted to travel by railroad before the 1870s, and some even traveled by steamboat, it was not until the 1872 circus season that the era of the railroad circus truly began. William Cameron, "W.C." Coup, co-owner of a circus with P.T. Barnum and Dan Castello, devised a system to move their large show by rail. This decision was emblematic of the entertainment industry's development in to a modern

[57] Tom Parkinson and Charles Philip Fox, *The Circus Moves By Rail* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Company, 1978).

capitalist business. Coup was an innovator, not only in terms of his business decisions, but also in his tinkering with the existing railroad equipment to design devices specific to the needs of a traveling show. Coup desired to keep costs low and profits high. In his autobiography, Coup wrote that for circus men, planning the show's route for the season was "an arduous labor, for the cost of transportation becomes, necessarily, a most important consideration in his calculations."[58] After analyzing the receipts from the previous season, Coup noticed that stops in larger cities brought in nearly triple the receipts of small towns. At this time, circuses played in towns of all sizes; however, performances in small villages were often out of necessity rather than desire. Due to the physical demands of traveling by wagon, traveling amusement companies could only travel a certain distance before it was necessary to let animals and crew rest. Coup realized that traveling by rail would allow the company to bypass these stops in undesirable smaller towns and concentrate instead on more lucrative locations.[59] While some other shows had begun hiring their own private train cars, none of these were the same size as Coup, Barnum, and Castello's show. Previously, railroad circuses hired seven or eight cars, but in 1872, Coup hired sixty-one.[60]

The transition to rail was a process of trial and error. Coup quickly realized that railroad companies, as well as the physical railcars themselves, were unequipped to meet the needs of a circus. In the 1860s and '70s, the railroad industry was still coming in to its own. Coup needed to negotiate with railroad companies to ensure that the circus made it

[58] William Cameron Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles: Stories & Secrets of the Circus* (Washington, D.C.: Paul A. Ruddell, 1901), 20.
[59] Coup, 21.
[60] Coup, 22.

to their destinations with enough time to set up before the "big show." When he first telegraphed the superintendents of different railroads asking if they could accommodate this need, they universally replied in the negative.[61] After continued haranguing, Coup's persistence finally paid off and he secured a contract with the Philadelphia railroad to provide switch room for the 1872 season.

Having settled an agreement with the rail company, Barnum, Coup, and Castello's show, going by the grandiose name "P.T. Barnum's Museum, Menagerie, Caravan and Hippodrome," prepared for their first season on rail. Coup's next task was to obtain rail cars that could accommodate circus wagons. Although they stopped using the wagons as a form of transportation, circus wagons were still an integral part of circus operations. Coup needed train cars able to haul several types of wagons, including elaborately decorated bandwagons and rolling animal cages, as well as simple baggage wagons. When a circus arrived at its destination, these wagons were unloaded from the train and used to haul equipment from the railyard to the circus lot, or, in the case of the flashier wagons, used in the daily circus parade through town. To move from town to town by rail for the 1872 season, Coup planned to load the wagons on to a series of flatcars which he rented from the railroad company. This created several problems, as many of these rented cars were ill equipped to handle the specific weight load of circus wagons, resulting in several instances of wagons crashing through rotted floorboards. Coup also quickly realized that the rented cars' mismatched sizes were a major challenge when it came to loading. If one flat was taller than the next, wagons could not roll seamlessly from flat to flat. Coup needed specially built cars with no obstructions at either end that were of

[61] Coup, 21.

uniform height and reinforced with steel beams to handle the weight of the circus wagons. The show began the season making do with rented cars until Coup located a firm in Columbus, Ohio that was able to quickly build his custom flats.[62] On June 28, 1872, when the show arrived at their fourth stop of their season in Columbus, a shiny new train greeted them, complete with custom-built flatcars.[63] Each car was a standard height and had iron bars running the length of the car to reinforce the flooring. These flatcars amounted to "a steel and plank highway on which circus wagons moved," removing many of the impediments to an expedient loading process.[64]

Figure 1.1 Several sections of a loaded circus train arriving at the station. Photograph. 1908. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Circus World Museum. (Reprinted in Dahlinger, *Trains of the Circus*)

[62] Coup, 22.
[63] Fred Dahlinger Jr., *Trains of the Circus, 1872-1956* (Hudson, Wisconsin: Iconografix, Inc., 2000), 18.
[64] Parkinson and Fox, *The Circus Moves By Rail*, 97.

Once they acquired proper cars, Coup and his crew still needed to figure out the best method of loading and unloading. Their first attempt to load the train took twelve hours and resulted in the literal breaking of a camel's back.[65] Initially, circus men attempted to haul the heavy wagons over the sides of the flatcars.[66] Coup realized this was an inefficient and unnecessarily strenuous way to get wagons on to the flats. He instead developed a system wherein workers could push wagons up on to the last car on the train and then roll the wagon from flatcar to flatcar down the length of the train. Coup devised a set of two steel planks with textured surfaces which would be "set parallel to each other, the width of the wheels on the circus wagons" which would attach to the back of the last flatcar, forming a ramp, or "runs," that allowed laborers to easily roll wagons from the ground up on the car.

Wagons were not the circus' only cargo. The large show also carried canvas tents, tent poles, grandstands, seats, cook tents, exotic animals, ticket booths, hundreds of employees and much more. Much like with the first flatcars, the standard design of other railcars was an additional challenge for Coup when he first set out to move his large circus by rail. As he started hiring baggage cars, stock cars, and sleeping cars for his circus, he quickly realized that much like flatcars, there was no uniform size. Once again, this made renting cars difficult, as Coup had to ensure that he would have ample space for tall tent poles or large animals. There was also no guarantee what shape the rented cars would be in. For the first season on rail, Coup did hire Pullman cars from the railroads as sleeping cars for the performers, but the ultimate goal was to own each car on

[65] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 21.
[66] Dahlinger Jr., *Trains of the Circus*, 16.

the train. By the turn of the century, the biggest circuses owned every part of the train themselves except the engine and caboose.[67]

Putting a well-functioning circus train together was a massive challenge, but this was only one piece of the puzzle as Coup, Castello, and Barnum discovered during that initial 1872 season. No matter how well-organized the circus company was, they were still largely dependent on railroad workers. As the circus began to standardize its practices for railroad travel, they found that railroad employees were completely unaware of how to best deal with a large circus. Despite notations to the contrary in Coup's contracts with the railroad companies, Coup reported that railroad yardmasters would try to have the circus load just one car at a time and that "to load a train in this way would have taken us twenty-four hours."[68] An apocryphal story illustrates Coup's determination to have his trains handled in his own way: when one particularly stubborn yardmaster refused to load the train according to Coup's instructions, Coup took the man out to a long lunch, distracting him while the circus's railroad crew snuck in and got all the wagons on to the flats before the pair returned.[69] After continued negotiations, and perhaps a little bit of humbug from Coup, "system and good order came out of chaos" and circus men convinced railroad workers that theirs was the most expedient way to move a big show.[70] As other circuses made the switch from "mud show" to "railroad show" they adopted Coup's methods, making his processes standard for both show men and the railroad operators they partnered with as they moved around the country.

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[67] Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Press Book No. 31, n.d., Microfilm, Reel 1, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL.
[68] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 23.
[69] Coup, 22.
[70] Coup, 23.

Barnum, Coup, and Castello's Great Traveling World's Fair traveled the country that first season giving three performances a day six days a week and making "jumps" of up to one hundred miles a night.[71] By just 1878 some circuses were traveling up to 10,000 miles a season and by 1909 Barnum and Bailey claimed to average 50,000 miles a year.[72] As the railroad circus entered its "golden age" at the beginning of the twentieth century, train sizes continued to grow. In 1875, just three years after their inaugural season on the railroad, Barnum's circus claimed to travel with 150 custom-built double-length rail cars, boasting that their train stretched a mile long.[73] As the century came to a close, trains grew larger still. A Barnum and Bailey pressbook from the early 1900s stated that the company's train had grown to cover three miles.[74] Although, as Parkinson and Fox note, the exact number of cars or length of the train was likely an exaggeration, the prevalence of descriptions of trains in circus advertisements from the late nineteenth centuries indicates that this was point of pride.[75]

Advertisements for traveling amusements from the 1840s to 1900 reveal the industry's changing attitudes toward rail travel. Traveling amusements' use of modern transportation and technology projected a sense of quality and professionalism to potential audiences. Proprietors of traveling amusements utilized cutting-edge technology such as specialty train cars and electricity not only to ease the physical burden of moving

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[71] Coup, 23.
[72] Adam Forepaugh Circus Route Book, 1878, Microfilm, Reel 1, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL; "Barnum & Baily Circus A City in Itself," clipping 1909, MWEZ + n.c. 9542, BRTC, NYPL.
[73] "A Colossal Enterprise," *Harper's Weekly*, March 27, 1875.
[74] *Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Press Book No. 31,* n.d., Microfilm, Reel 1, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL.
[75] Parkinson and Fox, *The Circus Moves By Rail*.

their large shows, but also as a status-symbol. During the transitional period before railroad travel became standard, advertising men who worked for railroad shows capitalized on this feature to differentiate themselves from competition. Although overland travel had been the standard for decades, as soon as companies took to the rails, their advertisements suddenly pointed to the inadequacies of this method of transportation. Even in the pre-Barnum days when only a few circuses attempted rail travel, advertisements repeatedly argued that the difficulties of overland travel led to tired employees, worn-out horses, and half-hearted performances. Describing his 1854 railroad show, Den Stone, a well-known clown and circus owner, wrote: "The great facility afforded by railroad transit gives preeminence to this troupe in every respect over the worn-out, behind-the-age, slow, perambulating baggage wagon system of the old fogey managements."[76] The Spalding & Rogers Circus echoed this thought in another 1850s ad, which stated that "under the old regime, the Company are always fatigued and querulous" when they arrive at their destination.[77] These advertisements ridiculed "mud shows" as being "behind-the-age" and implied that the use of technology led to higher quality entertainment.

Although some were initially leery about spending the circus season living on a train, the comfort of these cars, as well as the regular schedule that train travel provided eventually won over many of the skeptical, including P.T. Barnum himself.[78] Some showmen remained reluctant, such as circus proprietor Adam Forepaugh. Throughout the 1870s, Forepaugh resisted switching to rail. He argued that his show was, in fact, too big

[76] Parkinson and Fox, 9.
[77] Ad for Spalding & Rogers Circus, c. 1850s, reprinted in Parkinson and Fox, 10.
[78] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 21–22.

to move by rail. Since, in the circus world, "bigger" was often equated with "better," thus Forepaugh claimed that his show was so superior that he *couldn't* travel on the railroad. However, by 1877 Forepaugh, witnessing the growth and popularity of railroad shows, realized the need to utilize the railroad himself and made the switch. By the 1890s, railroad shows dominated the entertainment field, bringing amusement to audiences all across the country.[79]

In 1900, a writer for *The Cosmopolitan* reflected upon the changes in the circus business and proclaimed that "the railroad has civilized the circus man…[his] hardships have been greatly lessened since the special trains and schedule have eliminated the lumbering and uncertain caravans that worked laboriously from town to town."[80] Rail travel provided several "civilizing" opportunities: a predictable and reliable schedule as weather-related issues such as rain and mud were less likely to impede travel, carefully organized procedures for loading and unloading, and Pullman and sleeper cars that allowed company members a way to create more of a "home" on the road. As we will see in the coming chapters, Gilded Age entertainment moguls were incredibly concerned about projecting an image of sophistication and respectability both for themselves and their amusements. This "civilizing" feature of railroad transportation was an important part of creating this image. This is certainly not limited to the circus, as other forms of amusement also started relying upon the railroad as their main form of transportation after 1872. In 1882, J.H. Haverly's Mastodon Minstrel company emphasized their use of the locomotive in bold capital letters on their broadsides, proclaiming that "in case of any

[79] Parkinson and Fox, *The Circus Moves By Rail*, 23.
[80] Murray, "On the Road with the 'Big Show.'"

accident on Rail Roads, we invariably CHARTER OUR OWN SPECIAL TRAIN and never disappoint the public."[81] The prominence of this statement in their advertising indicates that Haverly felt that his use of the train set him apart from competition. This was something he wanted potential audiences to notice and admire about his company. Use of the railroad became a sort of cultural capital for show business entrepreneurs.

In their advertisements, traveling amusement owners encouraged audiences to equate "bigger" with "better" and used the size of their trains to support this notion. Advertisements informed audiences that a good traveling amusement was one where they got a good "bang for their buck," where there were many things to see and do. One Barnum and Bailey advertisement described the show as "An Embarrassment of Features and Bewildering Array of Novelties…Transcendent Splendors and Costly Spectacles."[82] If the best shows were also the biggest, then, the logic follows, one might judge the quality of a show simply by its size. This is exemplified in an advertisement for Barnum, Bailey, and Hutchinson's show described their attractions: "Three especially constructed [trains]—No limit to its attractiveness—The number of its features redoubled—Contemporaries shrink away as it approaches—A satiety for the public appetite…To behold this repository of sweeping greatness ends all desire to see more since, of its genius, there is nothing left to see."[83] As use of the railroad became a standard feature of traveling amusements, proprietors broadcast their shows' size simply by noting the number of train cars and/or length of their train. When the Adam Forepaugh and Barnum

[81] Haverly's Herald, 1882, Osf 18, Minstrel Show Collection, The Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin (Hereafter HRC) [Emphasis in original].
[82] "A Wealth of Wonders and a Feast of Riches," n.d., Clipping, Barnum Papers, NYPL.
[83] "Three Years' Journey Around The World," n.d., Microfilm, Reel 3, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL.

& Bailey shows combined for a limited engagement in 1887, their advertising pamphlet used the shows' size as a selling point, calling it the "Greatest, Grandest, Most Glorious Combination…employing nearly two thousand men, women and children. One thousand horses. Requiring 200 railway cars for transportation."[84] In 1913, a booklet of sample advertisements for the Ringling Brothers included one piece all about the Ringlings' mile-long train.[85]

The biggest shows frequently advertised how much money their attractions cost. In 1889, Barnum and Bailey bragged that they had invested $3,000,000 in their show and that daily expenses totaled $6,800.[86] Not to be outdone, in 1897, the Ringling Brothers proclaimed in bold capital letters "CAPITAL INVESTED $3,700,000. ACTUAL DAILY EXPENSE $7,400. This same brochure also advertised the menagerie portion of Ringling circus as "The Costliest, Most Superb, Curious and Wonderful Specimen of Zoology ever seen. It is only one of many noted and expensive features which have culminated in the creation of a collection of animals that is, by actual expenditure of money, a MILLIONAIRE MENAGERIE."[87] By 1918, the Ringling Brothers show boasted their investment was now up to $4,000,000 with $8,000 daily expenses.[88] These figures were more than likely exaggerations; however, that publishing one's daily expenses was a staple of amusement advertising illustrates how amusement proprietors suggested to

[84] Advertising Pamphlet for P.T. Barnum & Co. and Adam Forepaugh's Combined Shows, 1887, Microfilm, Reel 2, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL.
[85] Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Press Book No. 31, nd., Microfilm, Reel 1, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL.
[86] "'A Wealth of Wonders and a Feast of Riches,' Clipping, Barnum Papers, NYPL."
[87] Pamphlet for Ringling Bros. Circus, 1897, MWEZ + n.c. 4050, BRTC, NYPL.
[88] The Mammoth Marvel of the Century, 1918, Microfilm, Reel 4, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL.

audiences that the biggest, most expensive shows, the ones that required the most train cars to carry their spectacular exhibits, were the ones most worth seeing.

The traveling amusements that successfully utilized the railroad reached a larger audience than ever before. A glance at circus company's route books indicates the scale of this change. Route books functioned as a circus' road diary. One company member was charged with writing down details about any noteworthy events that occurred at each stop on their tour. From these route books, historians are able to trace circus' movements throughout the season. In 1871, the season before Barnum, Coup, & Castello first traveled by rail, their show visited seven states and remained in the Northeast and New England regions. The very next year, their first traveling by train, even with the growing pains of figuring out the best way to move the big show, they more than doubled the number of states visited, playing in sixteen states and Washington, D.C. They traveled as far North as Maine, and as far West as Kansas. When Barnum and Bailey first joined their shows together in 1881, they toured fifteen states, this time making it as far South as Texas. In 1890, Bailey brought his show to nineteen different states and the District of Columbia.[89] The significance of this expansion for the development of the entertainment economy cannot be overstated. As amusement companies expanded the territory they covered in a single season they created a unified set of cultural experiences among consumers. In the earlier period, a show might travel in only one region per season, meaning that patrons in the Northeast may see a Dan Rice show one year, while audiences in the South had to wait for the next season. As shows' content changed

[89] "Circus Routes," *Circus Historical Society*, Revised January 2011, https://classic.circushistory.org/Routes/Route.htm.

annually, this meant that these audiences, although witnessing shows by the same producers, were not consuming the same products. Regional tours became national tours with the expansion of the railroad, giving Eastern and Western, urban and rural patrons access to the same entertainments, and amusement proprietors access to a national consumer base.

The expansion of railroad shows was a boon not only for entertainment impresarios, but also for some businessmen in related industries such as train car manufacturing, railroading, and even electric lighting. Several train car manufacturers began to specialize in building cars for amusement companies. Since railroads charged shows by the number of cars, not by the length of each car, showmen took advantage and started ordering longer flatcars. Coup originally moved his show using the standard thirty or forty foot flatcars available at the time, but as time passed, he ordered specialty cars of sixty to seventy feet.[90] Traveling amusement companies purchased nearly all of these specialty cars from just two manufacturers, the Warren Tank Car Company of Warren, Pennsylvania and the Mt. Vernon Car Manufacturing Company of Mt. Vernon, Illinois.[91] These companies specifically advertised to showmen. By the turn of the century, entertainment trade papers were full of ads for various accoutrements for traveling amusements. One entertainment trade magazine from 1906 contained ads for three different circus tent companies, two different printing companies that specifically tailored their business for show advertising, a wagon company, a circus lighting company, and a wholesale grocer who wrote "we solicit the trade of shows vising cities within our

[90] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*; Parkinson and Fox, *The Circus Moves By Rail*, 97.
[91] Parkinson and Fox, *The Circus Moves By Rail*, 97.

vicinity."[92] The growth of railroad shows provided money-making opportunities to showmen and manufacturers alike.

There was also an internal market for these flatcars. Once a big show upgraded their cars, their old stock was often sold or leased to other traveling amusement companies, or, in the case of showmen like Bailey who eventually owned numerous traveling shows at the same time, passed down to smaller shows. In 1876, just a few years after they first decided to travel by rain, Barnum, Coup, and Castello's shows found it expedient to sell off their existing railroad cars and invest in new ones, indicating their serious investment in this mode of transportation.[93] In the trade paper, *The New York Clipper,* there were not only ads from established companies seeking the business of entertainment moguls, but also ads from fellow showmen looking to sell or rent out used equipment. Trade papers were a vital source for the sale of these used cars, because as Parkinson and Fox noted, these large flatcars were "freaks in general railroading." [94]Despite their immense value to traveling amusement companies, few if any other industries ever utilized these cars.

The fact that show cars were so unique was a problem for some reluctant railroad officials unsure of whether or not to agree to move big shows. For circuses and other traveling amusements, securing railroad contracts was a major task. The owner or general manager of a big show planned his company's route in advance and generally arranged the show's first move out of the big city in which they opened their season; however,

[92] Circus Advertisement Clippings, c 1906, Microfilm, Reel 2, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL.
[93] Parkinson and Fox, *The Circus Moves By Rail*, 23.
[94] Parkinson and Fox, 98.

general managers were often unable to organize the specific logistics from afar and instead hired "railroad agents" to travel ahead of the big show and make arrangements with railroad companies to get the show from one location to the next. The railroad agent became a crucial part of the traveling entertainment industry.

This position was well-recognized as an integral part of the traveling amusement industry as indicated by the presence of "How-To" guides for aspiring theatrical railroad agents. To be successful, railroad agents needed to have superior negotiation skills. One 1911 guide noted that "Old time agents took advantage of…competition and worked the railroads to a finish. It was a feather in an agent's cap to move his company from point to point cheaper than the other fellow."[95] For smaller shows that did not need to rent a locomotive of their own, these guides offered tips for how to get around paying some fares. With many railroad lines, the standard arrangement was that with the purchase of twenty-five fares, the railroad would provide a free baggage car. Some small companies would pay only twenty-five passenger fares and then hide as many additional people as possible in the free baggage car. Larger shows that owned or rented their own cars needed to rent a locomotive and caboose from the railroad company and also needed the labor of railroad crewmen to switch their train from one track to the next. This could create a significant burden for the railroad, as they would have to sacrifice crewmen and switch-room to facilitate the circus train that could have been used for their other, common-carrier locomotives. To convince railroad men to transport their shows, entertainment railroad agents had to make the deal beneficial to all parties.

[95] Parkinson and Fox, 375.

Despite the costs, there were indeed incentives for railroad men to transport large circus trains. Except for the locomotive and caboose, circuses provided all other cars themselves, whether they owned the cars or rented them from elsewhere. This meant that when railroads transported circus trains, they were not considered common carriers. In the early days of traveling by rail, fares were not monitored by the federal government and showmen had to negotiate with railroad operators for the best price. This meant there were occasions where railroad operators could secure a much higher rate from transporting a circus train than they could for regular passenger or freight cars. For traveling amusement companies, organizing transportation was a process of continual negotiation, even after the creation of the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) which was meant to establish standard rates. From its creation in 1887 through the 1920s, the ICC made several explicit rulings regarding circus trains including: "A railroad has the right to refuse to transport cars owned by a circus company except on its own terms." And "A railroad is not required, as a common carrier, to transport a circus train…but may refuse to transport such train, except under a special contract limiting its liability to that assumed by a private carrier."[96] This lead to the "liveliest competition between rival lines for the transportation of theatrical companies."[97]

A series of correspondence between the general superintendent of the New York, Ontario, and Western Railroad Company and his subordinates between the years 1909 and 1922 illuminates the decision-making process for railroad executives. In 1909, the traffic manager wrote to the railroad company's general superintendent questioning

[96] Parkinson and Fox, 39.
[97] Parkinson and Fox, 375.

whether they should agree to move the Howard Damon Circus. The potential benefit, the traffic manager wrote, was that the railroad could "exact from them as high a rate as the Almighty or the Interstate Commerce Commission will permit."[98] In response, the general superintendent wrote that the amount of labor required to move the train, including switching the tracks and "practically a continuous engine service in moving, unloading, and loading" the cars was not worth the price of the fare. Throughout this correspondence, the superintendent appeared quite reluctant to move any circuses. He noted that for big shows, such as the 85-car Ringling Bros. Circus in 1912, some of the railroads' stations simply did not have the space to accommodate the number and size of the show's cars. Eventually, he did agree to transport the Ringling Bros. that season; however, for some of the show's stops the railroad superintendent had to negotiate with other railroad lines to share track space at certain stations to provide enough room for the big show.[99] Organizing accommodations for a large traveling amusement was a challenge for railroad executives, but one that often had lucrative consequences.

The partnerships between amusement companies and railroads endured for decades. By the turn of the twentieth century many stock advertisements, generic pictorial ads on which different companies could add their own name and information, depicted circus trains. This indicates the centrality of the railroad to the traveling amusement industry. These two industries were indelibly linked in the American imagination. A major reason for this connection is that use of the railroad actually

[98] Correspondence from General Superintendent of the New York, Ontario, & Western Railroad, 1890-1922, Reprinted in Parkinson and Fox, 368.
[99] Parkinson and Fox, 370–71.

changed the appearance and content of traveling amusements. By 1900, the "circus" as Americans recognized it, would not have existed without the railroad.

Advances in transportation and technology changed the form of the "big show" itself. Barnum, Coup, and Castello's first year touring by rail succeeded in drawing large crowds. So large, in fact, that the company had a problem with audience members overcrowding tents. Eager viewers rushed to the front of the stands, blocking the view of seated patrons. Coup, ever the innovator, decided that expanding the show from one ring to two would alleviate this issue by providing more seats. Now that the show was traveling by rail, they could easily carry a larger tent and second performance ring with them. This feature quickly caught on with competitors and eventually the two-ring show became the standard three-ring circus. As Janet Davis notes, tent sizes increased from eighty-five feet in diameter in the 1840s to approximately 460 feet by 1890.[100] In addition to the big top, large shows also carried an assortment of smaller tents that housed side shows, menageries, stables for work horses, cook tents, and dressing rooms.[101] By 1909, Barnum and Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth, when unloaded and set up, took up fourteen acres of real estate.[102]

In order to compete with circuses for audiences, other forms of traveling amusement like minstrel shows and Wild West shows also began traveling by rail. Although these companies did not generally carry tents like circuses, they still took advantage of the systems put in place by circus men. Pioneering minstrel show producer,

[100] Advertisement clippings, c 1906, Microfilm, Reel 2, Townsend Walsh Collection, NYPL.
[101] "Barnum & Baily Circus A City in Itself."
[102] "Barnum & Baily Circus A City in Itself."

J.H. Haverly claimed that due to the advantages of modern transportation "the name of Haverly's Minstrels has penetrated every city, village and hamlet, and found a warm welcome in every household of this great land."[103] Described in the press as the P.T. Barnum of minstrelsy, Haverly was an innovator in his field. Although, like other showmen, some of his claims may be exaggerated, he was indeed responsible for changing the standard format of the minstrel show. In an 1880 article addressed to the public, Haverly argued that "modern minstrelsy, as presented in America, has, during the past two decades, remained, in point of enlargement and progression, at a standstill."[104] Many of Haverly's innovations in minstrelsy stemmed from his use of the railroad. Like Coup, Haverly also recognized the potential financial benefit of using the railroad to avoid stops in smaller, less profitable locations.[105]

Just as the railroad influenced the circus' expansion from one ring to three, the increased carrying capacity of rail cars encouraged minstrel troupes to carry larger numbers of people as well as more elaborate sets and props. Haverly was most well-known for his large minstrel troupes.[106] Unlike traditional minstrel shows that had approximately five to ten performers, Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrel troupe had over forty cast members. Haverly advertised this troupe by emblazoning his promotional materials with the slogan "Forty – Count 'em! – Forty." Despite this catchphrase and its

[103] Preliminary Pictorial of the Famous Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels, 1880, AMSC, HL.
[104] Preliminary Pictorial of the Famous Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels, 1880, AMSC, HL.
[105] Preliminary Pictorial of the Famous Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels, 1880, AMSC, HL.
[106] Toll, *Blacking Up*; LeRoy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

association with Haverly in the press, many of Haverly's various troupes exceeded this number of performers, with one troupe numbering one hundred minstrels. [107] Like his counterparts in the circus, Haverly used the size of his minstrel troupe as a selling point. Why pay to see seven minstrels when you could see forty, or even a hundred? The "Forty—Count 'em!—Forty" slogan was catchy, and formed an association between Haverly's name and spectacular entertainment.

To accompany this impressive number of performers, Haverly traveled with equally impressive sets and stage effects. While a traditional minstrel show may have utilized set pieces in the third-part burlesque skit, Haverly's shows often featured a scene in the first or second part of the show that used elaborate set pieces and stage effects. Expense reports from Haverly's touring season of 1880 indicate almost daily expenditures on props and costumes.[108] For several touring seasons in the early 1880s, Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels performed a second-part scene set in a "Turkish barbaric palace in silver and gold." Playbills describing this scene urged audiences to marvel at the spectacle of this act. The copy in many of these playbills reads: "The attention of the public is respectfully called to the magnificent FIRST PART TRANSFORMATION SCENE" with set pieces "painted expressly for Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels." A program from the next year began with a similar announcement: "Special attention is called to this magnificent dancing feature, with calcium light effects."[109] Here the

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[107] Promotional Cast Photo, Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels, 1879, 87, Seq. 4, AMSC, HL; Program, Haverly's Genuine Colored Minstrels at Haverly's Niblo's Garden Theatre, n.d., 430, Seq. 48, AMSC, HL.

[108] Expense Reports, Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels, 1880, Box 10, Folder 24, Minstrel Show Collection, HRC.

[109] Program, Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels at Boston Theatre, June 16, 1879, Box 10, Folder 22, Minstrel Show Collection, HRC; Program, Haverly's Original European

descriptions of Haverly's mise-en-scène function similarly to the descriptions of his trail cars. In emphasizing these details, Haverly suggested to his audience that his amusements were top-of-the-line and superior to his competitors' shows.

The railroad also offered new opportunities to smaller minstrel troupes, many of which were comprised of performers of color. As noted, in the early days of American minstrelsy, troupes generally performed in permanent theatres, but at the turn of the twentieth century more and more minstrel shows began performing under canvas. This is especially true of companies of black performers. According to Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff "portable tent theaters afforded greater access to back-country towns, and allowed a bit of leeway in negotiating Jim Crow laws and customs."[110] Given that rail cars were some of the most contentious racial battlegrounds in the Jim Crow South, private Pullman cars were enormously important for black performance troupes. Not only did a private car provide a safe space for troupe members to retire, these cars also projected a sense of professionalism and success. This helped these troupes counter many harmful stereotypes about African Americans, some of which were both created and perpetuated by the minstrel show genre itself.

Scholars today argue that turn-of-the-century black minstrel shows aimed to transform the common depictions of African Americans on stage, reworking minstrel shows "into vehicles for the development of racially self-referential humor and the

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Mastodon Minstrels at Haverly's Theatre, 1880, Box 10, Folder 22, Minstrel Show Collection, HRC; Program, Haverly's Consolidated Mastodon Minstrels at Tweedle Hall, n.d., Box 10, Folder 22, Minstrel Show Collection, HRC.

[110] Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Ragged But Right: Black Traveling Shows, "Coon Songs," and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 210.

advancement of modern African American popular music."[111] It is important to note the role that private train cars and tented performance spaces played in this development; giving black troupes a greater sense of autonomy. Several touring black minstrel troupes reached the level of national fame. While there were opportunities for black performers in these troupes, few black men ever reached the level of management or ownership. Still, the technological developments in the traveling amusement industry facilitated the growth of a "new" type of African American minstrelsy that employed black performers, providing them mobility, cash, fame, and an opportunity to play black-written music for a national audience.

Appearing on the entertainment scene much later than circuses and minstrel shows, Wild West shows were designed from the start to travel by rail. Although some debate still exists as to precisely who first came up with the idea, William "Buffalo Bill" Cody's show was the first and best known Wild West show. The show, which had the full title "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World," combined elements of rodeo and circus in to a Western-themed, equestrian and sharpshooting extravaganza. As historian Louis Warren describes it, "the convergence of the railroad circus with William Cody's Plains career was no accident."[112] The emergence of the railroad had already transformed the Western United States, so it seems only natural that the Wild West Show, responsible for creating much of the "myth" of the West that still exists today, would make use of the "iron horse." The Wild West show, as a genre, did not appear until after railroad circuses had already risen to prominence in the

[111] Abbott and Seroff, 211.
[112] Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 206.

entertainment industry. Prior the creation of the Wild West Show in 1882, Cody was already an experienced performer, having spent years acting in stage versions of the popular dime novels loosely based on his life, when he decided to branch out in to something new.

Although they experimented with alternate methods of transportation such as steamboat, the Wild West show never traveled over land by wagon. They quickly settled on train travel as the most expedient method of transportation. By the 1890s, Cody's Wild West was nearly as large as the biggest circuses. The company traveled on three trains carrying 23,000 yards of canvas, 20 miles of rope as well as electric generators, and hundreds of performers, crew, and horses. Cody and his partners, including the business-minded showman Nathan "Nate" Salsbury, found in the railroad circus an example of how to move a large show quickly and efficiently.[113] However, in the earliest days of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, speed was not the primary goal. Unlike Coup, Cody and Salsbury initially preferred to play long stands in one location. In 1893, the Wild West show experienced one of its most profitable season when it set up camp outside the grounds of the World's Columbia Exposition in Chicago, selling over three million tickets to eager spectators.[114] This changed in 1895 when Cody and Salsbury brought on James A. Bailey, of Barnum and Bailey, as a partner. Bailey reorganized the Wild West show and filled their seasons with one- or two-night stands. Still, there were unique elements of moving a Wild West show as opposed to a circus. In a statement reminiscent of the competition between railroad circuses and mud shows, an 1898 advertisement for

[113] Sarah J. Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets & Business: A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), 37; Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 229.
[114] Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 419.

Buffalo Bill's show claimed that the Wild West was superior to circuses because the circus needed to rush quickly from location to location, leading to sloppy work. Since the Wild West show did not carry their own big-top tents, they were able to take a more leisurely pace, which they claimed led to happier and healthier workers.[115]

Buffalo Bill's Wild West was also notable for its use of another modern technology; electric lighting. Although by the turn of the century some circuses and minstrel shows also traveled with electric generators, Cody's show seemed to attract the most attention for their use of this new technology. This was likely because unlike circuses where performers slept in their trains, Wild West performers set up an outdoor village and campground for visitors to stroll through and marvel at the "primitive" living conditions of Native Americans and cowboys. Ironically, this display of primitivism was illuminated by hundreds of incandescent lamps.[116] As with the first circus rail cars, figuring out how to transport an electric generator was a process of trial and error for Cody and Salsbury, who began attempting the feat as early as 1879. By 1896 they had mastered the process and their company roster included an "Electrical Department" with eleven dedicated employees. So exciting were these novel portable generators that electrical engineers came to the show grounds for the sole purpose of touring the electrical facilities. Warren noted that "Even on the road, managers arranged for tours of the electrical equipment, followed by performances, for visiting groups of electrical engineers and utility company officers."[117] This illustrates the centrality of technology in

[115] Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World 1898 Courier, 1898, MS6.1928, William Cody Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming (Hereafter BBCW).
[116] Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 444.
[117] Warren, 445.

the expansion of traveling amusements. Amusement managers not only used technology to bring their shows to new audiences, but they also used the novelty and appeal of new inventions to attract audiences to the show.

At the end of the 1873 season, Barnum and Coup proclaimed that the high quality of their show was a brilliant example of what "steam, electricity and a million dollars can do."[118] Not only did their innovations change the circus; the railroad changed the entire field of American entertainment. The railroad show was here to stay. The year 1911 saw thirty-two circuses traveling by rail, the highest number in circus history, and by the turn of the twentieth century, there were also approximately twenty minstrel shows traveling by rail as well as several Wild West shows and Uncle Tom shows.[119]

The railroad was essential to creating a national market for traveling amusements, but new developments in advertising and printing were equally as significant. What good would traveling to a new location be if potential customers did not know the show existed? The most successful showmen such as Barnum and Haverly were well-recognized for their talents for publicity. Barnum once remarked that "Without printer's ink I should have been no bigger than Tom Thumb. Advertising made me."[120] Barnum's genius for publicity began early in his life; however, the proliferation of steam lithography in the 1870s took amusement advertising to new heights.

Steam printing was first developed in Austria in 1851, greatly increasing the speed of producing lithographs. Using a hand-operated lithographic press, one might

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[118] Quoted in Parkinson and Fox, *The Circus Moves By Rail*, 21.
[119] Wilton Eckley, *The American Circus* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984).
[120] Cornelia Strassburg, "Barnum Said: 'Advertising Made Me,'" *Editor & Publisher*, July 21, 1934, MWEZ + n.c. 9543, BRTC, NYPL.

produce three hundred images a day, but the steam press increased this by approximately 850 percent to about 2,600 prints a day. By 1869 steam printing had reached Cincinnati where one enterprising printing firm, the Strobridge Lithographing Company differentiated itself from competitors by specializing in printing advertisements for theatrical and amusement companies.[121] In the late 1870s, owner Hines Strobridge brought in two key employees with existing connections in the entertainment industry; scenic artist and theatre manager Matt Morgan to head the firm's art department and A. A. Stewart, a sales agent who had previously contracted with such showmen as W.C. Coup and J.H. Haverly.[122] Strobridge opened a branch in New York City, the epicenter of the entertainment world, and began advertising in trade presses such as *The New York Clipper* to attract showmen. Strobridge not only specialized in entertainment advertising, but became well-known for printing large-scale posters. A standard printed "sheet" for outdoor advertisements was 28x42 inches. The Strobridge company began printing 12 and 16 sheet posters for entertainment impresarios, and in 1883 they attracted attention by printing an enormous hundred sheet poster for W.W. Cole's circus. This was not the largest poster they would ever print. When P.T. Barnum and rival Adam Forepaugh joined their circuses together for several performances in 1887, the Strobridge company put together a mammoth bill comprised of 1,562 sheets. Measuring 21ft. high and 347ft. long, Strobridge invited potential clients to view this massive billstand posted on a wall

[121] Kristin L. Spangenberg and Deborah W. Walk, eds., *The Amazing American Circus Poster: The Strobridge Lithographing Company* (Cincinnati, Oh; Sarasota, Fl: Cincinnati Art Museum ; The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2011).
[122] Kristin L. Spangenberg, "The Strobridge Lithographing Company: The Tiffany of Printing," in *The Amazing American Circus Poster: The Strobridge Lithographing Company* (Cincinnati: Cincinatti Art Museum, 2011), 21.

of Madison Square Garden.[123] Throughout its existence, the Strobridge Co. produced numerous works for notable amusement managers such as P.T. Barnum, Adam Forepaugh, and James Bailey.

Figure 1.2. Circus posters covering the side of a post office in Manchester, New Hampshire. 1910. CWM

For amusement owners, the development of steam printing not only made it easier to purchase color lithographs in bulk and at a lower cost, but also changed the standard appearance of printed advertisements to an image-based style beneficial to promoting entertainments. Earlier black-and-white woodcut prints were primarily text-based. These advertisements varied the size of the text to draw the reader's eye to the most important information, typically the show's name, the date of the performance, and the location. There would be a verbal description of the show in a smaller print and occasionally an

[123] Spangenberg and Walk, *The Amazing American Circus Poster*, 24.

image, but the placement and size of the text made words the focal point. With the lithograph, an artist would draw directly on a stone plate with a greasy crayon or specialized ink called *tusche* and then chemically treated so that the image could then be reproduced on to paper with printer's ink. This meant there were far fewer limits on print artists, as there was no process of engraving or carving required to create the initial advertisement, simply hand-drawing. Lithographs were initially hand-colored, but with the advent of the steam press, lithographers were able to print in color and firms like Strobridge developed specialty inks that could withstand rain and sun damage, making colored posters an industry standard for larger amusements. From the 1870s on, image began to replace text as the focal point in entertainment advertising. Of course, advertisements still needed to include text to inform audiences of what show was coming and when, but these new lithographs were not limited to linear, standard-font text. Strobridge hired several artists particularly skilled in hand-lettering such as John Reilly and Harry Bridwell.[124] As Kristin Spangenberg notes, "the great advantage of lithography was that hand-lettered typography with elastic letter forms could change in size or arc freely across the composition, following the design."[125] Along with typography artists, Strobridge also hired specialty lithographic portrait artists, providing some of the iconic profile portraits of circus impresarios such as Barnum and Bailey that would grace their advertisements for decades.

[124] Kristin L. Spangenberg, "Strobridge Pictorial Posters: Design, Printing, and Posting," in *The Amazing American Circus Poster: The Strobridge Lithographing Company* (Cincinnati: Cincinatti Art Museum, 2011), 86.
[125] Spangenberg, 86.

These developments in lithography, poster size, improved color printing, highly embellished and artistic typography, and more photo-realistic portraiture made for impressive amusement advertisements. Spangenberg argued that one of the great benefits of these advancements for amusement advertisers was that lithographic artists became more skilled in producing images that implied movement. As circuses and minstrel shows were dynamic places full of frenetic energy, posters that featured images of acrobats tumbling through the air, or daredevils attempting dangerous stunts helped capture the spirit of the show, giving audiences an idea of what sorts of exciting acts they could expect to see at the big show. Designing show posters was a collaborative process. While printers often provided clients with a set of stock images to choose from, the larger shows worked with lithographers to create original posters that reflected their show's unique content for the year.[126] Occasionally a show recycled images from year-to-year, but amusement owners desired new works to maintain audiences' interest. For example, in 1914, the Ringling Brothers commissioned thirty-four new designs and only seven reprints.[127] Although Strobridge was not the only firm printing entertainment advertisements, they were perhaps the most well-known and maintained long relationships with the biggest shows, offering big clients such as the Ringling Bros. preferred rates and special favors such as printing on short-notice. These specialty printing houses formed a symbiotic relationship with traveling amusements. The growth of the amusement industry increased the demand for show printing and at the same time,

[126] Fred D. III Pfening, "The Strobridge Lithographing Company, The Ringling Brothers, and Their Circuses," in *The Amazing American Circus Poster: The Strobridge Lithographing Company* (Cincinnati: Cincinatti Art Museum, 2011), 37.
[127] Pfening, 37.

the wider availability of more eye-catching posters then even further increased the demand for entertainment.

The mechanization and specialization in amusement advertising also extended to the process of posting show bills. Railroad circuses had between one and four "advance cars" that would travel several weeks ahead of the main show to post advertisements, obtain the necessary city permits to exhibit the show, and arrange for utilities such as water, meat, and hay to be ready when the big show arrived. In big shows with multiple advance cars, each car might have its own specific duty, meaning not every car would be posting advertisements, but for those cars that did carry billposters, advertising was a serious and often grueling job. The cars themselves were part-workspace and part-living quarters. In a typical car, underneath the top bunks, the bottom bunks were removed and replaced with long work tables. Some cars also contained an office for the car manager and most featured "an upright boiler to produce steam for cooking flour-based paste."[128] Show posters typically featured a blank space where billposters could paste in a smaller printed strip of paper with the specific date and location of the performance in each town. These bills came in different sizes. Half-sheet and one sheet ads were placed in shop windows, while the larger three-, six-, eight-, or sixteen-sheet posters might be fixed to the side of barns or buildings. Billposters would offer local property owners complimentary tickets to the coming attraction in exchange for the billing space. As circus historians Parkinson and Fox report, in larger shows in the 1880s, an advance team might post between 6,000 and 10,000 sheets per day.[129] Advertising jobs became

[128] Parkinson and Fox, *The Circus Moves By Rail*, 75.
[129] Parkinson and Fox, 75.

increasingly specialized as the nineteenth century came to a close and amusement impresarios worked hard to "out-bill" one another to compete for a greater share of the national market. In addition to billposters, some shows hired other workers, appropriately called banner men, to scale heights and affix muslin banners announcing the details of the show to the sides of buildings, hanging over heavily trafficked streets. In some cases, advance men were ordered to do "railroad work," taking the train from the site where the show would exhibit to smaller surrounding towns, posting ads to encourage more rural patrons to take the train in to see the big show. The largest shows also had one advance car dubbed the "opposition squad" that traveled behind the main advertising cars to double-check that rival shows had not torn down or defaced their company's ads, and the locals who agreed to let shows put posters on their property had not removed them.

The telegraph was the final major invention that created the golden age of traveling amusements. The increase in speed of communication afforded by the telegraph was a useful tool for those amusement proprietors who recognized the value of keeping tabs on their competition. To keep up-to-date with operatives spread out across the country, amusement managers needed a means of quickly contacting partners and subordinates. The telegraph made it possible for a show's manager to communicate with the advance teams quickly and efficiently or for a proprietor who did not travel with the show to check in with the manager on the road. Prior to the telegraph, communication was oftentimes not quick enough to be beneficial when a show was on the road, as they were constantly on the move. As a show's route was determined in advance, someone looking to communicate with individuals on the road could plan ahead and send letters by mail to a show's stop ahead of the troupe's arrival. The great advantage of the telegraph

was its potential to change a show's plans in-the-moment, particularly when it came to competition from rival companies.

Advance crews could wire the show's general manager updates on where and when their rivals were exhibiting and should territory disputes arise, a manager could quickly relay any changes in plans back to the advance men. An article in the Barnum & Bailey Route Book for the 1895 season described the job of the show's general agent, who would set up a headquarters in a region in which the advance team was working, noting that he was constantly telegraphing Bailey. The book's author wrote that "when [the agent] is fortunately to stop at a hotel overnight he is at the telegraphic desk half the time, answering queries."[130] The show's advance "skirmishing car," kept tabs on rival shows, and "as soon as a railway contractor of an opposition show makes his appearance anywhere the fact [was] telegraphed to Mr. Bailey, who thus knows in advance just where the other shows are going."[131] Both business historians and cultural historians have discussed the ways in which the telegraph made knowledge a commodity.[132] For amusement proprietors, timely knowledge of competitors' whereabouts had potential monetary value. By sending in a skirmishing team to interrupt the advertising process of a rival, larger shows with effective communication networks aimed increased their market share by undermining competition. When this kind of skirmish occurred between two large shows, such as Barnum & Bailey's and Adam Forepaugh's, it could be

[130] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1895, Box 47, Folder 6, McCaddon Collection of the Barnum & Bailey Circus, Manuscripts Collection, Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey (Hereafter McCaddon Collection, PUL).
[131] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1895, Box 47, Folder 6, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[132] Menahem Blondheim, *News Over the Wires: The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America, 1844-1897* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994).

beneficial to both parties, as we will see in greater detail in Chapter 4, but smaller shows could not always hold their own against shows with greater resources, both in terms of manpower and printing funds. A 100-sheet color poster was certainly more attention-grabbing than an all-text broadside, and when a large show with great capital used the information provided them through the telegraph to wage an advertising war, they drew attention and crowds, more valuable commodities, away from smaller competitors. Thus, well-coordinated use of the telegraph system for the purposes of "out-papering" the competition was a factor in some shows' eventual monopolization of the traveling amusement industry.

Communication between owners and managers during the touring season was, of course, not new. The archives are full of letters between impresarios such as Barnum and Haverly and their subordinates, wherein managers provided updates and discussed business matters with their bosses. The major benefit of the telegraph was the speed at which this communication occurred. Telegraphs between James A. Bailey and James T. McCaddon, his faithful manager and brother-in-law, show that the two were in nearly constant communication. For example, in 1891 when McCaddon was on the road with the Adam Forepaugh circus, of which Bailey was by then partial owner, the two were sending daily and sometimes twice-daily messages to one another.[133] In this particular case, the urgent communication between Bailey and McCaddon concerned the fate of P.T. Barnum's estate after his death, a time-sensitive issue as Bailey was eager to ensure that his most profitable enterprise, the Barnum & Bailey circus, would not suffer. The

[133] Telegrams between James A. Bailey and Joseph T. McCaddon, 1891, Box 1, Folder 1, Crain Collection, HRC.

October letters also show that the two men conversed regarding more mundane issues of running the show. Bailey advised McCaddon on hiring a detective to travel with the show, discussed printing prices and advertising budgets, and notified McCaddon that his wife had ordered flowers for McCaddon in condolence for an unspecified tragedy.[134] The near-instantaneous pace of communication through the telegraph was of great benefit for managing business affairs. Quick communication allowed showmen to stay actively involved in the operations of their amusement enterprises when not physically present on tour, making the task of operating multiple shows simpler. Thus, the telegraph was a significant component of the expansion of the industry.

There is no single causal factor that explains the rise of traveling amusements in the Gilded Age. In addition to the labor systems and business strategies that will be explored in the coming chapters, successful traveling amusements were strongly connected to the new industrial order of the late nineteenth century through their use of technology. As steam, rail, and electrical power became more widely available, individual shows grew, while the number of competitors in the field shrank. Those that had the money to purchase custom rail cars, commission large advertisements, and send constant telegrams used these technologies to cement their reputation as the biggest in the field, and in the flamboyant world of traveling amusements, "biggest" was synonymous with "best." The fervor with which commentators described "circus day" suggests that when smaller local shows existed, they did not inspire the same sense of excitement and wonder as these bigger spectacles. Technology shaped the look and feel of traveling

[134] Telegrams between James A. Bailey and Joseph T. McCaddon, Box 1, Folder 1, Crain Collection, HRC.

amusements, as well as the size of the available market for commercial entertainment. At the same time, traveling amusements' use of technology also contributed to the "panoramic vision" that Schivelbusch identified as being a result of the railroad. The three-ring circus, now a common metaphor for chaos and overstimulation, required audiences to take in a massive scene with many moving parts. The "machine and motion" that created panoramic perception were both on display in traveling amusements as performers utilized technological apparatuses such as the flying trapeze of the circus or the electric lighting that illuminated Buffalo Bill stampeding across the show grounds. These entertainments may not have been mechanically reproduced in the literal sense of films, but they were certainly mechanically accelerated, both in terms of the speed of travel across the country, as well as the pace of their acts. This speed of travel, communication, and advertisement, separated traveling amusements from their predecessors and rewarded those managers who quickly adopted new technologies.

CHAPTER 2

PERFORMING SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT

In 1873, just two years after he entered the circus business, P.T. Barnum penned a letter to his audiences published in his *Advanced Courier* advertising pamphlet. He informed audiences that he would not be on the road with the show: "I shall remain at headquarters to direct the enterprise, constantly on the alert to secure new and startling attractions, my able and thoroughly experienced corps of Managers and assistants…all heartily co-operate with me in carrying out my liberal and well-matured plans."[135] By 1873, Barnum needed this corps of managers. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Barnum and his partners' success in utilizing the railroad caused rapid growth in the amusement industry. With multiple teams of advance agents on the road, several trains, and a show lot of up to ten acres, proprietors could not personally oversee all their employees at once and relied heavily on a managerial hierarchy to keep the shows moving on schedule.[136] To manage their affairs, traveling amusement owners embraced some of the techniques of scientific management. Scientific management, or "Taylorism" after industrial organizer Frederick Winslow Taylor, aimed at increasing a business's efficiency. Traveling amusement owners and managers used aspects of Taylorism, most significantly the development of a managerial hierarchy, division of labor, and timed tasks, to increase speed and efficiency. Through their embrace of scientific management,

[135] Barnum's Advance Courier, 1873, Barnum Papers, NYPL.
[136] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 3.

entertainment impresarios fashioned the production process in to an amusing spectacle in its own right.

Traveling amusements helped spread the ideology of scientific management as they moved from coast to coast. Amusement proprietors developed a strong managerial hierarchy and utilized many of the concepts from Taylorism to grow their businesses. What made traveling amusement labor unique, especially when compared to traditional theatre, was its very public nature. In traveling amusements, the labor was literally part of the show, captivating audiences nearly as much as the Big Top performances. This labor was a spectacle both entertaining and educational, exposing patrons to new patterns of work. By presenting modern labor as part of a whimsical, enjoyable spectacle, traveling amusements were a hegemonic force, and amusement workers' performative labor, as well as the "visible hand" of middle managers' organization, displayed the powerful potential of industrial capitalism.

Historian Jackson Lears argued that one of the defining features of Gilded Age culture was a "new preoccupation with force."[137] Using the example of the electric dynamo, Lears described how "by transforming mechanical energy into the invisible force of electricity, and by placing that force in the service of concentrated capital, the dynamo epitomized the imperial reach of the new corporate economy."[138] Traveling amusements certainly made use of force as well by incorporating new technological developments to propel themselves across the nation as described in the previous chapter. But even as amusements became technological spectacles, they still relied on a great

[137] T. J. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877 - 1920* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 226.
[138] Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation,* 223.

amount of human force. In fact, manual labor on traveling amusements was so precise and well-choreographed that spectators frequently compared amusement workers to machines. These managers used new "scientific management" techniques to manage these "human machines" and increase workplace efficiency, which had the simultaneous effect of not only facilitating the growth and movement of traveling amusements, but also shaped audiences' expectation that traveling amusements would be punctual, well-organized, and the employees well-disciplined.

As historians and sociologists have noted, Taylorism was in many ways a "failed ideology." In practice, it did not always deliver the results it promised. But this did not reduce its impact. As Jackson Lears argued, "scientific management was often more about simulating efficiency than delivering it."[139] Scientific management was aspirational, a hegemonic ideology that promised profit from organization and viewed workers as subjects to be controlled. Thus, traveling amusement impresarios need not have strictly adhered to all of Taylor's guidelines in *The Principles of Scientific Management* to be part of a broader cultural movement toward an industrial capitalist society. In fact, traveling amusements played an especially significant role in this cultural shift given the highly public nature of amusement labor, and the popularity of these shows. This "performative Taylorism" was a key factor in the growth and professionalization of the amusement industry. Showmen were known for stretching the truth. The "perfect systems" they described in their advertisements most likely did not reflect reality; however, they still utilized aspects of scientific management, particularly division of labor, development of a managerial hierarchy, and an emphasis on time and

[139] Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation,* 261.

speed. Amusements owners' self-conscious presentation of their version of Taylorism indicates their investment in the industrial capitalist system, and created an audience expectation of systematized, efficient, well-organized entertainments.

As the previous chapter illustrated, as traveling amusements moved on to rail, they grew bigger and bigger. By 1889, the Barnum and Bailey show traveled on sixty-four cars. It took an enormous number of people to quickly and efficiently set-up and tear-down these massive spectacles. For example, in 1895, the Ringling Brothers circus employed 775 people, only about a hundred of whom were performers.[140] The rest were involved in erecting, managing, and staffing the temporary city that was the circus or Wild West Show lot. Large traveling amusements set up everything from cook tents, to blacksmith shops, to dressing rooms, only to tear it all down at the end of the evening, repeating this process almost-daily throughout the approximately 150-day season. To best execute the arduous task of moving a big show, proprietors of traveling amusements fashioned their shows in to modern business enterprises with the goal of increasing efficiency through expanding managerial oversight. In some ways, this resembled a mobile version of Pullman's company town or Ford's employee homes in Dearborn, Michigan.

Alfred Chandler defined a modern business enterprise as having "two specific characteristics: it contains many distinct operating units and it is managed by a hierarchy of salaried managers."[141] To coordinate the daily operations of moving a large show, amusement owners developed a managerial hierarchy, several layers deep. Traveling

[140] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 72.
[141] Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 1.

Amusements' employee rosters demonstrate the hierarchical structure of these massive shows. In 1902, Buffalo Bill's Wild West listed sixteen men as part of the show's executive staff, including Buffalo Bill as the show's President, Nate Salsbury as Vice President, and James Bailey as one of three Tour Directors. This executive staff also included, among other positions, a General Manager, Secretary, two Treasurers, and the Director of Entertainment. Beneath this, the route book listed twenty-one other heads of departments such as the Master of Transportation, Head Waiter, and Superintendent of Canvas. Several of these departments were further subdivided. For example, within the Canvas Department, there were two assistants to the superintendent, special crews in charge of the horse tents and dressing room tents, and then fifty-nine laborers without specialized positions listed who would have helped secure the massive big top tent. The crews that set up seating also appear to have been within the Canvas Department. These workers were divided in to three groups: front end, back end, and the reserved seating area. Each of these units had its own superintendent, as well as another person whose job title was just listed as "In Charge" of the installation of seating. The "In Charge" man had his own assistant underneath him, and then the other men who worked on seating each had a specialized position listed: leveler, jack-setter, toe pin driver, blocks, and kids. The Publicity and Advance departments were listed separately from the rest of the show staff, but these were again hierarchical staff lists. Each of the three Ad Cars had a manager, Boss Bill Poster, Boss Lithographer, and between three and sixteen other workers.

Although minstrel shows were smaller, as many of the largest ones performed in permanent theaters, payment records indicate a hierarchy among minstrel employees as well, and demonstrate the development of specialized executive management positions.

Minstrel shows did not publish route books, but their expense reports and payroll records give insight on the managerial structure. In the 1880s, J.H. Haverly's Mastodon Minstrel Show regularly traveled with a manager, treasurer, secretary, and stage manager. Other managerial positions appeared sporadically, such as business manager, comptroller, and assistant managers. At the height of his career, Haverly owned several minstrel troupes at one time, as well as touring opera and comedy shows. As Haverly could not be physically present with each of his shows at all times, the role of general manager took on increasing significance.

Proprietors delegated power to general managers. Letters between Haverly and William Foote, the long-time manager of Haverly's Mastodons, indicate that Haverly was aware that Foote was more knowledgeable about the Mastodons than he was. In June of 1892, Haverly wrote Foote, telling him that he heard reports that one of the performers in the Mastodons, Kissel, was receiving bad reviews and was "a detriment to [the company] inside and out." Haverly offered to send Foote a different performer from one of his other shows to take Kissel's place, but deferred to Foote, writing that if Kissel was a poor performer, "no one is more keen to realize it than yourself, and if you agree with these [critics'] opinion, why don't you dismiss him?"[142] Haverly trusted his manager to make the best decision for the company, and in the same letter also asked Foote's opinion on several other staffing questions. Correspondence between circus owner James Bailey and manager of the Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Joseph T. McCaddon demonstrates a similar relationship wherein Bailey did not so much issue commands as ask McCaddon

[142] J.H. Haverly to William Foote, June 12, 1892, Box 10, Folder 22, Minstrel Show Collection, HRC.

for collaboration. After P.T. Barnum died in 1891, as Bailey was in the midst of negotiating details of the estate with Barnum's heirs, he regularly corresponded with McCaddon, informing him of how the negotiations were progressing, gossiping about other showmen, and finally, asking McCaddon if he could "spare" an employee to go to Europe and begin making plans for the circus to tour abroad.[143] These letters, between Bailey and McCaddon, and Haverly and Foote, illustrate that at the top levels of management, although there was a hierarchy, there was also a spirit of collaboration and proprietors respected managers' expertise when it came to daily operations.

Haverly's correspondence with Foote regarding Kissel also illustrates the new attitude toward performers and creative labor that developed as traveling amusements grew. Amusement proprietors outsourced much of the creative work on their shows. Circuses, minstrel shows, and Wild West shows, although there were great differences, were all essentially based around the variety-show structure, wherein there was no unifying narrative structure. For the most part, these proprietors hired artists who already had an act: jugglers, acrobats, dancers. Records indicate that during the off-season, if performers were re-hired, circus proprietors did not pay them for the time spent training and putting together a new act for the next season. As Haverly's conversation with Foote demonstrates, proprietors put their shows together piecemeal and could shuffle around different acts as needed. In circuses, the show's real "director" in the sense the term is used today, was the Equestrian Director, the position that later morphed in to the Ring Master. As equestrian acts were the main staple of circuses in the colonial era, the

[143] James A. Bailey to Joseph T. McCaddon, July 19, 1891, Box 41, Folder 1, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

equestrian director naturally took on responsibility for more-or-less the whole show, coordinating the performances in the sawdust ring.

Although the proprietor may have had ultimate control of the decision-making process in theory, the managerial structure of traveling amusements meant that expertise and agency were more distributed throughout the company. Historian Robert Wiebe wrote that this "unplanned diffusion of power" was an unintended consequence of the managerial revolution. When "executives in the home office relied so heavily upon the initiative of their scattered subordinates…it was difficult to know who made the major decisions."[144] The proprietor(s) retained the decision-making power when it came to corporate strategy but lower-level staff were empowered to make decisions regarding shows' daily operations. The Barnum & Bailey route book for 1895 described Louis Cooke, the show's general advance agent, as "Mr. Bailey's adjutant and something more; for he not only carries out the general plan of operations laid down for him, but is responsible for the details and is entrusted with large discretionary powers."[145] Although Cooke was Bailey's subordinate, Bailey acknowledged his skills and their benefit to the organization by entrusting him with decision-making power when it came to advance preparation for the show.

The top proprietors in the industry often were not on the road with their shows throughout the entire season. Of course, as proprietors consolidated the industry and held interests in multiple massive shows at one time it was physically impossible for them to be present at multiple shows at once. The most well-recognized circus figure today, P.T.

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[144] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search For Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), 19.
[145] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1895, Box 47, Folder 6, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

Barnum never toured with his show for an entire season. He was in his seventies when he entered the circus business. In his first year in the circus industry he told the public in his show's *Advanced Courier* pamphlet that "like Baron Von Moltke, I shall continue to fight faithfully at Headquarters and direct the enterprise, while W.C. Coup, Esq., my General Manager (a man of unequalled ability in his specialty), will superintend the daily operations of the *great moving army* during its triumphant procession throughout the land."[146] Another promotional pamphlet regarding Barnum's merger with James Bailey and James Hutchinson in 1881 admitted that Barnum realized that his desire to create an amusement empire "could be better accomplished by associating himself with young, experienced, and capable managers. Such desirable aid he found in the management of the GREAT LONDON CIRCUS, etc., James A. Bailey and James L. Hutchinson, its energetic and wealthy proprietors. In Barnum & Bailey's early years, Bailey did travel with the show while Barnum remained on the East coast, either at New York offices or his home in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Barnum visited his show periodically, especially during their annual opening in New York, and always relished the opportunity to appear before fans. Barnum also directed publicity for the circus, perhaps his greatest skill. Bailey told the public that he "accepted the entire responsibility of the personal and active management of the grand new combined exhibition bearing [the Barnum and Bailey] names, I publicly outlined the basis upon which they were organized, the strict business principles upon which they would be conducted, and the executive policy that would be

[146] P.T. Barnum's Advance Courier, 1871, Barnum Papers, BRTC, NYPL.

adopted and enforced."[147] Here Bailey acknowledged that he was the organizational director, passing policies and principles down to others beneath him.

After Barnum's death, James Bailey expanded his businesses beyond the point where it was feasible for him to stay with one show throughout a season. As will be explored in detail in Chapter Five, Bailey came to have a virtual monopoly on the circus industry in the first decade of the twentieth century. He controlled three of the largest traveling amusements at one time, typically with one playing in Europe while the others showed in the U.S. At this point, Bailey had developed his management system to the point where shows could operate without his direct oversight. His contract with Buffalo Bill Cody, wherein Bailey took ownership of one third of the show, specifically notes that of the three partners, Cody, Bailey and Nate Salsbury, Cody was the only one required to stay with the show as he was a performer and did not take an active role in management. In 1900, Bailey's contract with fellow showmen W.W. Cole and the Sells Brothers to mount the Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Show included a clause that stated neither Bailey nor Cole were required to be on the show's premises. In this case, it was the Sells Brothers who assumed active management. In 1905, after two of the three Sells brothers passed away, the remaining brother, Lew Sells, sold his interest in the Forepaugh-Sells show to Bailey who then brought in the Ringling Brothers for a fifty-fifty partnership, keeping the Forepaugh & Sells Bros. title. In this case, neither of the parties who owned the show would be on the premises. The partnership agreement stated that while the Ringlings "shall give [their] personal attention to the management and direction of said show…an assistant manager shall be selected by both parties [Bailey and the Ringlings]

[147] "'A Wealth of Wonders and a Feast of Riches,' Clipping, Barnum Papers, NYPL."

to travel continuously with said circus and menagerie, during the traveling season and during the time said circus and menagerie may be in winter quarters."[148]

Proprietors' separation from their shows becomes evident when analyzing route books, and their descriptions of show owners' visits as special occasions. The Buffalo Bill's Wild West route book for 1896 makes a special note on May 17 that "Nate Salsbury, manager [and co-owner] of the Wild West, came on from Chicago, and met us on the lot to-day." Salsbury remained for two days before returning to the windy city. On June 1st, the author of the route book left a note that famous guests in attendance that evening included James Bailey as well as Louis Cooke, the general agent of the Barnum & Bailey show, and Peter Sells of the Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus and the following day John Ringling was in the audience. This veritable "who's who" of the circus industry demonstrates that that both proprietors and top-level managers did not stay with their shows all season.

By the turn of the century, traveling amusements had become multi-unit firms with proprietors overseeing business affairs from afar. Traveling amusements were part of the "managerial revolution" of the Gilded Age. Even with a general manager on site, it was still not possible for one man to oversee the entire show. As the shows physically grew and moved on to rail, labor became increasingly specialized. One crew was responsible just for unloading the train, and from there different crews picked up the supplies and set it up. Even within these smaller divisions, managers further subdivided

[148] Articles of Agreement between William F. Cody, Nate Salsbury, and James A. Bailey, December 10, 1894, Box 42, Folder 15, McCaddon Collection, PUL; Articles of Agreement between James A. Bailey, William W. Cole, Lew Sells, and Peter Sells, 1900, Box 42, Folder 20, McCaddon Collection, PUL; Articles of Agreement between James A. Bailey and the Ringling Brothers, 1905, Box 42, Folder 26, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

tasks. In traveling amusements with hundreds of employees, one man's job might be just hammering in tent stakes. Each unit had its own manager who did have some say in managing his employee's movements; however, there were clear limits lower-level managers' control, particularly in regard to time. Executive managers controlled the time and pace of all other employees' labor. Before the touring season even began, a railroad contractor and/or general agent had already planned the route for the season and prepared preliminary train schedules.[149] Performance dates and times were advertised months in advance, and proprietors, in their quest to portray their amusements as high-toned, moral institutions insisted shows start on-time to establish a reliable reputation with audiences. The superintendent of, say, the ring stock department did not have control over what time his horses were unloaded, washed, tacked, and ready to perform. He had to meet a deadline imposed by his higher-ups. He might, however, have been able to decide the order they would unload the horses, make requests for what equipment he needed, and decide which of his subordinate employees would be responsible for which task. As amusement owners created their own version of an economy of scale with their now-massive shows that now covered vast territories in short periods of time, labor management became increasingly important and proprietors dispersed the task of managing labor down through series of middle managers.

Analysis of a typical day in traveling amusements reveals the extent of managerial oversight, division of labor, and systemization. In the case of a large tented amusement such as the Barnum and Bailey circus, the process of unloading and setting up actually began the day before the show when a "twenty-four-hour man" would arrive in town to

[149] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*.

ensure that all permits and taxes were taken care of, and that commodities such as water or meat which the advance men had contracted from local vendors were available and ready for the main company.[150] This meant that unloading and set-up could begin immediately when a train rolled in to a station. The show's first train section, the "Flying Squadron," would arrive before dawn. As a typical example for a large circus, the Barnum & Bailey Circus' train loading schedule from 1908 lists the first section as containing the cook-house, water wagon, stakes, poles, and canvas for the menagerie tent, many of the circus' exotic animals, 2 sleeping cars and 66 workhorses.[151]

The process of unloading wagons from train cars illustrates the precision with which labor was organized in traveling amusements. As they fine-tuned the process for moving wagons on and off the train, these railroad crews developed specialized positions. Each man knew his assigned task and performed his job over and over as each wagon rolled off the train in a manner resembling factory workers on an assembly line. Overseeing the process was the railroad boss, the director of the operation who coordinated the timing of his crew's activities and ensured their safety. Workmen disembarked first and as the train crew set up runs to unload wagons, horse men, or "hostlers" harnessed up teams of stock horses to help haul wagons from the train yard to the show lot. Although not ideal, the distance between the rail station and performance space could be up to a mile. Busy horses and hostlers made this journey repeatedly until

[150] John Robinson's Circus Route Book, 1904, Box 9, Folder 3, Townsend Walsh Papers, NYPL.
[151] Business Records, 1908-1909, n.d., Box 2, Folder 5, Barnum Papers, CWM.

all supplies were in place. On many occasions, particularly when terrain was hilly, hostlers would enlist the aid of the circus' elephants to push wagons up steep inclines.[152]

To aid in unloading the train, it was standard for the final car on the train to have a "snubber post," an hourglass shaped piece of steel sticking up on either side of the car. One man would wrap a rope around the middle of the snubber and attach the other end to a wagon and, using the rope for leverage, ease the wagon slowly down the ramp. In addition to this rope, a team of men used their own strength to help assist the car down the runs at a consistent speed so it would safely reach the ground without rolling forward out of control. When it was time for a car to descend and the crew needed to lift in unison, railroad bosses were known to call out a warning to laborers to "Raise 'yer backs!" Due to the frequency of this command, men who worked this job were termed "Razorbacks" on circus lots across the country.

[152] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 25–26.

Figure 2.1. Railroad crew unloading circus flatcars using Coup's "runs" to guide wagons to the ground. *Photograph. 1901. Circus World Museum* (Reprinted in Dahlinger, *Trains of the Circus*.)

Meanwhile, the boss canvasman arrived on the show lot and set to work marking the location for the various tent poles of the big top. As circus historian Fred Dahlinger Jr. describes it, "[The boss canvasman] carries with him a sketch of what should go where, a part of the contract the circus had negotiated with the host city. If the lot contains trees, low spots, rocks, or other features that might cause problems, he relocates tents and driveways accordingly."[153] Just as the boss finalized his plans, the big top stakes and canvas arrived on the train's second section along with more crew members and stock horses to assist with the enormous task of raising the main tent.

Stake-driving crews begin to hammer in the enormous four-foot long stakes that would secure the tent. Usually six-man crews, they gathered around a stake and worked methodically and rhythmically, each taking his turn to pound on the stake. This strenuous

[153] Fred Dahlinger Jr., foreward to Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, xviii.

task was accomplished with great expediency. Dahlinger wrote that "in about forty-five minutes some thirty stake drivers pound[ed] in as many as one thousand stakes."[154] A different crew set about raising tent poles, while the canvasmen, generally the largest crew, carefully laced together the various pieces of the big top tent, layed it out on the ground, and then, using a system of pulleys, raised the canvas up the center pole. As soon as the tent was up, even more workers rushed in, setting up the circus' three rings, seats, bleachers, and rigging for aerial acts. These crews broke in to smaller units and set up the various other tents such as the menagerie, side show, blacksmith shop, and wardrobe.[155] Throughout this process, bosses carefully observed their workers, maintaining responsibility for the pace and efficiency of their work. Traveling amusements operated on a tight schedule, with train plans set in place months before the show hit the road. Any slight delay could kick off a domino effect of consequences for the rest of the show's season; it was therefore imperative that laborers behave according to a tight time chart.

W.C. Coup wrote that with the new equipment he invented loading and unloading trains became "mere play," but this oversimplification obscures the demanding physical labor still required to load and unload circus trains. Although Coup's equipment helped ease the process, safely moving a heavy wagon down a ramp still required the strength of multiple men, and, at times even the aid of elephants. Technology lessened some of the physical burden for amusement laborers but did not eliminate it. Managers borrowed some techniques from factory labor, such as division of labor, breaking each task down in to smaller, specialized actions which a worker performed over and over. W.C. Coup

[154] Fred Dahlinger Jr, foreward to Apps, xx.
[155] Fred Dahlinger Jr., foreward to Apps, xi.

himself developed many of the patterns of labor that became standard as the traveling amusement industry matured. Coup drilled his men until they were as efficient as possible in their movements, claiming that he didn't even have time to change his clothes for the first seven days of the season he was so concerned about overseeing his employees' every move.[156] One again, we see here the influence of Taylorism and the Gilded Age preoccupation with standardization. Historian Daniel Nelson wrote that the aim of scientific management was to conduct shop management "with the same knowledge and forethought as the building of a complicated machine."[157] Vladimir Lenin described the Taylor system as "analyzing mechanical motions during work, the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, [and] the elaboration of correct methods of work."[158] This phrase could also describe W.C. Coup's supervision of his laborers. In a move that could have been straight out of Taylor's handbook, Coup even took to timing his employees with a stopwatch as they unloaded train cars.[159]

After the train was unloaded, and workers had enjoyed breakfast, they returned to work. Shows such as Barnum & Bailey's or the Ringling Brothers' generally held two performances a day, one at 2:00pm and one at 8:00pm. While audiences enjoyed the evening performance, workers were already making preparations to get the show back on the rails as quickly as possible. They began by closing and disassembling the menagerie and side show tents. As soon as the audience left the main tent, the boss canvasmen blew

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[156] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 22.
[157] Daniel Nelson, *Frederick W. Taylor and the Rise of Scientific Management* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 12.
[158] Quoted in Sudhir Kakar, *Frederick Taylor: A Study in Personality and Innovation* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1970), 2.
[159] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 22.

his whistle, and crew immediately began deconstructing the big top, the last remaining tent they need to haul back and load on to the train. According to contemporary observers this process was so well-rehearsed that it only took ten to twenty minutes to pack up the big top and begin the final trip back to the train yard.[160] As soon as the train was loaded, the circus set off for its next destination. Circus men repeated this process six days a week for approximately six months out of the year.

Amusement proprietors made the loading and unloading process in to a neatly choreographed operation which became a source of entertainment all on its own. Many observers recall waking up early to meet the circus at the station to watch the process of unloading the trains and setting up the big top.[161] Others remained in their seats after the big show and although this was ostensibly to watch the post-show concert, amusement proprietors were well aware that the concert was merely musical accompaniment for the real show of breaking down the big tent with speed and precision.[162] Circus archives are littered with similar statements from spectators in awe of the way the circus moved with efficiency and regularity, frequently describing the show's laborers as either an army or a machine. Amusement impresarios welcomed these comparisons as part of the project of increasing their positive reputation. Their shows were not haphazard endeavors, but perfectly organized examples of effective scientific management, as modern and impressive as a complex piece of machinery.

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[160] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*.
[161] Clipping, n.d., Box 2, Folder 10, Barnum Papers, CWM; Murray, "On the Road with the 'Big Show.'"
[162] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 50.

Observers were struck by what they described as the almost mechanical movements of amusement laborers. This system was so fascinating that *Cosmopolitan* published an article in 1902 providing readers with details of "The Organization of a Modern Circus" describing the "perfect precision of movement of every one concerned with the program. The performance moves with a machine-like regularity, which is obtained only by rigidly enforced discipline."[163] Spectators' comparisons of the circus to a machine or factory reveal even more of the connections between the entertainment industry and other modern labor systems. *Cosmopolitan* magazine published several different articles on the circus at the turn of the century. In one, the author described the unloading process on circus day: "I say it seems chaotic and altogether unreasonable, yet it is the systematic perfection of system in which all things are made to come together at a moment and in proper order. It is only a perfectly trained, though a quite noisily working, human machine."[164] Other spectators wrote that the show moved "like clock-work," and described how the "exact, mathematical running of the business" made it similar to a factory, a "circus plant."[165] Amusement laborers were public symbols of the changes taking place in an industrializing society. They used both muscle and machine to complete their work, and, in the eyes of observers, seemed almost to become part machine themselves. The changes in work patterns engendered by new specialized technology and scientific management techniques made amusement laborers in to

[163] Whiting Allen, "The Organization of a Modern Circus," *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, August 1902, Box 3, Folder 25, Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Collection, CWM.
[164] Murray, "On the Road with the 'Big Show.'"
[165] "The Circus Colossal," Clipping, n.d., Townsend Walsh Papers, MWEZ + n.c. 4032, BRTC, NYPL.

symbols of "cultural Taylorism." Their work was a performance, blending the work patterns of industrial capitalism with the pageantry of the circus.

In addition to describing amusement laborers as machines, spectators also frequently compared their work to that of soldiers. In 1873, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* described the Barnum & Bailey show as being "governed in regular military style."[166] Circus men too recognized the similarities with one advertisement stating "A great army general once said that it required as much capacity, ability, executive force, brains and ingenuity to successfully manage a great show…to route it through states and across the continent as it required to command, equip, transport and feed an army of invasion in a hostile country, and that managing a great show was as much of a fixed science as commanding brigade."[167] The circus-military connection became more than mere analogy when military leaders reached out to the Barnum show in 1906. The military sent representatives for both the Commissary General and Quartermaster General to observe the Barnum & Bailey show, the latter writing to the show's manager, George Starr, that he believed "there are many things to be learned in regard to up to date methods of moving men, animals and baggage by an observation of your methods."[168] This demonstrates the success of amusement managers as system builders. In this case, amusement managers used performative Taylorism to help legitimate themselves as industrialists in the eyes of the American military. Amusement managers were not merely

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[166] "Barnum's Great Show," *Plain Dealer*, July 16, 1873, Box 1, Folder 3, Barnum Circus Papers, CWM.
[167] The Great Sells-Floto Shows Consolidated Magazine of Zoology, 1909, Microfilm, Reel 3, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL.
[168] Henry G. Sharpe to George Starr, May 15, 1906, Box 41, Folder 5, McCaddon Collection, PUL; Charles F. Humphrey to George Starr, May 15, 1906, Box 41, Folder 5, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

following the trend of scientific management, but were perfecting aspects of it that had implications for industries outside of entertainment.

Traveling amusements made modern labor management in to an entertaining spectacle witnessed by audiences of 10,000 people at a time. What Janet Davis described as the "spectacular labor" of amusement employees represented the ascent of scientific management as a cultural ideology, which, in the long run, would aid the entrenchment of industrial capitalism in American society. Many audiences, especially traveling amusements' middle class audiences, would never set foot on a factory floor. Traveling amusements were one way the managerial ideology embodied in Taylorism made its way in to the broad public consciousness of Gilded Age America.

Traveling amusements were an ideal vehicle for this project not only because the new physical demands of a large show required extreme labor organization, but also due to traveling amusements history of displaying an "operational aesthetic." This term, from Neil Harris' book on P.T. Barnum, refers to the phenomenon of entertainments calling attention to their own structures and operations. For Harris, this mainly functioned in a way that was similar to what James Cook called the "arts of deception;" audiences enjoyed Barnum's humbugs because the act of deciphering them, uncovering how they operated, was just as entertaining as the hoaxes themselves. The circus also embodied the operational aesthetic, although not necessarily in the contents of the amusements themselves, but in the spectacular displays of labor before and after the big show. In traveling amusements, the production process was highly visible, neatly organized, and most significantly, entertaining. Spectators woke up early and stayed out late to watch the

great amusement machines and take in the operational aesthetic, the performative Taylorism embodied in traveling amusements.[169]

[169] Harris, *Humbug*; James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001).

CHAPTER 3

HEY RUBE

Although not all industrialists embraced scientific management, and it did not always have the hoped-for effects, Taylorism and its emphasis on standardization and efficiency made a significant contribution to the rise of industrial capitalism. Beyond scientific management's potential for increasing profits, some believed that it would also have a positive effect on employee-manager relationships. In his interpretation of Taylor's views, Jackson Lears wrote that Taylor tried to position his ideas as "a parable of progress, a key moment in the inexorable movement toward utopian harmony between workers and managers. Submission to the impartial arbitration of science, [Taylor] insisted, would render old conflicts obsolete."[170] In traveling amusements, scientific management did not lead to a "utopian harmony." As in other industries, it led to de-skilling, substantial time pressure, and, for workers, lack of control over their own labor. Unlike performers whose bodily feats were viewed as evidence of individual skill, as noted in the preceding chapter, audiences saw laborers as mere cogs in the amusement machine; not individual men, but simply one of many moving parts on the assembly line of show set-up and tear-down.

Amusement workers were, of course, not machines, and had longings and desires of their own. Lears argued that the concept of "force" that held such a powerful sway in

[170] Lears, *Rebirth Of A Nation*, 261.

the Gilded Age imagination had the potential to be both limiting and liberating, and this dialectic is clear in traveling amusements. The first part of this chapter analyzes manual laborers' lived reality, using the precious few writings of amusement workers as well as employment records and managers' notes to recreate the experience of life on the road for workers at the bottom of the corporate hierarchy. Amusement workers had to adhere to a new time-bound industrial work ethic. The frequent comparisons of amusement workers to machines indicates that there was a dehumanizing element of the new force of industrial work practices. Steam power, the same force that amusement proprietors harnessed to create a national audience for their products, also had detrimental effects on workers' minds and bodies as they struggled to find comfort in difficult and dangerous living conditions. And yet, some workers found the experience of life on the road, or at least elements of it, fulfilling. This chapter ends with discussion of amusements workers' development of a unique culture; unique not only for its idiosyncrasies and quirks, but in its inclusion of amusement workers at all levels, manual laborers, middle managers, and proprietors alike.

This showmen's culture was a limiting and liberating force all on its own. Due to the stigmatized reputation of the show business at the start of the Gilded Age, participants at all levels of the amusement industry, from the owners down, developed a common identity as "showmen." Both manual laborers and company owners described themselves using this term. Those in the amusement business shared a sense of being outside the traditional boundaries of industrial capitalism, leading them to turn to one another for community and support. Living in what was essentially a traveling company town, employees of all levels developed shared traditions and language. This culture stands out

as an example of what labor historians have identified as a "negotiated loyalty" between labor and management.[171] By the late nineteenth century, some companies began to engage in more paternalistic, welfare-oriented practices to maintain peace between labor and management.[172] In traveling amusements, management made some concessions to laborers, such as passively permitting some of workers' more violent and rowdy traditions. High-ranking employees also joined fraternal organizations and benefit societies alongside laborers, projecting a sense of solidarity and, in some cases, providing financial support for workers in need. For those higher-ups, these actions benefit the workplace by helping maintain employee morale and diffusing potential class tension as well as furthering proprietors' goal of developing reputations as "respectable" entertainment.

Primary sources indicate that the showman's culture was at the same time both authentic and contrived; fitting for the "humbug" industry of traveling amusements. Amusement workers fondly recalled traditions from life on the road in their memoirs at the same time they also expressed disgust for their living conditions. Company route books published articles describing top-level managers and workingmen going fishing

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[171] Gerald Zahavi, "Negotiated Loyalty: Welfare Capitalism and the Shoeworkers of Endicott Johnson, 1920-1940," *The Journal of American History* 7.3 (December 1983): 602–20; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Lisa M. Fine, "'Our Big Factory Family': Masculinity and Paternalism at the Reo Motor Car Company of Lansing, Michigan," *Labor History* 34. 2–3 (1993): 274–91.

[172] Rick Halpern, "The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: Welfare Capitalism in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1921-1933," *Journal of American Studies* 26.2 (1992): 159–83; Zahavi, "Negotiated Loyalty: Welfare Capitalism and the Shoeworkers of Endicott Johnson, 1920-1940"; Fine, "'Our Big Factory Family': Masculinity and Paternalism at the Reo Motor Car Company of Lansing, Michigan"; Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*.

together in harmony, and on the next page detailed the brutal dismemberment of an unfortunate employee as a result of management's inattentiveness. The truth is that there were some conflicts between labor and management, and life on the road was incredibly difficult. The presentation of showman's culture as a unifying force covered up some of the more egregious capitalist abuses of amusement workers. This allowed amusement owners to continue the expansion of the entertainment industry without attracting too much negative attention. Instead, amusement owners garnered positive attention for creating a "happy workplace family" despite the obviously industrialized labor that spectators also loved to comment on. The showman's culture was a benefit for laborers in terms of community, identity, and morale, but it was also a weapon that proprietors wielded to combat would-be critics from both inside and outside their companies.

As veteran circus man, Bert Chipman, described in his 1933 autobiography, "The majority of people are of the opinion that workingmen on a [traveling amusement] are just rough-necks, but in many cases they are mistaken, for we have seen men from all walks of life working as roustabouts."[173] It is somewhat difficult to verify this statement, as traveling amusements' employment records contain scant details about the men they hired aside from name and payment received. In some cases men were listed in records by nicknames rather than legal names and some shows referred to working men by number, rather than name, further anonymizing them.[174] David W. Watt, ticket-seller and company treasurer for the Great Forepaugh Show, described payday noting that "every working man had a number as well as his name and as they would step up to the wagon,

[173] Bert J. Chipman, *Hey Rube*, ed. Harry B. Chipman (Hollywood, Calif.: Hollywood Print Shop, 1933), 135.
[174] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 68.

every man knew his number and [management] would call his name and number" to get paid.[175] As with the machine and military metaphors, this practice indicates that from the perspective of management, amusement laborers were not seen as individuals.

By the turn of the century, many traveling amusements hired both black and white laborers. This was a departure from the early nineteenth century. In the earlier years of the amusement business the few people of color working with traveling shows were most often performers in racialized and exoticized roles. Few white-owned companies employed any black laborers until the 1880s, and even then employment patterns were sporadic. As Janet Davis noted, in the 1880s the Sells Bros. large railroad circus employed many African Americans; however, once James Bailey acquired the show in 1896, he reversed this policy. By the first decades of the twentieth century, route books for Barnum & Bailey's show do note the presence of a "colored crew;" however, as this phrase illustrates, black laborers were most often segregated, assigned the most menial positions within traveling companies, and paid less than white employees in similar jobs.[176]

Nevertheless, some black employees found the experience of being on the road with a traveling amusement liberating to a certain extent. Traveling amusements by their very nature allowed individuals to see parts of the country they may never have had a chance to visit otherwise. African American circus roustabout W.E. "Doc" Van Alstine described this, stating: "At an early age I had a yearning for the show business…I wanted

[175] David W. Watt, "Side Lights on the Circus Business: Part One," *Bandwagon* 45, no. 3 (June 1998): 23.
[176] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 71; Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1904 1903, Box 47, Folder 12, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

to go, do, and see things for myself, and I couldn't think of any better way to satisfy my ambition than to join up with a circus."[177] Black musician W.C. Handy wrote that when he first teamed up with Mahara's Minstrels the salary was merely "six dollars a week plus 'cakes,'" but this was more than enough because "there would be a chance to travel." As Barbara Young Welke has described, the railroad held a special place in the African American imagination following emancipation and particularly in the age of Jim Crow.[178] Traveling with an amusement company eliminated some of the difficulties of navigating increasingly strict segregation in public accommodations. Travel with amusement companies was certainly not without its difficulties, and black amusement employees were not immune from racially motivated violence and discrimination, as will be discussed, but the lure of travel, sometimes to places as far as Australia, was a motivating factor for some employees of color. American Indian employees with Wild West Shows also found the promise of travel appealing. This was an opportunity to leave the heavily-restricted reservations in the American West and travel not just throughout the country, but also abroad. In fact, many of the Indians who traveled to Europe with Buffalo Bill's Wild West took day trips throughout the continent independently during down time.[179]

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[177] W.E. "Doc" Van Alstine, Circus Days and Circus Ways, 1940, Federal Writers' Project: Folklore Project, Manuscript/Mixed Material, https://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh001954/.
[178] Barbara Young Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law, and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[179] Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 371 American Indians were employed with Buffalo Bill's Wild West almost exclusively as performers rather than laborers, leading to their absence in much of this chapter.

Amusement companies recognized that travel was a big draw for all employees. In fact, the standard employment contract for the 1910 season of the Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. show contained a clause requiring the employee to swear "that I recognize personal advantages in this employment, which is solicited by me, because of extensive travel and opportunity for profitable intercourse."[180] This "profitable intercourse" consisted of salaried work for a predetermined period of time as well as room and board. Workers' salaries reflected their status in the show's hierarchy, with division bosses earning considerably more than common laborers. For example, in 1910 the Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. circus paid the superintendent of the props department $711.66 for the season, while the average salary of the other employees in this department was just $177.15.[181]

For the Forepaugh & Sells Bros. laborers, the salaries ranged from $5 to $55 a month; however, most, a full 72%, earned a salary of just $15 monthly. Only one man with the show, E.D. Hill in the Animal department, had a lower salary listed at $5 a month, but just 11% of all men earned over $20 monthly. Standard pay for both bosses and common labor differed across departments, hinting at managements' opinions of the relative value of different jobs.[182] Of those surveyed, the two departments with the highest average salary were props and ushers, two of the smallest departments. These two jobs were not wholly manual labor positions. While these men would have been required

[180] Employment Contract for Ed Ames, Canvasman, 1910, Box 2, Folder 12, Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Collection, CWM.
[181] Time Book, 1910, Vol 6, Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Collection, CWM.
[182] These figures are based on the Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Time Book for 1910. The departments analyzed were non-performing, non-management jobs. As listed in the time book, these departments are: Animal Men, Bag Stock, Canvas, Elephants, Lights, Porters, Props, Ring Stock, Side Show [Non-performers], Train, Trappings, and Ushers.

to assist in loading and set-up for the big show, prop men were also responsible for repairs, a task requiring some artistic skill, and ushering was a "front-of-house" job, requiring face time with customers. The small number of employees in these departments also hints at the exclusivity or higher status of these jobs.

Travel opportunities and a steady salary were not always enough of a draw to keep men with a company for an entire performing season. Maintaining a steady labor force was a constant problem for show owners and managers. The payment records of the Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus for 1910 show that most laborers stayed on board for less than half of the thirty-week touring season. 25% of contracted laborers remained employed for just three weeks or less. Among the departments that were entirely manual labor, such as canvas and trappings, the turn-over rate was even higher, with the percentage of men working less than three weeks sitting at 50% and 47% respectively. These employment records do also include several pages of designated "short term" workers who were not included in the statistics above. These men, it seems, were purposefully hired for just one or two days to complete a specific task and did not travel with the show. The special designation of these day laborers indicates that those other canvasmen and railroad men listed elsewhere in the payroll book had been expected to stay on for a longer term; although in reality some stayed just barely longer than the day laborers. Only 18% of workers remained employed the entire length of the touring season. To incentivize staying on board, it was standard practice for many show owners to hold back a portion of an employee's pay until the end of the season.[183]

[183] Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Time Book 1910 The precise calculations for this "held back" pay is difficult to ascertain from records. Although most men did receive some

This retention problem stems from the difficult labor and living conditions for amusement workers. Popular culture then and now is rife with tales of young men and boys "running off to join the circus," and for some, this origin story was true. In fact, circus impresario James A. Bailey's entrance in to the amusement world fits this narrative, as he reportedly escaped from an abusive household at thirteen years old and took on a position with the advance department of Robinson and Lake's Circus.[184] This "running off" trope romanticizes and obscures many of the challenges amusement laborers faced. Living on the road with a traveling amusement, workers faced difficult living conditions, dangerous labor, and a high likelihood of violent encounters.

During the show season, a good night's sleep was difficult to come by. With a dramatic flourish, one Ringling Bros. employee from their wagon show days wrote "Sleep was the dragon which pursued me with a relentless and irresistible power. It was like a vampire that took the zest and vitality out of my very life sources, and I went about almost as one walking in a dream."[185] This challenge was even more acute for men traveling with railroad shows, where workers were expected to sleep aboard train cars en route to the next destination, rather than check in to local hotels. David Watt described life on the road as "surely hard show business," writing that "the workingmen got but little sleep," as they rolled from town to town.[186]

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extra payment at the end of the season, the formula the treasurer used to calculate this amount is unknown as no clear pattern emerges from the data.

[184] A. H. Saxon, "New Light on the Life of James A. Bailey," *Bandwagon*, December 1996, 4–9.

[185] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 20.

[186] Watt, "Side Lights on the Circus Business: Part One," 21.

As noted, time was of the essence for railroad shows. There was little-to-no flexibility for big shows as they kept their tight loading and unloading schedules, meaning that early mornings were mandatory for laborers, regardless of whether they got any sleep on the cramped, moving train. Laborers' sleeping cars were often overcrowded. As Davis notes, "in 1895 some three hundred Barnum & Bailey laborers occupied three sleeping cars that were each designed to hold fifty to sixty people, or half the number of people actually sleeping there."[187] During a rare overnight stop in Cleveland in 1901, members of the Ringling Brothers circus were so uncomfortable in their sleeper cars, due to high heat, that they abandoned the cars entirely. The route book writer describing the episode noted that "to sleep in the cars was an utter impossibility."[188] Conditions on the trains were so crowded that stories of animals perishing due to overheating in the cramped conditions appear across the years in several companies' route books.[189]

Bad weather was also a constant trouble for traveling shows. When trains were delayed due to weather or accident, managers pushed forward, attempting to stay on schedule, whether that meant cutting in to laborers' rest time or not. This also meant that laborers often worked outdoors in cold, wet, and stormy situations. Circus impresario Al Ringling recalled an incident in which he was driving a wagon team in the middle of a storm and "an old razor back sitting beside him says to Al, as he had seen an old farmer coming out of his house and going in to the barn to do chores. 'Look at that rube.' Al turns to the man and says, 'You call him a rube. Well he is going into a nice dry barn and

[187] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 64.
[188] Ringling Bros. Route Book, 1901, Box 47, Folder 23, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[189] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1888, Box 47, Folder 3, McCaddon Collection, PUL; Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 102.

back to a dry house to eat and we are both soaking wet. We are the rubes."[190] Rain and mud slowed down travel and required workers to labor even harder than normal, occasionally having to completely dismantle wagons when they became stuck.[191] In 1902, the Ringling circus found one lot so muddy that their wagons sank, requiring the strength of twenty-four horses to pull them out.[192] In an interview, one Wild West employee recalled that "a Wild West show in bad weather, its hell…Because when it's raining and snowing and the lot is all nothing but mud, why you're riding a buckin' horse there or anything, and you happen to fall in the mud and roll around, why by the time you got to the back end you wouldn't know your outfit."[193] As this implies, poor weather not only made laborer uncomfortable and more strenuous, but it also increased the likelihood of workplace accidents.

Lack of sleep and stormy weather only increased the already dangerous working conditions with a traveling show. Circus route books are rife with stories of death or injury on the road. Railroad accidents were fairly common. Barnum & Bailey route books from the 1880s record several incidents of train cars "jumping the tracks." In 1883, near Steubenville, Ohio, the route book author notes that a "flat car containing the Lion, tiger, and rhinoceros cages jumped the track throwing one of the cages into the ditch."[194] On August 31, 1888, on the way to Marshalltown, Iowa "a disarranged switch throws three of the flat cars of the fourth section off the track," once again damaging several of the

[190] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 21.
[191] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 26.
[192] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 103.
[193] Quoted in Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets & Business*, 37.
[194] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1883, Box 47, Folder 1, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

circus' exotic animal cages.[195] Other shows reported incidents including fires onboard the train, men accidentally stepping off of train cars and injuring themselves, train cars "telescoped" in a major crash, and a crash so bad it killed all of the show's horses on board.[196] The 1879 route book for Cooper and Bailey's circus had an entire section titled "Accidents and Incidents." Among the events listed were the death of James Cassim, who, "after the show - he was going to the car. Crossing the tracks he stepped out of the way of one train only to be caught and crushed to death by another." Another incident concerned roustabout George Sholters who broke both legs while loading a train car.[197] Working on a traveling amusement was not easy work. Amusement laborers had to contend with dangerous and uncomfortable working conditions, long hours, and repeatedly perform strenuous physical tasks. And yet, many workers returned season after season, becoming "lifers."

Many men found the community of life on the road with a big show a satisfying experience due to the bonds they formed with one another and the unique culture they developed as showmen. A significant aspect of life with a traveling amusement was that workers were constantly in close proximity of one another, contributing to the camaraderie that many amusement laborers described. The author of the Barnum & Bailey route book from 1891 wrote:

> When persons are brought together on board ship for a long journey, by the time they have reached their destination they have only discovered the good qualities of their fellow-passengers, and even while their hearts may be filled with gladness

[195] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1888.
[196] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1884, Box 47, Folder 1, McCaddon Collection, PUL; Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1885, Box 47, Folder 1, McCaddon Collection, PUL; Ringling Bros. Route Book, 1892, Box 47, Folder 23, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[197] Cooper, Bailey & Co's Great London Circus, Sanger's British Menagerie, International Allied Shows Route Book, 1879, Box 46, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

> at reaching the end of their voyage in safety, a feeling of regret at parting from new friends will, nevertheless, intrude itself. There is very little difference between them and those of the circus. Brought together in the Spring, we travel together 'rain or shine,' for six months, grow to like each other amazingly, to really know and understand each other so well, that by the time the season is over and the canvas packed away for its last run, many of us honestly and sincerely regret to separate.[198]

In some ways, creating a unique workplace culture was, as Thomas Higbie described in his study of hobo workers, a means of survival, physically and socially, in difficult working conditions.[199] Although amusement workers were indeed organized hierarchically, there existed a sense of community and solidarity among amusement laborers at different levels within the company that provided a means to cope with the challenges of show life. In the early days of traveling amusements, workers were stigmatized as immoral and dangerous, and in some ways this stereotype still persists today in the trope of the shady "carnie." As part of the project of professionalizing and legitimizing traveling amusements, owners worked hard to change the public perception of their employees as rowdy deviants, including clauses in workers' contracts that required sobriety and "respectable" conduct. To some extent the workers seem to have accepted bosses' limitations on their actions as route books contain a scarce few mentions of firings due to alcohol or profanity use; however, amusement workers did resist some of the moralizing impulses of their employers, maintaining many of the "rough and tumble" elements of their earlier reputation, particularly when it came to engaging in violent activity. At the same time, amusement workers were not without a softer side, and

[198] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1891, Box 47, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[199] Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 176.

by the turn of the twentieth century, workers formed several fraternal organizations, some that included both laborers and managers, for showmen to take care of their own.

Amusement workers' awareness of their status as outsiders contributed to their forming closer bonds among one another. Both the historical disparagement of theatre performers as well as Americans' general distrust of transient people meant that amusement workers were doubly stigmatized. This stigmatization applied to all who were on the road with the show; laborers, performers, and management alike. This contributed to the lack of major conflicts between workers and management; most of the issues that arose on the road were between amusement workers and local townsfolk and law enforcement. Amusement workers defined themselves as against the "townies" in the various locations in which they exhibited. The language used in route books to describe local citizens illustrates workers' often hostile feelings toward their patrons. The Ringling's 1906 book described visitors as "frog-eyed Rubes and guttersnipes of humanity, who had double rows of teeth and felt very much inclined to bite."[200] Others referred to them as "yokels" and "hoodlums"[201] Traveling amusement employees of all ranks identified as "show people" and to some extent this common group affiliation mitigated what may have been class antagonism between laborer and owner and instead directed it toward locals.

Company route books are full of references to fights between amusement laborers and townies. One circus "oldtimer" wrote that when he first started working in show

[200] Ringling Bros. Route Book, 1906, Box 47, Folder 17, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[201] W. E. "Doc," "Van Alstine, "Circus Days and Circus Ways", Jan. 19, 1939, U.S. Works Progress Administration, Federal Writers' Project, Folklore Project, Library of Congress; Ringling Bros. Route Book, 1901.

business, canvasmen were hired "as much for their ability to fight as to work."[202] In many locations, harassing members of traveling amusement companies appears to have been a local pastime. W.C. Coup wrote that in many towns, "'Fighting was in the air,' and as may be imagined, the showmen received their full share of it. It was no infrequent occurrence…as a consequence showmen went armed, prepared to hold their own against any odds. Not once a month, or even once a week, but almost daily, would these fights occur."[203] Although this was perhaps a slight exaggeration, route books do confirm that fights were common. In 1882, as the Barnum & Bailey circus passed through Troy, New York, their herd of elephants was "stampeded by a gang of Trojan roughs" eager to cause trouble, causing the elephants to scatter and leaving circus employees to spend their evening tracking down the beasts, of which they apparently found "all but one."[204] Several years later, in 1893 when the Barnum & Bailey show was back in Troy, the locals chose a different group to pester. This time "some town toughs congregated around the ballet girls' car, and began passing insulting remarks and otherwise annoying the girls."[205] This example of repeated incidents in one locale was not uncommon. From the route books, it is clear that showmen knew which towns had a history of causing trouble, and took measures to prepare themselves upon their return. The people of Toledo, Ohio maintained a grudge against Barnum & Bailey employee Jack Sutton for several years. In 1884 as the show entered the town, Sutton received an anonymous letter reading "'…Be on your guard for we will do you up before you get to the cars. Yours, not forgetting last

[202] Chipman, *Hey Rube*, 15.
[203] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 4.
[204] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1882, Box 47, Folder 1, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[205] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1893, Box 47, Folder 6, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

year.'"[206] Although the threat never materialized, the author of the route book reporting on the incident noted that both Sutton and his workmates were prepared to tackle any incoming attack.

For workers of color, threats of racially-motivated violence were also an ever-present reality, particularly as companies moved throughout the South. W.C. Coup noted that regardless of where employees came from, "circus men were universally regarded as 'Yankees'" and looked at with great suspicion in the South.[207] In his memoir, Bert Chipman described an incident when, as the circus was loading up the train in "a small southern town," Black cookhouse employee, "Campfire Bill," was approached by two white men, one being the town's sheriff, who threatened his life saying "'Hey, I ain't killed myself a nigger for a couple of days and here is a pretty good chance to start." The Barnum & Bailey route book from the 1880s and 90s recount similar incidents of townspeople looking to harm black showmen for sport, often with no legal repercussions as was all too common in the Jim Crow south. W.C. Handy wrote that when he traveled with the all-black Mahara's Minstrels, this danger existed not just in towns where the company stopped, but even in locations that the show's rail cars were just passing through. Handy described the group's preparations for passing through Orange, Texas, writing that among some of the young men in the town, "their conception of wild, he-man fun was to riddle our car with bullets as it sped through their town. Our strategy was to extinguish the lights and lie quietly on the floor. Fortunately none of our company ever

[206] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1884.
[207] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 6.

got killed during these assaults."[208] Handy also recounted that the minstrel troupe's car was eventually outfitted with a secret compartment in floor in which men could hide from local law enforcement or lynch mobs if necessary.[209]

The frequency of violence against amusement folk led to the amusement laborers' most well-known tradition: the "Hey Rube." This phrase was a rallying cry. When a member of an amusement company was in trouble, he yelled the phrase "Hey Rube!" and others came rushing in, prepared to defend their compatriot. References to "Hey Rube!" appear in route books, memoirs, and pieces of journalism. It was even the title of showman Bert Chipman's 1933 autobiography.[210] In fact, so common was this expression that some used it as a noun. As "Doc" Van Alstine, described it, "a 'Hey Rube' was a fight between the circus folks and the town yokels."[211] This shows an awareness of a group identity. Showmen describe the "Hey Rube" as evidence of workers' loyalty to one another as they immediately responded to any threat against one of their own. In fact, Chipman noted that failure to participate in a row against locals might leave one "branded a coward and disgraced forever in circus ratings."[212] In a business where employees slept and ate next to one another for months on end, there was pressure to conform to group standards to avoid this ostracism.

Amusement workers' experiences with local justice systems in the aftermath of "Hey Rubes" may also have contributed to their sense of community. Van Alstine wrote

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[208] W. C. Handy, *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 44.
[209] Handy, 45.
[210] Chipman, *Hey Rube*.
[211] Van Alstine, "Circus Days and Circus Ways."
[212] Chipman, *Hey Rube*.

that in nearly all of the fights he witnessed "the town folks [came] out second best physically, although the circus usually lost out financially. Lawsuits always followed a Hey Rube, and circus people had no chance for a square deal in a prejudiced small-town court."[213] Route books recount that in the aftermath of fights with locals, amusement workers were often arrested and required to pay a heavy fine, regardless of who began the fight. In some cases, there were also incidents of amusement laborers' arrests for minor crimes. The Barnum & Bailey route book from 1890 recounts that in Anniston, Alabama "vigilant police arrest[ed] two of our canvasmen for using profane language."[214] The bias of law enforcement on the side of the locals, and feelings of being unjustly targeted for minor offenses only strengthened showmen's feelings of being outsiders.[215]

"Hey Rube!" is just one example of amusement workers' creation of a unique culture. Use of specialized slang was another common way in which amusement laborers expressed their group identity. Both memoirs and scholarly analyses of the amusement world often include slang glossaries to aid readers unfamiliar with the language. A poem in the 1890 Barnum & Bailey route book titled "Boss Hostler's Story" playfully depicted the showmen's language. The poem described an average day on the road with the circus in a manner nearly unintelligible to outsiders:

[213] Van Alstine, Circus Days and Circus Ways.
[214] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1890, Box 47, Folder 3, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[215] Van Alstine, "Circus Days and Circus Ways."

The ‘peck cabs’ are all pretty ‘quisby’,
But the ‘dones’ are ‘rum’ on the ‘mash’,
As they flit in from the kitchen,
A ‘steering’ the biscuits and hash…
The ‘annex’ is always ‘wide open’,
But the ‘good old days’ have gone by;
‘Nixey weeden’, ‘stag his nibs’, and ‘HEY RUBE!’,
No longer the ‘side showmen’ cry.[216]

Printed in the company’s route book, a publication sold and distributed to the show’s own employees as mementos of the season, this poem was meant as an in-group joke. The poet uses coded language, understood only by this small group, to articulate a sense of belonging. To an outsider, the heavy use of slang is amusing; however, the true meaning of the poem is obscured. Written in 1890, around the time in which the railroad show was coming in to its heyday, the author mourns the “good old days” gone by, likely referring to the days of the wagon show. His assertion that “no longer the ‘side showmen’ cry” certain phrases was a bit premature, as sources in to the early twentieth note the continued use of “Hey Rube!” and other amusement worker slang. Still, this piece indicates that the author appreciated and enjoyed the sense of camaraderie that this shared language created. Excluded from and denigrated by mainstream society, amusement laborers formed a group identity based on shared experiences.

Route books contained many examples of inside jokes, nostalgic poems, and anecdotes about amusing or sweet incidents on the road. The Ringling Brothers’ 1892 book featured an article about Bismarck the dog who became the unofficial guardian of the stake and chain wagon. The book claimed that “there is not a mother’s son with the show but would yell ‘Hey Rube!’ to defend him, and Bismarck, to the best of his ability,

[216] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1890.

would fight for all the circus men."[217] Another book noted that when the show played in Chicago, a retired employee "came in to-day and shook hands with all his old-time friends."[218] Poems like the "Boss Hostler's Story" above show up in route books with surprising frequency. Most of these poems are about average workingmen, not performers, owners, or other amusement-related subjects. The 1896 Buffalo Bill route book contained no less than three poems, including an anonymous one which the route book author claimed to have found on a scrap of paper on the ground "which expressed the opinion of the working man on a two days stand:

> Give us back the one-day stand,
> Even if the mud is two feet deep,,
> Where we have a run of 100 miles,
> And plenty of time to sleep.
>
> Where we get in town at 6 o'clock
> And are early on the ground
> We have our work all done by noon,
> And can quit this 'dubbing' around[219]

Another poem in this same route book described, in detail, the life of a bill poster written by a "brother paste." The poem urged these "comrades in paste" to be proud of their careers, and described the close relationship between these showmen:

[217] Ringling Bros. Route Book, 1892.
[218] Buffalo Bill's Wild West Route Book, 1896, Box 46, Folder 6, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[219] Buffalo Bill's Wild West Route Book, 1896.

Brothers in paste don't get sad at your fate.
You can think for yourselves, and though you may hate
The ass who turns up his aesthetic nose,
Like you, in the end, he 'turns up his toes.'

And when we get through with paste, bucket and flour,
Care and work laid aside, and it comes the last hour;
We'll each drop a tear for the other who's gone,
And let the world go on with laughing and scorn.[220]

The time and thought that company members put in to these poems, as well as the route book authors' efforts to compile stories that aged showmen might someday look back on with fondness, illustrate that despite extreme hardships, those workers who stuck around found a community under the big top.

Gilded Age views on masculinity also shaped the showman's culture. Women in traveling amusements were either performers, or worked in roles that were traditionally considered "women's work," such as seamstresses and cooks. Janet Davis noted that "male circus workers as a whole were more liminal that female employees. Women were commonly born into the business as members of established family troupes, while transient men filled the laboring ranks at the canvas city."[221] These men, who did not come to the show as part of a family unit, sought out the companionship of other male workers. Even the term "show*man*" indicates that women were considered outsiders in the culture of traveling amusements. As part of portraying their shows as moral institutions, some proprietors forbid male and female employees from interacting so as to conform to Victorian sexual mores. A list of "Suggestions and Rules" put forth by the Ringling Brothers informed their employees that "[Girls] are not permitted to talk or visit

[220] Buffalo Bill's Wild West Route Book, 1896.
[221] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 143.

with male members of the show, excepting the management, and under no circumstances with residents of the cities visited…The excuse of "accidental" meetings will not be accepted."[222] Given that the majority of existing primary sources related to traveling amusements come from owners, higher-up managers, official company publications, and advertisements, it is not surprising that there is little mention of how strictly employees adhered to these guidelines. What is clear is that male amusement employees formed close bonds with others of their sex, and owners were willing to support and participate in this showman's culture.

Ironically, the principles of scientific management that amusement owners so eagerly embraced also contributed to a growing "crisis of manhood" at the turn of the twentieth century. Americans expressed anxiety that modern industrial life was feminizing the work force and that men needed to reembrace the "strenuous life." Historians such as Janet Davis and John Kasson have described how the content of traveling amusements reflected these anxieties, with many performances such as strongman acts and lion tamers glorifying the muscular male body and promoting wildness as a desirable masculine value.[223] Davis argued that "proprietors promoted their exhibitions as sites of athletic Euroamerican manliness" and this extended beyond the sawdust ring. Amusement workers also embodied athleticism as they performed difficult acts of manual labor in front of an audience, pounding in stakes, hoisting heavy tent poles, and wrangling horses. Furthermore, "workingmen's labor was also exciting to

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[222] Ringling, Charles "Suggestions and Rules: Employees" c. 1900, Quoted in Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 43.
[223] Davis, *The Circus Age*; John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002).

watch because it was just as dangerous as the athletic stunts under the big top." The idea of escape, so embodied in vaudeville performer Harry Houdini's daring stunts, appealed to those concerned with declining manhood. This was reflected in the trope of "running away to join the circus," leaving modern industrial society to take up the strenuous life of an amusement worker. The idea of a primitive, wild masculinity also helps explain why proprietors permitted the continuation of traditions such as the "Hey Rube." The circus and other traveling amusements were liminal spaces where traditional social roles went topsy-turvy and middle class male audiences could immerse themselves in the wild masculinity of amusement laborers for a day. If this were part of the draw of amusements, as Davis and Kasson persuasively argue, then it was in proprietors' best interest to permit these activities.

Amusement proprietors' investment in their employees' masculine identities also had the potential benefit of diffusing class antagonism. As Thomas Winter notes in his study of the YMCA, gender, and class relations at the turn of the twentieth century, there was a belief that true "manliness" was antithetical to labor unrest, and "building the right standards of manhood would subdue the destructive impulses of a potentially restive working class."[224] Amusement owners encouraged employees to participate in athletic activities such as baseball and other sports as a more respectable means of expressing their masculine physical energy. Company route books contain many examples of these strenuous pastimes. The 1896 route book for Buffalo Bill's Wild West notes that on June 28th, in the afternoon, afternoon there was a "game of baseball between the Candy

[224] Thomas Winter, *Making Men, Making Class: The YMCA and Workingmen, 1877-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 4.

Butchers and Cook. Betting was lively, and in favor of the Candy Butchers, who came out ahead by a score of 16 to 11."[225] In many cases, owners and top managers participated in these activities. Also during the Buffalo Bill Show's 1896 season, company members formed the Fu-Kort Fishing Club, whose membership included Fred Hutchinson, longtime Bailey associate, as well as manager Joseph T. McCaddon. Sponsoring these activities was a way for proprietors and managers to keep employees busy and engaged in a "healthy" masculine activity during their limited downtime, as well as portray themselves as a friend to the worker. In cultivating an attitude that amusement workers were all working toward a common ideal of pursuing athletic manliness, owners "framed 'manhood' in terms of interdependence between workers and company officials."[226]

In this way, amusement proprietors were engaging in a moderate form of the "welfare capitalism" that came to characterize some industrial corporations in the first decades of the twentieth century. In this system, company owners "sought to cast the relations between employer and worker within a cultural framework of benevolent, manly paternalism in which employer-patriarchs not only provided work, but also looked after the moral well-being of their employers and built workers' manhood."[227] This paternalism becomes particularly evident when examining the 189ways in which owners wrote about their companies in public advertisements, and the clues in route books that hint at owners' manipulation of these company-sanctioned records. One Bailey obituary

[225] Buffalo Bill's Wild West Route Book, 1896.
[226] Winter, *Making Men, Making Class*, 71.
[227] Winter, 47.

claimed that "one of his good qualities was that his employees were all his friends."[228] Al Ringling also wrote that

> Mr. Bailey realized that friendship, trust, and gratitude for an employer form a great part of the latter's capital in dealing with employes[sic]. His subordinates soon recognized that in him they had a father who shielded them from want in times of misfortune and this knowledge tended to inspire a certain esprit du corps among his army of workers which gave to his business organization a unity, harmony and general excellence which is seldom observed among any large body of workmen. His men took a great pride in manifesting to him their eagerness to carry out his desires in the minutest details. Such a condition can not help but make a man's business successful.[229]

Ringling's statement was published in an obituary, and therefore he had an incentive to portray Bailey in the most positive light possible; however, regardless of whether this is really how Bailey related to employees or not, Ringling's quote acknowledges that this familial feeling would have had a benefit for Bailey in a business sense. Articles about J.H. Haverly contain similar statements, writing that he aimed to "cultivate a feeding of 'brotherhood'" amongst his employees.

Some statements from workers corroborate these sentiments; however, the degree to which amusement proprietors coerced these messages is unclear. The 1888 Barnum & Bailey route book was dedicated to James Bailey. In a sycophantic manner, the author writes that "to dedicate to [Bailey] so small a work is of course a mere trifle, but it serves to show how the heart feels and will be an evidence of how James A. Bailey is esteemed, respected and loved by every member of the Barnum and Bailey show."[230] This same author acknowledged that readers of the route book included his "associates and the [amusement] profession in general," and therefore one can assume he considered the

[228] "James A. Bailey Dead."
[229] "Great Showman Is Dead."
[230] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1888.

impact of his wording carefully so as not to talk poorly of his boss. Barnum & Bailey's 1896 route book opened with a note from the author acknowledging that management oversaw the contents of the book: "The instructions from the management relative to this publication were that I should, as near as possible, give correct data of all that has occurred with this great exhibition."[231] This shows that management played an active role in determining how the company was perceived from those both inside and outside of the profession. Rather than providing proof for how employees felt about their bosses, these sources are stronger evidence that company owners were interested in portraying their shows as peaceful, paternalist, workplaces.

As historian Liz Cohen notes, from a workers' perspective, when it came to welfare capitalism "managers' actions proved less convincing than their rhetoric."[232] Passively allowing violent traditions, and sponsoring a fishing club could hardly make up entirely for the often-harrowing experience of living and working on a traveling amusement. There were some minor incidents in which amusement laborers did rally together for changes in the workplace, as in 1896 when employees of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show boycotted the cook tent to demand better food.[233] These cases of collective action were generally limited to demands for better living conditions and other quality-of-life issues; understandable given that amusement workers spent approximately eight months living under management's thumb with little opportunity to find alternate accommodations; however, strikes due to wages were rare. Amusement laborers did not unionize during this period. The Gilded Age saw a robust labor movement with many

[231] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1896, Box 47, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[232] Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 184.
[233] Buffalo Bill's Wild West Route Book, 1896.

unionization efforts, including the creation of several unions for stagehands in the traditional theatre industry, eventually combining to form the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) in 1893.[234] The seasonality of amusement work may have contributed to this lack of formal organization. Unlike theatre in New York or Chicago, where although shows ran for indeterminate periods of time, stagehands had opportunities to find work in their profession throughout the entire year, traveling amusements had a predetermined end-date each year, putting nearly all its laborers out of the job for months. When the traveling season ended, a small number of men were hired on to tend animals or work on equipment in the shows' winter quarters, but in many cases laborers simply disappeared from the historical record. Some likely returned to families, while others may have taken on other temporary work waiting for the show to reopen the following spring. Some returned for another season. Those who did return formed what Higbie described as a "tenuous ethic of mutuality."[235] Showmen, both owners and laborers, participated in the clubs and social activities mentioned earlier and put forth efforts to take care of one another. This was a step toward the welfare capitalism, wherein business owners attempted to quell potential labor conflicts through a series of nonlegislative workplace reforms such as education and social programs.[236]

The most substantial way in which show owners supported employees was thorough joining fraternal organizations meant to aid ailing showmen. Those who had a lasting career in amusement labor, the "lifers," formed exclusive fraternal organizations

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[234] "Timeline," International Association of Theatrical Stage Employees, https://www.iatse.net/timeline.
[235] Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts*, 200.
[236] Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

to take care of their own. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, those in the traveling amusement industry founded several organizations, including the Showmen's League of America, the Circus Saints and Sinners Club, and the Benevolent Order of American Tigers. The founders of the Benevolent Order of American Tigers came from the middling ranks of the show business, including assistant superintendents, a head waiter, an "in charge" of feed, and a side show lecturer.[237] The primary purpose of these groups was to take care of employees who aged out of the business and to raise money for special grave plots for their members. When four circus veterans noticed an upsetting trend in the classified sections of entertainment newspapers where ill and aging showmen out of work begged for charity, they established the Circus Saints and Sinners Club. One of their main goals was to establish "a home to which the old and indigent trouper can wend his tottering way and spend the few remaining years of his life, not in an elaborate manner, but with other old people who talk his language."[238] "Trouper" here referred to both managers and common amusement laborers. This again demonstrates that amusement men did view themselves as having a unique culture; that their shared experiences on the road created a language and culture which outsiders could not understand. This cultural affiliation was so strong that, as this newsletter notes, some desired to spend their final years among show people.

These organizations provided valuable support for showmen, but fell short of changing the dangerous working conditions or legally requiring owners to provide compensation in the case of accidents. Amusement laborers took on great physical risk

[237] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1905, Box 47, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[238] Chipman, *Hey Rube*, 154.

when they agreed to work for a traveling show and contracts were explicit about this. For example, for the 1901 season of the Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. circus, an employee had to verify that he "accepts and assumes the increased hazard of railway travel and circus service and hereby exempts and releases [the show] from all liability for injuries, accidents, sickness and damages of whatever nature."[239] This contract also required the worker to "renounce his rights as 'passenger' while traveling on any railway line." This was likely so that amusement impresarios might elicit better deals from railroad agents if they could offer protection from risk for the railway company. While this was beneficial for both the amusement and railroad company, releasing them from liability, it was a detriment to the laborer. Here the worker assumed all risk. For laborers, fraternal orders were a method of protection in this changing economy, providing support in difficult times, while for employers, participating in these organizations gave them the appearance of maintaining a familial relationship and providing aid to employees during times of need, without providing more comprehensive benefits or protections in their contracts.

To grow the amusement industry, show business impresarios needed men willing to perform hard labor. Maintaining this labor force was a difficult task, given the challenging living and working conditions on a big show. In making some concessions to employees by allowing the maintenance of violent traditions and participating in fraternal organizations, owners, whether directly or indirectly, participated in the development of a showmen's culture that united amusement employees at all levels. This was a benefit to employers who needed the "spectacular labor" as Janet Davis described it, of amusement

[239] Employment Contract for Ed Ames, Canvasman, Box 2, Folder 12, Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Collection, CWM.

workers. Audiences rushed to circus grounds early in the morning to catch a glimpse of the impressive, machine-like process of erecting the tented city on the show grounds. This performative labor furthered the growth of the commercial entertainment industry by providing the work necessary to get shows on to the rails, allowing them to expand their reach and grow audiences, and also aiding in "cleaning up" the reputation of traveling amusements. Although there were some noted conflicts between company management and labor, many commentators, including show business impresarios and laborers alike, depicted amusement companies as familial rather than antagonistic. Show owners publicly touted the morality and respectability of their workingmen, but many turned a blind eye to their laborers' behind-the-scenes activities, passively permitting unsavory traditions such as the "Hey Rube!" to persist, even allowing mentions of it in the published company route books. Amusement laborers' feelings of marginalization due to their status as *showmen*, rather than their class meant that in many cases where laborers might have turned against management, they instead felt a duty to their fellow showman, despite how radically different their position on the corporate ladder may have been. Therefore, it was in show business impresarios' interest to permit workers to continue social practices that strengthened affective bonds among colleagues to deter unrest, maintaining a public image of corporate peace. Although negative stereotypes of "carnie" culture still exist today, the process of negotiated loyalty through which amusement laborers developed this culture was a significant part of growing the traveling amusement industry, which in turn fertilized the ground from which the commercial entertainment industry in the United States blossomed.

CHAPTER 4

"THE PATRON SAINT OF THE AMUSEMENT-GOING MASSES"

In the competitive traveling amusement business, a showman's name was everything. So much so that after the deaths of Henry and Alf T. Ringling, when it came time to determine the taxable value of their estates, the "good-will" of their names was appraised at a value of approximately $500,000 each. This meant the Ringlings' benefactors owed somewhere between $200,000 and $300,000 in additional taxes on Henry and Alf T.'s estates. Disputes over this issue eventually made their way to the Board of Appeals and Reviews of the Inheritance Tax Division of the U.S. Treasury Department in 1923.[240] John Kelley, longtime lawyer for the Ringling brothers, argued that the "good-will" of a circus man's name did not constitute a taxable part of his estate. Kelley's main argument was that while good-will was certainly valuable, it was not a transferrable commodity. A man's personal reputation applied to him and only him. This dispute reveals the significance of name and reputation in the amusement industry. As the business of entertainment grew, so too did impresarios' focus on building a personal "brand" tied to their own name and image.[241]

According to Kelley, in most businesses, good-will amounted to the "public confidence in the continuation of the same standard or character of dealings; maintenance

[240] "Trials of a Circus Told in Tax Case," *The New York Times*, April 7, 1923.
[241] Before the Board of Appeals and Review. Interitance Tax Division, Treasury Department. *In re* Estates - Henry Ringling. Alf T. Ringling, April 6, 1923, John Kelley Papers, CWM.

of the same quality of goods or merchandise." For example, if the owner of a brick-and mortar business, such as a department store, passed away, the store still stood and the reputation he had created for his business persisted, making that good-will something of monetary value for his heirs, and therefore a taxable interest. In these cases, the good-will came from the business. For the showman, Kelley argued, the good-will was not in the show or company, but in the individual; his personal reputation. When the showman died, his good-will died with him. Unlike a department store, the circus was ephemeral. As Kelley described it, "the circus passes completely out of existence as far as place or locality is concerned when it moves off the lot." And furthermore, the actual product, the talent exhibited, differed from season to season, and sometimes even within the same season. The public's confidence in a circus was not in the business, but in the individual "genius" and skill of the proprietor. They may not have known what show they would see, but if a Ringling, or Barnum, or Bailey was managing it, they could expect high quality.[242]

Through dissection of the existing legal definition of "good-will," Kelley successfully demonstrated that with the tax laws as written, the good-will of a show was not something that could be passed down and therefore not part of the taxable property of an estate. There is something ironic, however, that in arguing that the benefit of a showman's name was not of value to his heirs, Kelley ultimately demonstrated the enormous value of those very names. Showmen were acutely aware of this fact and worked hard to craft personal reputations as reliable providers of high-quality shows. In

[242] Before the Board of Appeals and Review. Interitance Tax Division, Treasury Department. *In re* Estates - Henry Ringling. Alf T. Ringling.

the blossoming traveling amusement industry, performers were not the only celebrities. In many cases, the reputation of the entertainment owner outshined the notoriety of the acts he exhibited. The most successful showmen, the ones who ultimately monopolized the field, were also the ones most successful in promoting themselves not only as providers of entertainment, but as competent and gifted businessmen. The degree to which promoting one's business acumen played a central role in entertainment promotion reflects the efforts of traveling amusement owners to position themselves among the capitalist elite of Gilded Age "big business." That many showmen were successful in these efforts illustrates the scale of change in the public perception of the entertainment industry.

Traveling amusement owners nearly universally named their shows after themselves. Although they might add a descriptor or superlative, the proprietor's name was in the title; Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth, Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels, Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Show, Buffalo Bill's Wild West, Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Enormous United Show, and the list continues. Aside from Buffalo Bill, none of these men were performers, and in many cases the show's namesake did not even travel with the company. As Kelley pointed out to the treasury department, naming one's show after the talent may not have been a wise choice, considering the roster changed from year to year, therefore, showmen had to build public confidence in *themselves* and their ability to organize quality entertainment. Rather than depicting themselves as creative directors or auteurs, traveling amusement owners crafted public personas that highlighted their skills as businessmen.

In *A Short History of Celebrity*, Fred Inglis explained that during the Gilded Age, simply being wealthy was not of supreme importance as far as reputation was concerned. Some men, especially the familiar "Robber Barons" such as Carnegie and Rockefeller, became celebrities for being good businessmen.[243] As Inglis put it, "To be a celebrated businessman is to be self-possessed, accessible but only on official affairs, to be rich and getting richer, to be expressionlessly mature and poised in the boardroom."[244] Showmen sought this status of "celebrity businessman," although some were more blatant about it than others. Minstrel troupe owner J.H. Haverly proudly proclaimed himself the "Amusement Economist" in his own advertising, stating that "few men of the present time equal him in executive ability, wise discretion and prompt decision and it has been asserted that his multifarious affairs require more labor and observant care than those of THE PRESIDENT of the United States (see figure 4.1)."[245] P.T. Barnum, perhaps the most flamboyant of all, announced in his advertising that he was "a shrewd, high-toned business man, a moral reformer, a wide-awake observer, and that he possesses a most profound knowledge of human nature in all its phases."[246] Although being good at business and being good at putting on a show are not inherently connected, showmen worked hard to create this link in the minds of the public.

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[243] Fred Inglis, *A Short History of Celebrity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[244] Inglis, 113.
[245] Haverly's Herald, 1882.
[246] Advertisement for Barnum's Lecture, "The Art of Money Getting, or Success in Life," n.d., Clipping, P.T. Barnum Papers, NYPL.

Figure 4.1 Haverly's Herald, 1882, Osf 18, Minstrel Show Collection, The Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

This chapter discusses the ways in which amusement owners built personal brands centered on the notion that they were successful businessmen. Many of the impresario's statements were pure puffery, but this does not negate the significance of the fact that this was how owners *wanted to be seen*. By presenting themselves as moral individuals and capable businessmen, they attempted to increase public confidence in the respectability of their entertainments. What is most significant about these trends in amusement advertising is that much of it centered around the shows' owners themselves, not the content of their shows.

Advertiser extraordinaire P.T. Barnum enjoyed a strong rehabilitation of his reputation as the "Prince of Humbugs" as he entered the circus business in the late nineteenth century. His career in entertainment began in 1835, when he purchased an interest in an enslaved woman, Joice Heth, and exhibited her across the country, claiming she was 161 years old and had been a nursemaid to George Washington. From there, he did briefly take a circus on the road in 1836 and 1837, but left that venture to open his American Museum in New York City. Here visitors could examine collections of natural history specimens, as well as dubiously real curiosities like the FeeJee mermaid, watch plays such as the moralistic *The Drunkard*, and gawk at human "oddities" such as little person Tom Thumb. By the 1840s, he was a household name on two continents, having taken Tom Thumb on a successful European tour where they entertained royalty. Barnum leveraged this notoriety as he entered in to politics. In 1865 he was elected to the Connecticut General Assembly, in 1867 he ran an unsuccessful big for the U.S. House of Representatives, but in 1875 he had electoral success again, this time as Mayor of

Bridgeport, Connecticut. But throughout his political career, he remained actively involved in the entertainment industry.

While Barnum was never viewed as an outright criminal or full confidence man, many regarded him as less than completely honorable during the days of his highly-publicized hoaxes such as the FeeJee Mermaid or the Cardiff Giant. As Cook wrote, for many, this "artful deception" was harmless fun, but to others the fact that Barnum was making his money through trickery cast doubt on his character. One newspaper article from 1867 when Barnum was running for Congress wrote that "the way in which Mr. Barnum has become rich has been scandalous and injurious to public morality; and even if it had not been, a person who makes 'humbug,' or, in other words, the extraction of small sums from gullible people on false pretenses, his profession, is not fit, for a dozen reasons not purely moral, but very strong nevertheless, for a seat in the national legislature."[247] However, as Barnum aged and his name became permanently associated with the traveling circus, public perception of both him, and of the circus genre as a whole evolved. One article reflected on this change, noting "as the years came and went, Barnum abandoned his occupation of humbugging the nation, and determined to crown the declining portion of his life with a mammoth show that should eclipse all previous efforts, and hand down an honorable and honored name to posterity."[248] Barnum was successful in achieving this goal. In the 1889 edition of his autobiography, *60 Years Recollection,* Barnum republished many letters of support from such figures as Henry Ward Beecher and news outlets such as *Christian Union* and *Methodist* attesting to the

[247] "Barnum Again," 1867, Clipping, Barnum Papers, BRTC, NYPL.
[248] "Amusements," n.d., Clipping, Barnum Papers, CWM.

moral character of his shows.[249] At the time of his death, Barnum was described as "the patron saint of the amusement-going masses."[250]

From its first year, Barnum's circus promised audiences it would deliver "wholesome instruction with innocent amusement."[251] The show's *Advanced Courier* pamphlet distributed to patrons ahead of the show's arrival assured readers that it would "encourage that only which has for its object *innocent diversion and amusement*, blended with the moral, social, and intellectual improvement of my myriad patrons."[252] An 1873 advertisement described Barnum as "modifier and purifier of many of the abuses which have crept into public amusements."[253] Barnum repeatedly emphasized the educational benefits of his amusements, with special attention given to the menagerie. At a time when zoos were few and far between, limited to major urban areas, visitors to the circus menagerie had a chance to view and learn about exotic animals such as hippopotamuses and giraffes. Describing the menagerie as "better than a library for sound information," circuses often had animal keepers present themselves as "professors," and stand in the menagerie tent alongside their charges to answer visitor questions.[254] Some circuses even offered a special lower admission price where visitors could visit the menagerie but skip

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[249] P. T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs Or, Sixty Years' Recollections of P.T. Barnum, Including His Golden Rules for Money-Making* (Buffalo, N.Y.: The Courier Company Printers, 1889).
[250] "P.T. Barnum Dead."
[251] P.T. Barnum's Advance Courier, 1871.
[252] P.T. Barnum's Advance Courier, 1871.
[253] W.C. Crum, *History of Animals and Leading Curiosities Contained in P.T. Barnum's World's Fair and Colosseum of Natural History & Art*, n.d., Microfilm, Reel 1, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL.
[254] Barnum & London United Shows Advertisement, Clipping, n.d., MWEZ + n.c. 9543, BRTC, NYPL.

the big top performance, meaning there was a respectable, "educational" option for patrons who objected to the main show to visit (and spend money at) the circus.[255]

By presenting the menagerie, and the circus in general, as educational, these shows attracted more parents and children, helping cement the circus' enduring reputation as a family-friendly entertainment. By the time of his death, Barnum was remembered as a beloved, almost fatherly figure in the entertainment world. He made it a great point to appeal to children, calling his show "the Kindergarten of the Show World." In *60 Years Recollections,* Barnum wrote "To me there is no picture so beautiful as ten thousand smiling, bright-eyed, happy children; no music so sweet as their clear ringing laughter. That I have had power, year after year, by providing innocent amusement for the little ones, to create such pictures, to evoke such music, is my proudest and happiest reflection."[256] Barnum boasted that he had success in this arena, one of his promotional advertisements claimed that "when you talk to the little toddler who, climbs on your knee, and ask him who is the greatest man in the world, he will answer at once, 'Barnum."[257] President Garfield allegedly referred to Barnum as the "Kris Kringle of America" because children spent all year eagerly awaiting his arrival.[258] Barnum wanted middle-class patrons to feel as comfortable visiting the big top as they did in the menagerie.

This was also facilitated in part by the changes in the form of circus performance as afforded by the railroad as noted in Chapter One. Barnum shows became known for

[255] Renoff, *The Big Tent*.
[256] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 346.
[257] The Man About Town, n.d., Clipping, Barnum Papers, NYPL.
[258] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs,* 327.

their enormous spectacles, or "specs," that featured hundreds of performers reenacting great stories from history such as Nero and the Destruction of Rome, or Columbus and the Discovery of America.[259] Like the menagerie, these were advertised as educational; "better than history as an instructor."[260] The elevation of circus parades also helped increase the appeal to children. It was customary for shows to stage a grand parade through a town's streets on the morning of their performances for publicity. As the years passed, Barnum's parades became ever more grandiose, featuring steam calliopes playing peppy music, and elaborate, gilded wagons with carvings of story-book characters such as Mother Goose. The free parade was a preview of the types of acts audiences could expect from the main show, and reassurance that the circus would provide family-friendly entertainment. Advertisements supported this belief as well, with statements from Barnum himself, "the Public's Obedient Servant," informing patrons that his show was "full of fun, but so strictly moral that a Christian mother could always attend them with her young daughter without hearing a word or seeing a gesture offensive to the purest taste."[261]

As the first large circus traveling by rail, Barnum may have pioneered this new direction for circuses, but other showmen quickly followed. The Ringling Brothers'

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[259] Strobridge Lithographing Company, *Barnum & Bailey: Nero or the Destruction of Rome*, c 1890, Ink on Paper, 31 x 38 1/4 in., c 1890, The Ringling, The State Art Museum of Florida; Strobridge Lithographing Company, *The Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth: Imre Kiralfy's Columbus and the Discovery of America*, 1891, Ink on Paper, 30 x 40 in., 1891, The Jay T. Last Collection of Graphic Arts and Social History, Huntington Digital Library.

[260] Barnum & London United Shows Advertisement, Clipping, MWEZ + n.c. 9543, BRTC, NYPL.

[261] "P.T. Barnum's Last Will and Testament - The Big Show to Last Forever," n.d., Clipping, MWEZ + n.c. 9542, BRTC, NYPL.

show, not founded until after Barnum and Bailey had achieved notoriety, was a "Sunday School show" from the start, always known for its "clean" entertainment. An 1897 ad described their show as being "without a single objectionable feature."[262] The Stone circus "announced that it was "a kid glove affair, with no smoking in the tent, no peddling, no side-shows, and quite as high-toned and aristocratic in its way as an opera or first-class concert."[263] It was during this period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that the circus established its lasting reputation as a place where the ringmaster's familiar call to "ladies, gentlemen, children of all ages" was natural and expected.

In minstrelsy too, a genre initially known for suggestive and scandalous content, there was a major shift near the turn of the century. Robert Toll concluded that this was due to the competition that minstrelsy faced from circuses and the emerging vaudeville industry. As an older performance genre, minstrelsy had to adapt to survive. Haverly recognized the importance of bringing in middle class families to sustain his shows' profitability. Toll credited Haverly with nearly singlehandedly transforming the minstrel show, writing that "with a finger on the public's pulse and a great eye for talent, [Haverly] assembled a large, talented company, produced a well-organized, diverse show free of vulgarity, and brought it to the American people."[264] A contemporary article from the *Columbus Journal* supported this claim, announcing that "To [Haverly] alone falls the glory of having transformed into an art what has always been a mere bagatelle."[265] Programs and advertisements for Haverly's performances repeatedly emphasized the

[262] Pamphlet for Ringling Bros. Circus, 1897, MWEZ + n.c. 4050, BRTC, NYPL.
[263] D.W. Stone's Circus, c.1870s, MWEZ + n.c. 4031, NYPL.
[264] Toll, *Blacking Up*, 145.
[265] Quoted in Haverly's Herald, 1882.

"refined" nature of his material. Tied to Haverly's interest in assuring audiences of the high quality of his shows, programs from the 1880s onward emphasized performers' training as classical musicians. A reviewer in the 1890s noted that it was Haverly's "intention to depart from what is termed straight minstrelsy and produce a number of operatic burlesques, admitting of instrumental and vocal music as well as comedy."[266]

In the "straight minstrelsy" of earlier years, the first part of the show featured a mix of high energy musical numbers supposedly based on black spirituals and sentimental popular ballads such as those of Stephen Foster.[267] Toward the end of the nineteenth century, minstrel troupes added "coon songs" to their repertoire, inspired by ragtime music, and also incorporated more up-tempo comic songs similar to what one might have seen in vaudeville. To separate his shows from the crowd, Haverly added more classical and operatic pieces to his troupes' repertoire. In a published libretto of Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels' repertoire during their 1880 trip to London, out of twenty-two songs, only seven were explicitly about black characters, six of the songs in the booklet were about other ethnic groups including Irish and Scotch, and nine pieces made no mention of any racial or ethnic group.[268] These non-dialect songs were mostly love ballads; male singers pining for lost loves. In programs from this season, these songs are highlighted by introductory phrases such as "Mr. George Harley's plaintive ballad," "Mr. James Adams' beautiful song," and "Mr. Harry W. Roe respectfully submits," indicating that as audiences watched a Haverly show they could expect not simply the

[266] "Haverly To The Front," *The Morning Call*, November 18, 1894.
[267] Toll, *Blacking Up*.
[268] Souvenir Libretto, Haverly's American United Mastodon Minstrels at Her Majesty's Theatre, Haymarket, n.d., 430, Seq. 36, AMSC, HL.

traditional comedy of blackface minstrelsy, but also light parlor music that contained little objectionable content.[269]

Haverly and his contemporaries in the traveling amusement industry put a significant amount of time, effort, and money in to crafting images of themselves as moral reformers of popular entertainment. This was a significant factor in ensuring their long-term success. In order for the entertainment industry to grow, it needed to expand its market and by drawing in women, children, and families, groups that previously avoided traveling amusements. As part of accomplishing this goal, amusement owners made themselves in to symbols of their shows' respectability.

An advertisement for Barnum's show once claimed that "P.T. Barnum was born to be a showman—but not a charlatan nor a mountebank."[270] Throughout his illustrious career, Barnum had his fair share of critics who disagreed with this sentiment but in the end, Barnum successfully crafted a reputation as a respectable purveyor of family-friendly entertainment. As the most well-documented amusement owner, P.T. Barnum serves as an example of how showmen crafted public personas as captains of the show business industry and how this created an image of respectability. P.T. Barnum was already sixty years old when he entered the circus business in earnest in 1870. A true capitalist from the start, in one of his autobiographies, Barnum recalled one of his earliest memories in which his grandfather instructed him on how to get candy from store owners

[269] Program, Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels at The Globe Theatre, Boston, 1880, 430, Seq. 78, AMSC, HL; Program, Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels at Boston Music Hall, 1880, 430, Seq. 66, AMSC, HL.
[270] Crum, *History of Animals and Leading Curiosities Contained in P.T. Barnum's World's Fair and Colosseum of Natural History & Art*.

at the lowest possible price.[271] He noted many times that he had "a disposition which ever revolted at laboring for a fixed salary."[272] Barnum engaged in a variety of speculative endeavors. As a young man, he owned a grocery store, sold lottery tickets, published a newspaper, invested in companies selling dubious medical products such as "bear grease," founded both a bank, and invested in an ill-fated clock manufacturing company that eventually found him in bankruptcy court.

As numerous biographers and scholars of nineteenth century culture have argued, it was Barnum's genius for publicity that initially facilitated his rise to the top of the entertainment industry.[273] Writing under pseudonyms, he sent fake letters to the editors of prominent newspapers casting doubt on the veracity of his own amusements to stir up public controversy, generating enough buzz that audiences flocked to his entertainments to "see for themselves."[274] In his autobiography, he revealed another creative method of gaining visitors. He announced a free public concert on the street, but "took pains to select and maintain the poorest band I could find – one whose discordant notes would drive the crowd into the Museum, out of earshot of my outside orchestra."[275] "Humbug" or not, there was no doubt that Barnum knew how to draw a crowd.

This reputation for attracting customers helped cement Barnum's reputation as a businessman and ultimately provided him the capital necessary to be successful in the

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[271] P. T. Barnum, *The Life of P.T. Barnum, Written By Himself*, ed. Stephen Mihm (1888, Reprint Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018), 27.
[272] Barnum, 45.
[273] Cook, *Arts of Deception*; Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Harris, *Humbug*.
[274] Cook, *Arts of Deception*.
[275] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*.

traveling amusement. As noted above, in 1856, Barnum lost everything due to an investment in the Jerome Manufacturing Company, a clock-making business. Barnum was unaware that prior to his investment the company was suffering financially, and soon found himself responsible for over half a million dollars in debt and had to relinquish all his property. Despite, and in many ways because of this massive, and very public failure, Barnum revived his reputation as a business expert. His lecture, "The Art of Money Getting," became extraordinarily popular. He was booked on a speaking tour throughout America and Britain, and then published the lecture in print, earning him enough cash to pay off debts and resume his ownership of the American Museum.[276] How did a businessman in financial ruin manage to bring in massive audiences to hear him talk about creating wealth? Barnum answered this question himself, encouraging entrepreneurs to "put on the *appearance* of business, and generally the *reality* will follow."[277] This is how Barnum ran his entertainment ventures as well. Following a bit of an "if you build it, they will come" mentality, Barnum skillfully used marketing to create a reputation for his circus, even prior to audiences seeing the big show.

In 1870, Barnum was retired from the show business when circus veterans William Cameron "W.C." Coup and Dan Castello approached him and asked him to join them in launching a new circus. Barnum agreed, (re)beginning the work in the industry that would give him his longest-lasting reputation. Coup and Castello, experienced in the circus industry, sought out Barnum as a partner due to the financial advantage that attaching his name to their show would bring. Barnum had a powerful reputation as a

[276] Barnum, *Life of P.T. Barnum*, 17.
[277] Barnum, *Life of P.T.* Barnum, 20.

purveyor of amusement and as one knowledgeable about the entertainment business. For Coup and Castello, adding the Barnum name to their show was instant advertising, given his pre-existing fame. Barnum claimed that when he told friend and fellow showman Avery Smith about his intention to put his name on circus, Smith "laughed and said I was a fool and would lose everything. When I asked him why he said because I was giving my own name to the show, and no circus had ever been known to exist under one name for more than two years."[278] Although some assumed Barnum would be a silent partner, or that he had just rented out the rights to use his name, he remained actively involved in the circus business, primarily managing publicity where he utilized circus advertisements to continue to portray himself as a respectable showman.

Even before he joined the "Greatest Show on Earth," James A. Bailey had already crafted a reputation as a shrewd businessman; however, rather than boldly trumpeting his success and skills as Barnum did, Bailey's reputation was as a reserved, industrious entrepreneur. In interviews, articles, and advertising, Barnum and Bailey were often described as two sides of the same coin. Barnum sought the spotlight while Bailey hid in the shadows. Barnum ran his affairs from New York or his home in Connecticut, while Bailey stayed on the road with the show. Although some reporters described Bailey as the "silent power" of the show, reluctant to even have his picture taken, the Barnum & Bailey show's own promotional materials celebrated his virtues as a businessman.[279] Bailey's obituaries described him as the "managing lieutenant" of the circus, noting that his skills,

[278] "A Chat With P.T. Barnum," *New-York Tribune*, December 30, 1888, MWEZ + n.c. 9542, NYPL.
[279] "James Anthony Bailey: Death of the Famous Circus Promoter - His Characteristic Career," *New York Mirror*, April 21, 1906, T-CLP James Bailey, BRTC, NYPL.

while exceptional, were transferrable to other industries. He could have been successful in any business he chose.[280] In fact, contemporaries recognized that Bailey's methods of conducting business were like those in other industries. Bailey "made the circus conform to recognized business laws; he standardized and systematized it." [281]

In an advertisement in which he wrote a personal address to his audiences, Bailey announced that he "accepted the entire responsibility of the personal and active management of the grand new combined exhibitions bearing [the Barnum and Bailey] names, I publicly outlined the basis upon which they were organized, the strict business principles upon which they would be conducted, and the executive policy that would be adopted and enforced."[282] He ensured audiences of his own trustworthiness, writing "I am always present to personally investigate all complaints."[283] By including this first-person address in his advertisements, Bailey cultivated a reputation as a reliable, knowledgeable businessman. If a show were under his control, these ads suggested, it was sure to be top quality.

Another way in which showmen broadcast the merits of their show, and their own skills as businessmen, was in highlighting the amount of money they spent. As noted in Chapter One, it was common for advertisements for the biggest shows to prominently announce the cost of the years' spectacles, or the amount of the shows' daily expenditures. In bold, capital letters, an 1897 advertisement for the Ringling Bros. Circus

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[280] "James Anthony Bailey: Death of the Famous Circus Promoter - His Characteristic Career."
[281] Hartley Davis, "The Business Side of the Circus," *Everybody's Magazine*, July 1910, T-CLP James Bailey, BRTC, NYPL.
[282] "'A Wealth of Wonders and a Feast of Riches,' Clipping, Barnum Papers, NYPL."
[283] "'A Wealth of Wonders and a Feast of Riches,' Clipping, Barnum Papers, NYPL."

proclaimed "CAPITAL INVESTED $3,700,000. ACTUAL DAILY EXPENSE $7,400" and that that year's show featured "the most expensive aerial features ever presented in America."[284] In the minstrel sphere too, J.H. Haverly did not hesitate to inform his audience that his "daily expenses are not less than twenty thousand dollars."[285] In reality, the expense records for these companies show that actual daily expenses were far lower than advertised; however, the prevalence of these claims in traveling amusements' advertisements indicates that showmen believed that audiences would find a more expensive show to be a better one.[286]

There is certainly some truth to this assumption as the biggest shows did have a greater budget for props, costumes, and talent, leading to a more novel and spectacular entertainment, something audiences looked for in traveling amusements. But not only was this an announcement of the quality of the show, but also a boast about the proprietors' ability to successfully earn and handle large amounts of money. Haverly's self-proclaimed title of "Amusement Economist" suggests to readers that the show was successful not just because of the talent on stage, but also because of Haverly's own ability to wisely manage his money. He boasts not of his artistic skills in assembling a premium creative product, but of managing his finances. Due to his own personal financial genius, Haverly could spend more money and therefore deliver a better product.

Not only did showmen boast of how much they spent, but, naturally, they also did not hesitate to brag about their earning power as well. They often found creative ways to

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[284] Pamphlet for Ringling Bros. Circus, 1897, MWEZ + n.c. 4050, BRTC, NYPL.
[285] Haverly's Herald, 1882.
[286] Business Recrods, 1908-1909, Box 2, Folder 5, Barnum Papers, CWM; Expense Reports, Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels, 1880, Box 10, Folder 24, Minstrel Show Collection, HRC.

do so. When a Haverly show arrived in a new town, during their unloading process, Haverly instructed his men to carry an enormous safe painted with the company's logo down the streets with them to their final location emblazoned with the show's logo. While this was a prop safe, usually empty, Haverly intended it to send a message about the show's success; they earned so much money, they needed this oversized safe to secure it all.[287] Barnum also instructed his employees to make no secret of the money his shows brought in. When a reporter with *The Spirit* arrived to interview Barnum, he wrote that "the first object we discovered on entering the main office was the cheerful countenance of Mr. Hurd, who manages the financial department of the 'Great Event,' seated upon a huge bale of greenbacks, directing his assistants how to tie up another bale with the greatest security, while he hummed to himself, 'I know a bank.'"[288] This emphasis on a shows' revenue reflects the Gilded Age Social Darwinist belief that a man's financial status was connected to his inherent value. In his famous article, *Wealth,* Andrew Carnegie expounded on this thought, arguing "that this talent for organization and management is rare among men is proved by the fact that it invariably secures for its possessor enormous [monetary] rewards."[289] Therefore, flaunting wealth, and depicting themselves as wealthy, despite the fact that nearly all of the most successful showmen had times of serious financial struggle during the height of their careers, was a statement of a man's "fitness" for high society. Entertainment impresarios flaunted their financial success in their advertisements in to position themselves among the elite business class.

[287] Isaac F. Marcosson and Daniel Frohman, *Charles Frohman: Manager and Man* (London: J. Lane, the Bodley Head, 1916), 52.
[288] Untitled Article, *The Spirit*, n.d., Clipping, n.d. MWEZ + n.c. 9542, BRTC, NYPL.
[289] Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," *The North American Review* 148, no. 391 (1889): 655.

The visibility of showman's wealth extended beyond advertisements and in to their personal lives as well. The upper echelon of showmen, Barnum, Bailey, Haverly, the Ringlings, brandished their wealth in other ways as well. Sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote that "glamour has become a hard fact of well-established business routines."[290] To continue to claim their space in high society, showmen engaged in glamourous, conspicuous consumption. This was common among many of the "Robber Barons," and "Captains of Industry" at the time, when they built glittering mansions such as Biltmore and The Breakers and hosted extravagant social gatherings. As Inglis described it, many of these men felt "that the important thing in the weird, unprecedented world of American moneymaking and power-broking was not to be right but to be audible, not to lead but to be seen."[291] And showmen shared in this desire to be seen. J.H. Haverly was known for wearing diamonds on his shirtfronts.[292] Others built their own elaborate mansions, such as P.T. Barnum's Connecticut home he dubbed "Iranistan." Allegedly telling his architect "to spare neither time nor expense," Barnum commissioned what he claimed was the first "Oriental" style construction in the United States and filled the house with marble, bronze, and custom furniture, taking care to make sure that his circus' elephants, when spending the winter on his estate, were visible from the passing railroad tracks.[293] When Iranistan burned down in 1857, Barnum built another estate in Bridgeport he named Waldemere. James Bailey, too, had a large Romanesque Revival mansion built in Harlem complete with custom stained-glass windows designed by Henry Belcher.

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[290] C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, New Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72.
[291] Inglis, *History of Celebrity*.
[292] Marcosson and Frohman, *Charles Frohman: Manager and Man*, 46.
[293] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 97.

When the first edition of the New York Social Register was published in 1887, James A. Bailey was among those listed.[294] This was a significant accomplishment for a showman, a profession that historically had been considered disreputable, and indicates a major shift in public attitudes toward the entertainment business.

These showmen exemplify many of the middle-class values of the late nineteenth-century. Karen Halttunen acknowledged a cultural shift toward the end of the nineteenth-century when Victorian men turned away from sentimentality and embraced a new "success ideology" where attributes such as pluck, boldness, charm, "self-trumpeting" and even impudence were lauded. It was during this period that self-help books focused on money-making first appeared and it became more acceptable to speak about earning money for money's sake as the success of Barnum's *The Art of Money-Getting* demonstrated. Halttunen noted that charm or "magnetism," was one of the most sought-after qualities for success-seekers, writing that "the man of magnetism thus possessed in abundance what the new success literature called 'executive ability,' the art of acting as a 'master and manager of human conduct.'…only the man of magnetism could rise in society because only he could manage the men around him."[295] Barnum's promotional materials emphasized his executive abilities in much the same way. An 1873 advertisement claimed that Barnum's name was a "synonym for all that can possibly enter into the composition of a successful managerial career."[296] Barnum exemplified this new masculine ideal that Halttunen described. He openly discussed money, never shied

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[294] *The Social Register of New York* (New York: Social Register Association, 1887).
[295] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830 - 1870* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982), 204.
[296] Crum*, History of Animals and Leading Curiosities Contained in P.T. Barnum's World's Fair and Colosseum of Natural History & Art.*

away from promoting himself, and was willing to stretch the truth. As demonstrated by the success of *The Art of Money-Getting,* many people were willing to take financial lessons from the "Prince of Humbugs." The confidence man, once a dangerous figure, "was actually becoming a kind of model for ambitious young American to emulate."[297] Barnum and his contemporaries were highly visible examples of this new masculine ideology, openly praising their own executive ability and flaunting their wealth.

Once the owners of traveling amusements established a name for themselves, they guarded it fiercely. This included protecting one's self against harmful rumors and smear campaigns, and in a more literal sense, keeping an eye out for imposters using a large company's name without authorization. In some cases, a smaller show used the name of a larger one to gain attention. One advertisement in the *New York Clipper* featured the title "Buffalo Bill" prominently; but upon reading the full ad it became apparent that this was not a promotion for Buffalo Bill's Wild West, but for another show featuring "William A. Lavelle: A Buffalo Bill in 'Wilds of the West.'"[298] The Sells-Floto Circus, a fairly successful enterprise, seems to have added "Sells" to its name to capitalize on the success of the pre-existing Sells Bros. circus. Originally debuting as simply the Floto Circus, the show added "Sells" to its name in 1906, despite the fact that there was no owner with that last name. When the Ringlings later purchased the Sells Bros. show, they sued the owners of the Sells-Floto company in 1909 for using the Sells name and images of the real Sells Brothers, who had no connection to the Sells-Floto show, in their advertising. Asking for $2,000,000 and a restraining order against further using the Sells' names or images, the

[297] Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 198.
[298] "Advertisement for William A. Lavelle, A Buffalo Bill in Wilds of the West," *The New York Clipper*, November 5, 1887.

Ringlings' attorneys alleged that the Floto show "maintained continuously and knowingly approved unlawful games of chance, graft and various undesirable practices, all of which bring the name of Sells into disrepute before the public, and to the damage of the name and reputation of the Sells, and the Sells Brothers' shows, as owned and controlled by the Ringlings."[299] The Ringlings guarded the good name and reputation of the Sells Bros. title and sought to protect the value of the Sells name by bringing suit against the Sells-Floto show.[300]

Name stealing and misleading advertisements escalated in some cases to outright impersonation. Trade newspapers like the *New York Clipper* often featured notices from amusement proprietors warning the public that someone was imitating their company and falsely using their name. For example, in 1887 the *Clipper*'s "Circus and Sideshow" column published a notice from George W. Peck with a large headline in bold, capital letters reading "WARNING TO MANAGERS," informing his colleagues in the show business that someone was imitating his company and exhibiting their traveling play "Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa."[301] Rooting out impersonators was significant as unscrupulous people were known to enter a town claiming to be agents of a well-established amusement company, accumulate a tab of expenses, and, due to the real company's honest reputation, leave with bills unpaid and false promises that payment was on its way from company headquarters. In 1879, Barnum sent a letter to the editors of the *Mercury* exposing a similar scam, warning that "an imposter is preceding my show

[299] "Ringling Brothers Sue for $2,000,000," *The Baraboo News*, October 21, 1909.
[300] This 1909 lawsuit was unsuccessful and these two shows continued a very public "war" for the next two decades until the Ringling Brothers ultimately purchased the Sells-Floto show in 1929.
[301] "Peck's Bad Boy. Warning to Managers.," *The New York Clipper*, November 5, 1887.

some ten days who represents himself as my agent, obtains advertisements (paid in advance), and falsely promises the advertisers that he will insert them in my programme…the scoundrel ought to be arrested for obtaining money under false pretenses."[302] This was a consequence of the nationalization of traveling amusements; word of a show's respectable reputation might reach a small rural town before the show itself, leaving local business owners vulnerable to the scams of confidence men. As historian Steven Mihm discussed, the rise of capitalism and the rise of the confidence man were parallel developments and "the very features that had fostered unprecedented economic growth – economies of scale, interchangeable parts, and the division of labor" were beneficial to the con man.[303] The same technological developments that facilitated the rise of traveling amusements, such as the railroad and new printing technology, also made it easier for confidence artists to exploit victims. Gone were the days when the owner of a show was also the manager, booking agent, advertising agent, and performer. As shows expanded and began to use multiple advance crews and agents their employees became increasingly anonymous to outsiders and smooth talkers with well-printed business cards might swindle unsuspecting patrons under the guise of working for a big show.

Although rural patrons would not have been able to identify Barnum's advance men by sight, making them vulnerable to these cons, they likely would have been able to identify Barnum himself. As described above, amusement proprietors fashioned

[302] P.T. Barnum to Editors of the *Mercury*, Bridgeport, May 10, 1879, in *Selected Letters of P.T. Barnum*, ed. A. H. Saxon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
[303] Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), 262.

themselves in to celebrities, just as, if not more important than the performers in their shows. This is demonstrated in the design of amusement advertisements, as images of shows' owners often dominated the layout of their posters and handbills. One newspaper article reminiscing on Barnum's career argued that Barnum "formed a sight acquaintance with perhaps more persons than any American of his time."[304] Featuring the owner's face as much as possible could help prevent imposters and help further cement the association between a showman's name and the respectability of his business. The *Advanced Courier* for P.T. Barnum's very first circus season in 1871 gives an idea of the extent to which some proprietors went to make themselves an integral part of the show's brand (see figure 4.2). The first page of the *Courier* is split in half, the top featuring a collage of images of animals. This is in line with the efforts to highlight the educational benefit of circuses. In this ad, the only hint of the circus is a big top tent framing an image of several wild animals in the center of the picture. The top of the image has "P.T. Barnum's" written in bold attention-grabbing block letters, black against a white background, drawing the reader's attention to the showman's name. The bottom half of the page contains a letter from Barnum to his audience; however, a large image of Barnum himself takes up approximately half of this space, with the text pushed to small columns on either side. Barnum's name is emphasized in four places on this one page. A potential audience member might see this advertisement and have no idea that Barnum was not the sole proprietor of the show. During the 1871 season, Barnum was partnered with W.C. Coup and Dan Castello, and the official title of the show included all three men's names. It is clear from this pamphlet that Barnum was the one being emphasized,

[304] Reminiscences of Barnum, April 12, 1891, Clipping, Barnum Papers, NYPL.

likely due to his pre-existing name-recognition.[305] This was a trend that continued throughout Barnum's circus career. Although he worked with several different partners up-to and even during the first few years after he combined his show with Bailey and Cooper, Barnum's name was often the only one emphasized in ads. For example, when the show first began to call itself "P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth," the enterprise was owned by Barnum, John J. Nathans, Avery Smith, George F. Bailey and Lewis June. While the shows' print ads did list the other men as "sole proprietors," only Barnum's name was in the title.[306]

[305] P.T. Barnum's Advance Courier, 1871.
[306] "Where Barnum Started: Memories of the Early Days of the Great Showman," Clipping, n.d., MWEZ + n.c. 9542, BRTC, NYPL.

P.T. BARNUM'S

ADVANCE COURIER.

P. T. BARNUM, Editor. 1871. Circulation 800,000.

P. T. BARNUM TO THE PUBLIC.

AFTER thirty years' active career in the Museum and Show Business, I undertook, at the end of two disastrous conflagrations, to retire permanently from business cares, and, taking Horace Greeley's characteristic advice, "Go a Fishing" for the balance of my days.

But neither ease nor fortune of itself furnishes a comfortable contrast; and being stimulated by energies that will not abate, by a constitution unimpaired, and by a desire once more to gratify the demands of an anxious public, I have absolutely become "restive" under "rest."

A custom now prevails in the Spectacular world, after having astonished a gazing multitude with a succession of gorgeous scenes, to crown all—just before the curtain comes down for the last time—with one picture of wonders, into which money and pains have been put with almost a lavish recklessness, that the entertainment may close with startling éclat. Being inspired by a like ambition, I am therefore prompted to undertake a new Mammoth Enterprise, by collecting, equipping, and putting in actual operation a great NATIONAL MUSEUM, MENAGERIE, CARAVAN, and HIPPODROME combined — an Exhibition which I purpose to make as absolutely NOVEL, COLOSSAL, EXHAUSTIVE, AND BEWILDERINGLY VARIOUS as money and experience can make it; and which I can transport, by means of 1500 MEN AND HORSES, to every important neighborhood, township, and city of my own native land.

PHINEAS T. BARNUM.

I intend it to constitute in the aggregate, when put on the road, the LARGEST GROUP OF WONDERS EVER KNOWN; while the admission to the entire series of attractions will be that of ordinary travelling exhibitions, viz., 50 cents; children under 9 half-price.

My facilities and experience were never so good as at present. I could never so well as now bring into requisition and summon to my service "the uttermost parts of the earth," nor find men so able and willing to carry out my long matured plans.

This Enterprise will combine—as all my shows have aimed to do

NORWICH, Friday, May 26th, 1871.

Figure 4.2. P.T. Barnum's Advance Courier, 1871, Barnum Papers, BRTC, NYPL.

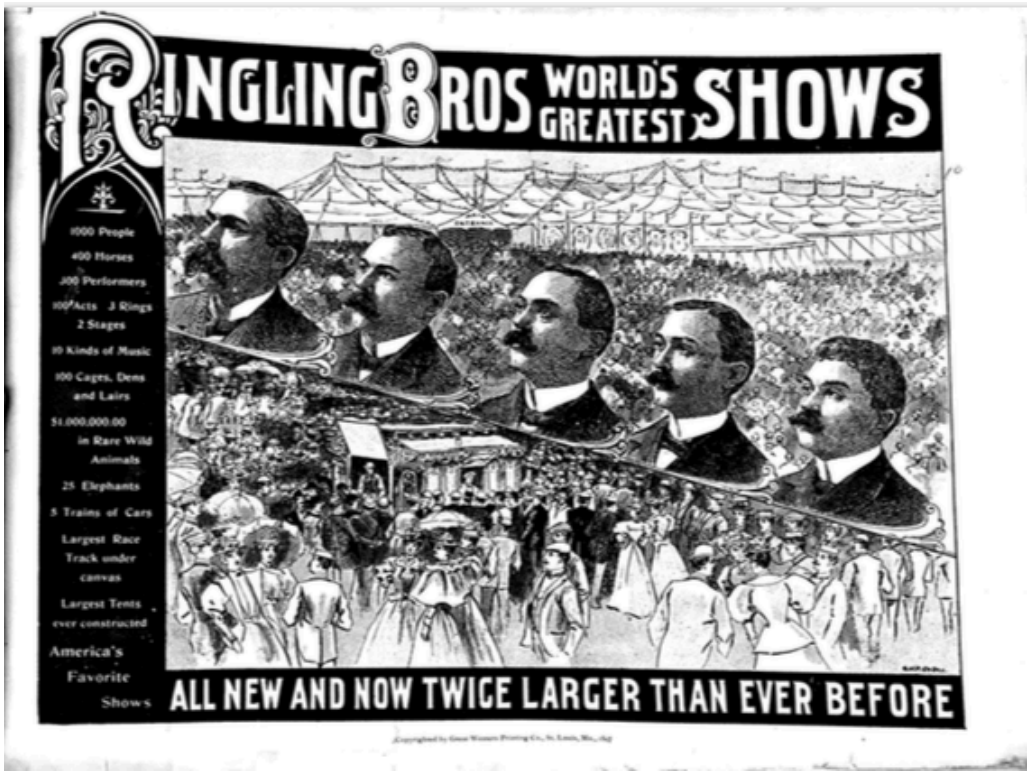

Figure 4.3. Pamphlet for Ringling Bros. Circus, 1897, MWEZ + n.c. 4050, BRTC, NYPL.

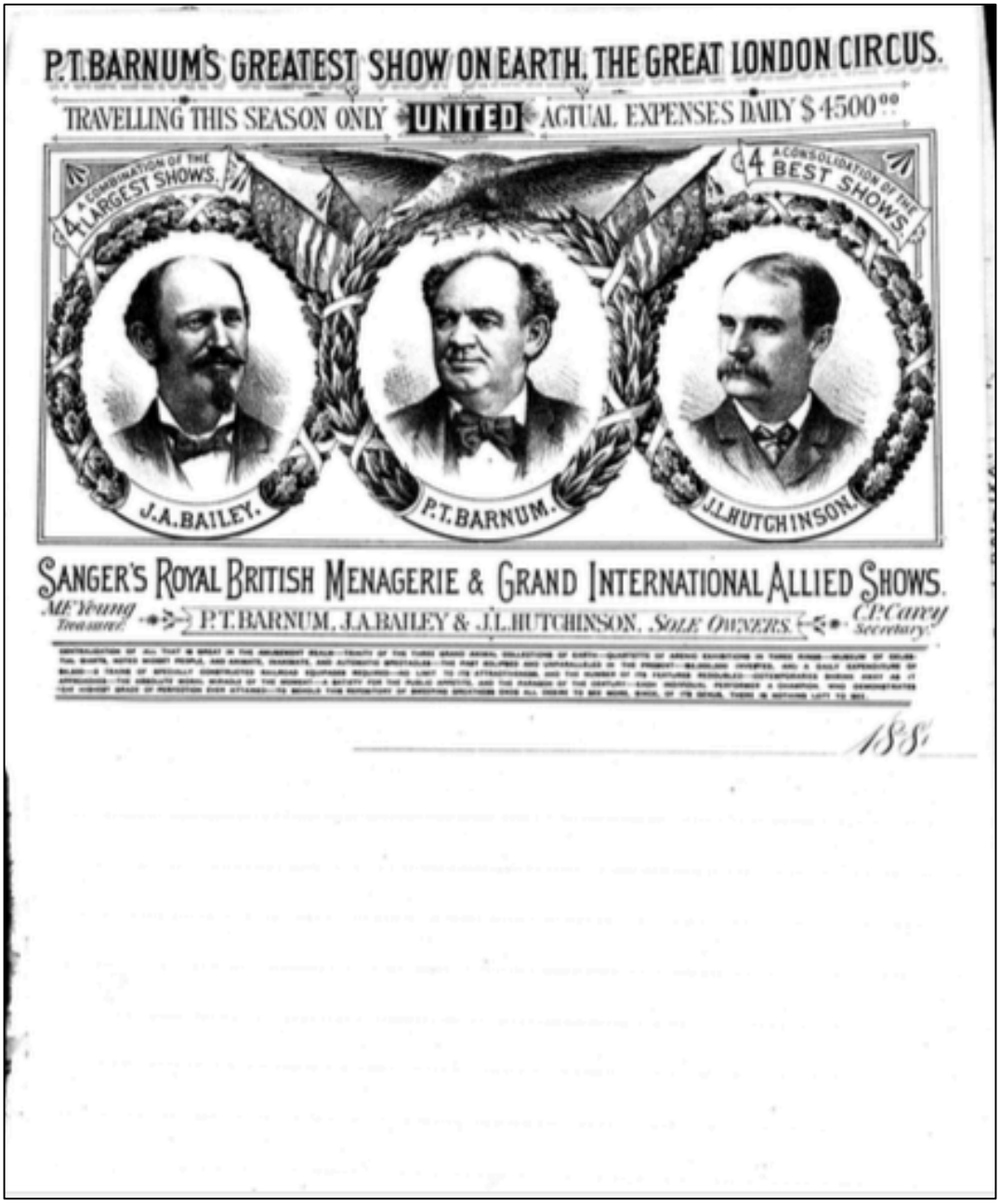

Figure 4.4. Blank Letterhead for P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth, The Great London Circus, Sanger's Royal British Menagerie & Grand International Allied Shows. c.1880s Barnum Papers, CWM.

Other entertainment impresarios followed suit, featuring portraits of themselves prominently in their advertising, and even company stationery (see figures 4.3 and 4.4). When Barnum, Bailey, and Hutchinson combined in 1881, their letterhead featured an image of all three men that took up over half the page. Showmen styled themselves similarly in their official portraits, appearing stoic and professional; well-dressed and well-groomed with serious expressions. One edition of J.H. Haverly's *Haverly's Herald* advertising pamphlet is particularly noteworthy for mentioning the owner's name no less than 13 places on the first page (see figure 4.1). The page is dominated by Haverly's portrait, framed with an intricate border. This advertisement equated the quality of the show with its owners' respectability claiming "All classes of people fully appreciate the guarantee that inevitably accompanies the great name of J.H. HAVERLY. It is the towering symbol of truth, honesty, and prosperity, because it has never been associated with a weak performance of any kind."[307] Making one's self in to a symbol of trustworthiness was a necessary tactic to counter the negative stereotypes of showmen and to build brand loyalty in a business where the product was constantly changing from season to season.

While company owners built up their own names in advertisements, many also sought to knock competitors' names down. These efforts ranged in severity from covering up rival shows' posters, to spreading rumors, to, in a few cases, outright physical sabotage. To handle this competitive atmosphere, the biggest shows formed what became known as "opposition squads." These were part of the advance team for a show, who would travel ahead of the big show and ensure that previously-posted

[307] Haverly's Herald, 1882.

advertisements had not been taken down or covered up by competitors. Opposition squads would also keep track of rival companies' routes, and in any place where the two shows were both exhibiting, either in close geographical proximity or in the same location but with dates close together, the squad would make great effort to ensure that their show had the better turnout.

Showmen viewed this competition as a real fight, and in some cases this fight turned physical. One commentator described the duties of opposition squads in martial terms, saying they had "no other duties save to fight the like brigades of other shows…the result is flying paste brushes and buckets, faster flying fists, broken noses, black eyes, police, jail, bail – and the same thing over again until one side tires and quits, or circus day arrives to end the war of the opposition crews." Unlike the other advance cars, the "skirmish car" had no pre-arranged route, and would go wherever needed as information on competitors' routes became available. Leaders of the opposition squads kept close tabs on their competitors, and, as described in the 1895 route book for Barnum and Bailey, "as soon as a railway contractor of an opposition show makes his appearance anywhere the fact is telegraphed to Mr. Bailey, who thus knows in advance just where the other shows are going."[308] The somewhat-paranoid W.C. Coup even accused some advance men of being double agents and passing on information to the opposition, and asserted his suspicions that rival companies were intercepting telegrams between owners and railroad agents to figure out their competitors' routes.[309] When the skirmish car arrived in a town where more than one show was set to exhibit in a season, they took all

[308] Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1895, Box 47, Folder 6, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[309] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 37.

measures possible to post more advertisements and "out-paper" the competition, whether that meant working all through the night or bribing local business owners to refuse to hang their competitions' posters.[310]

When out-papering competitors was not enough, showmen turned to more ruthless tactics. A 1919 article from *The Billboard* described the competition between amusement proprietors, stating,

> It is an old story with capitalists, with organizations of employers, 'IF YOU CANNOT DEFEAT A MAN, IF YOU CANNOT BRIBE A MAN, IF YOU CANNOT BUY A MAN THEN DESTROY HIM.' *And the surest way to destroy a leader of actors is through rumors and insinuations in the theatrical press.*[311]

Showmen took advantage of trade publications for this purpose. In 1892, a bitter rivalry between minstrel show owners J.H. Haverly and M.B. Leavitt was brewing. In a letter to the manager of his Original Mastodon Minstrel company, Haverly wrote that "Leavitt's actions toward you are strange and unbusiness like [sic] to say the least. Is there any way you can avoid the annoyance in the future?"[312] Although it is unclear from surviving sources exactly what this "unbusiness like" activity was, Haverly took this issue public, placing an ad in the *Clipper* reading "WARNING! The public are cautioned against fraudulent misrepresentation of this company by an alleged Minstrel *gang* called Leavitt's. Fearing utter annihilation, their only resource is *Malicious, Deliberate*, **LYING**! Haverly's Minstrels have a national reputation and fear no flimsy imitator."[313]

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[310] Alfred T. Ringling, *Life Story of the Ringling Brothers* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1900), 211; Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 134.
[311] Harry Mountford, "Shooting the Leaders," *The Billboard*, April 12, 1919.
[312] J.H. Haverly to William Foote, June 12, 1892, Box 10, Folder 22, Minstrel Show Collection, HRC.
[313] Warning Advertisement from Haverly's Minstrels, Clipping, n.d., Box 10, Folder 23, Minstrel Show Collection, HRC.

Of course, this in and of itself was a smear campaign against Leavitt. Whether Leavitt's troupe had been spreading rumors about Haverly or not, Haverly attempted to brand Leavitt as a jealous liar, potentially harming Leavitt's reputation.

Taking the name-calling even further, at one point the Sells Bros. had an entire "press book" of suggested advertisements for local newspapers exclusively focused on smearing their competitors, Barnum & Bailey. These ads took on a quite bitter tone, one reading,

> Mr. McGinnis, alias J.A. Bailey, you are a thoroughly exposed, convicted, baffled, beaten, desperate and crazy fraud; the rotting titles of your monopoly tainted, Janus-faced show are frauds; your lying announcements and advertisements are frauds; your performing lions are cringing, crawling, sneaking frauds; your 'Wild West' is a lousy Indian, ruffianly fraud, and one extremely dangerous to the lives of the spectators, through the wild, reckless shooting of its lawless drunken frauds; your 'Nero' is an all-polluting, harlot-concealing fraud, and your announcement to exhibit here is an unmitigated fraud.[314]

This ad and many others in the pamphlet were especially fixated on the fact that Bailey had changed his last name from his birth name McGinnis. Whether placing an emphasis on Bailey's name change was an anti-Irish sentiment or just meant as additional evidence for their claims of him being the ultimate fraud, the authors of this press book recognized the power of a showman's name. Upon Barnum's death, the Sells Bros. press book demanded that the Barnum & Bailey show change the slogans on its advertisements to read "Death and McGinnis: Sole Proprietors," suggesting that the show was unworthy of the reputation built around the Barnum and Bailey names.

Occasionally, rivalries became even more extreme. W.C. Coup described several instances of direct sabotage by rival companies. He recounted that "the most serious and

[314] "Press Tips" Pamphlet, n.d., Box 23, Pg 50, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

daring trick played on me was when the agent of an opposition show actually went to the railroad office and ordered a carload of my [advertising materials], which was on the sidetrack there waiting for our man, to be shipped to California" instead of the East Coast.[315] At another time, a rival confessed to Coup that when his train ran off the track he seriously considered blaming Coup for somehow arranging the accident. The man even went so far as to have warrants drawn up for Coup's arrest, although they never followed through with it. Coup also made similar accusations against his rivals, claiming that when his company was unable to make a stand in Ohio due to a burned-out bridge along the train route, this was a deliberate attack on his troupe by rivals, whom he knew "were driven to desperation and were capable of resort to any such outrage."[316] Of course, the veracity of these stories may be viewed with suspicion as showmen were known for exaggeration; however, that Coup would go so far as to publicly accuse rivals of such extreme actions in his published autobiography evidences the severity of amusement rivalries.

In some cases, competition ultimately benefit both parties, as occurred during the White Elephant affair of 1884 between Barnum & Bailey and Adam Forepaugh. From popular travel and adventure stories, the public was aware of the idea of a "white elephant," a creature that was worshipped in some Asian cultures, but none of these elephants had ever made it to European or American shores. None, that is, until P.T. Barnum secured one from Burma in 1883 and made plans to exhibit it at the London Zoological Society for a few months and then bring it to America to tour with his circus.

[315] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 36.
[316] Coup, 37.

In the United States, the arrival of the elephant, Toung Taloung, was a highly-anticipated event. *The New York Times* reported that the Prince of Wales arranged a reception for the elephant in London, and upon his arrival in the United States there was to be a great event where invited guests included "naturalists, scientists, clergymen, missionaries, and physicians" all excited to welcome, and inspect "His Sacredness."[317] Unfortunately, many were quite disappointed when Toung Taloung arrived and, instead of seeing a spotlessly white elephant, they were greeted with fairly normal looking elephant, with some pink and cream colored spots on his face. This was indeed a "white elephant;" however, what was not explained in popular literature about these animals, is that they were not, as most assumed, completely snow white. Albino elephants may be a light gray or pinkish shade, have mottled patches of light pigmentation, and have light eyes, nails, and hair.[318]

As had happened many times before, members of the public felt deceived by Barnum. They expected a pure white elephant and were disappointed by the blotchy animal. Newspaper debates abounded discussing whether Toung Taloung was a "genuine" white elephant or not. As James Cook has discussed in great detail, this "artful deception," was Barnum's modus operandi.[319] He took full advantage of the press storm that accompanied any perceived hoax on his part, finding that scandal seemed to only increase ticket sales. But in this case, Barnum was not the only one reaping the benefit of this controversy. His rival, Adam Forepaugh, seized the opportunity to exhibit his own

[317] "Waiting for the White Elephant," *The New York Times*, March 26, 1884.
[318] Sarah Amato, "The White Elephant in London: An Episode of Trickery, Racism and Advertising," *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 1 (2009): 31–66.
[319] Cook, *Arts of Deception*.

"white elephant," and managed to open his exhibit in New York just eight days before Barnum's elephant arrived. This elephant, Forepaugh insisted, was the real thing.

In reality, Forepaugh's elephant, The Light of Asia, was the fraud. An animal keeper later testified that Forepaugh purchased a regular elephant named Tiny in Liverpool and had him painted with "a composition of Paris white mixed with size and a flesh-colored pink composition also containing size" and shipped to the United States.[320] In public, Forepaugh stuck to his claim that The Light of Asia was a genuine white elephant and issued advertisements calling out Barnum's elephant as the fake, claiming that "Barnum's 'Sacred White?' Elephant and all its Surroundings a Rank Fraud."[321] This challenge led to more publicity for both men and newspaper articles about the elephants proliferated.

In an effort to both expose Forepaugh's method of faking his "white elephant" and continue to capitalize on this public controversy, Barnum then created his own fake white elephant, making sure the public knew that this one was an imposter, while Toung Taloung was the genuine article. In Forepaugh's home town of Philadelphia, Barnum unveiled this new "profane white elephant." According to one newspaper article, after the new elephant's first exhibition, Barnum invited a group of scientists and chemists to inspect the animal, and had a Mr. Paul F. DeSpotte explain the bleaching process.[322] Given the pun of the name "DeSpotte" and a lack of corroborating evidence, it's likely that this was yet another of Barnum's self-planted articles; nevertheless, the publication

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[320] "A Whitewashed Elephant," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1884.
[321] Copy of Forepaugh Playbill reprinted in Philip B. Kunhardt, *P.T. Barnum: America's Greatest Showman* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 294.
[322] "The Big Show Vanishes. The Sacred Elephant and the White Fraud Off for Philadelphia," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1884.

of this piece in the New York Times indicates that this was of interest to the general public. Whether Mr. DeSpotte was real or not, Barnum's effort to "prove the fraud played upon the people of Philadelphia by [Forepaugh's Circus], which professes to exhibit a sacred white elephant," kept this matter in the public eye, drumming up excitement around both shows.[323] Sadly, while these stunts may have benefit the circus proprietors, this was achieved at the expense of the elephants. The whitewash Forepaugh used to color Tiny was poisonous, and the elephant passed away before the end of the 1884 season.[324] It's likely Forepaugh did not intend to kill Tiny, as elephants were a significant investment; however, this demonstrates the extent to which a showman was willing to go to one-up his competition.

In the White Elephant affair, Barnum's old tactic of "artful deception" benefit him once again. As both Barnum and Forepaugh accused one another of being the fraud, audiences were encouraged to visit both shows, see the elephants for themselves, and then make up their own minds about which animal was authentic. Eventually, as W.C. Coup recalled it, "after getting all the benefit they could out of the white elephant war, Barnum and his rival came to an amicable understanding."[325] In 1887, Barnum and Forepaugh capitalized on their combined fame and exhibited their shows together at Madison Square Garden for several weeks. Fellow circus man, David W. Watt, wrote that "men from all over the country came to New York to witness the combined parade and

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[323] "The Big Show Vanishes. The Sacred Elephant and the White Fraud Off for Philadelphia."
[324] The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) investigated this event, gathering affidavits from several of the animal keepers involved; however, Forepaugh was never charged in regards to this matter. "A Whitewashed Elephant," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1884.
[325] Coup, *Sawdust & Spangles*, 15.

learn some of the secrets of success of these two show kings of their day."[326] With advertisements triumphantly proclaiming, "In Union There Is Strength," the rivals formed a temporary partnership, drawing in audiences with the novelty of witnessing these two enormous shows combined.[327] While Barnum and Forepaugh settled some of the tensions between them in the mid-1880s, Forepaugh remained a thorn in Barnum's side as the years went on. This continued until Forepaugh's death in 1890, upon which James A. Bailey purchased the Forepaugh show with his long-time business partner, James E. Cooper.[328]

These amusement impresarios created brands centered around the identity of the show's proprietors, not the performers or the show's content. Audiences, who recognized men like Barnum and Haverly by name and face, understood that when they attended a show with one of these men's name on it, they were attending a moral, high-quality, family-friendly entertainment. This was particularly necessary in traveling amusements where the content of the show changed each year. In an industry where name and reputation were essential to success, some more ruthless showmen attempted to cut one another down by attacking each other's character, or, in some extreme cases, sabotaging one another's business in a more physical sense. But as the White Elephant affair illustrates, in some cases, partnership was beneficial to all involved. As the nineteenth century faded in to the twentieth, the largest showmen began to approach competition

[326] Watt, "Side Lights on the Circus Business: Part One," 27.
[327] Advertising Pamphlet for P.T. Barnum & Co. and Adam Forepaugh's Combined Shows.
[328] "Circus Men Form a Trust," *The New York Times*, March 12, 1890; "The Forepaugh Show Sold," *The New York Times*, January 14, 1892.

through mergers and acquisitions, leading to the consolidation and eventual monopolization of the industry.

CHAPTER FIVE

"MASTER MIND OF THE SHOW WORLD"

Tucked away in a folder in the W.H. Crain Collection at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas is a short note, just two short phrases scrawled in pencil on a blank sheet of paper that reads "Bailey Not Barnum. Master Mind of the Show World." Although it's unclear if this note is from one of Bailey's contemporaries, a present-day researcher, or even Bailey himself, the message reveals an under-appreciated fact of the history of traveling amusements: James A. Bailey was the individual most directly responsible for the consolidation of the traveling amusement industry at the turn of the twentieth century. At the time of his death in 1906, Bailey had a near-monopoly of the traveling amusement industry, with either a controlling interest or equal partnership in all the largest shows of the time aside from the up-and-coming Ringling Brothers' circus, which did not become a serious competitor until the final years of Bailey's life.

Bailey's story is significant for the way it illustrates the effects of all the business strategies mentioned in previous chapters. Bailey took advantage of new Gilded Age technologies to transport large shows and was the first showman to take a circus on a major international tour. He was well-known for his managerial skills and, in the words of one commentator "He made the circus conform to recognized business laws; he standardized and systematized it."[329] Descriptions of Bailey in the press support the

[329] Davis, "The Business Side of the Circus."

argument that he engaged in industrial paternalism, painting himself as the showman's friend. Bailey also embodied the concept of the businessman celebrity and earned praise in both amusement trade papers as well as major financial news outlets. All of this contributed to Bailey's consolidation of the amusement field. He believed the best way to handle competition was not necessarily to out-advertise competitors, but create an alliance. Initially, these alliances took the form of non-compete agreements where shows divided up territory, staying out of each other's way. However, as the Barnum & Bailey show continued to grow, Bailey used his financial power to purchase competitors. This is not to say that Bailey was the only showman utilizing these strategies, that his business partners and subordinate managers were not essential, or that his success trivializes the work of his fellow showmen, but Bailey is the independent factor in this story. His partners came and went, whether due to death, personal conflicts, or other reasons, but Bailey remained constant. Other showmen such as Buffalo Bill and Adam Forepaugh reached success on their own, but were then absorbed by Bailey in to his amusement empire. Bailey's creation of a "circus trust" is a clear, and well-documented, example of the industrialization and consolidation of the entertainment industry.

During the Great Merger Wave of 1896-1904 the number of competitors in American business shrank drastically across all industries; some 1,800 firms reorganized in to 160 horizontal combinations.[330] The effects of this trend are most commonly discussed in industries such as oil, tobacco, and meat packing but the traveling

[330] Naomi R. Lamoreaux, "The Problem of Bigness," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2019): 98.

amusement industry was a part of this merger mania as well.[331] By the time of his death in 1906, James Bailey had purchased at least five competing companies. The analysis of Bailey's career in this chapter illustrates that merger and acquisition led to the greatest reduction of competition in entertainment market, further demonstrating that in the Gilded Age entertainment industry, success depended more on one's skills as a capitalist, than a creative. Ultimately consolidation created a Bailey-led oligopoly of traveling amusements in the 1890s and monopoly in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Although reporters and commentators in the entertainment trade presses frequently described a Barnum & Bailey monopoly of the amusement industry, or referred to a "circus trust," there were few attempts at industry regulation. As economic historian Naomi Lamoreaux has pointed out, during the Progressive Era, much antitrust activity was focused on separating "good" trusts from "bad." With the general consensus that purposefully anticompetitive practices fell on the "bad" end of the spectrum, commentators recognized that when a firm was particularly innovative or increased its efficiency, sometimes the stifling of competition was a natural result. Here the goal was proving intent, as the Supreme Court espoused in the so-called "Rule of Reason" in two 1902 verdicts regarding Standard Oil and American Tobacco. While measures such as price-fixing were illegal per se, so-called "tight combinations" such as Standard Oil were

[331] For examples of works on Gilded Age consolidation see: Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*; Naomi R. Lamoreaux, "Industrial Organization and Market Behavior: The Great Merger Movement in American Industry," *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 1 (March 1980): 169–71; Lamoreaux, "The Problem of Bigness"; William G. Roy, *Socializing Capital: The Rise of the Large Industrial Corporation in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Charles Perrow, *Organizing America: Wealth, Power, and the Origins of Corporate Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

not automatically in violation of the Sherman Act; one would have to prove monopolistic intent.[332] Entertainment moguls did not encounter much of the antimonopoly criticism and legal persecution that plagued other industries. Some of this may have been due to the scale of the entertainment industry. While large, it did not play in the same numbers as oil or tobacco.

However, had commentators looked more closely behind the curtains they would have seen that owners of traveling amusement companies did engage in anticompetitive activity to aid in monopolization of the field. Although Bailey's empire of amusement may have been considered a "good" or natural trust, he utilized the same techniques as his contemporaries in other businesses. The trajectory of consolidation in the traveling amusement industry paralleled that of other fields such as oil and tobacco, beginning with the formation of cartels, followed by a series of major mergers and acquisitions, and, by the early twentieth century, incorporation. The greatest reduction in competition occurred due to the series of mergers and acquisitions in the circus industry from the 1870s-1900s that led to James A. Bailey's near-complete monopolization of the field by the time of his death in 1906.

At the time of this writing, there is no existing biography of James A. Bailey, save one 20-page pamphlet written by Richard Conover in 1957.[333] While there are numerous books and articles, both scholarly and popular, about P.T. Barnum and the Ringling Brothers, Bailey is rarely more than an afterthought.[334] This is a great oversight

[332] Lamoreaux, "The Problem of Bigness."
[333] Richard Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey* (Xenia, Ohio: Self-Published, 1957).
[334] Notable Barnum and Ringling Biographies Include: Harris, *Humbug*; Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum*; Kunhardt, *P.T. Barnum: America's Greatest Showman*; Robert Wilson, *Barnum: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019); A. H Saxon,

considering the fact that it was Bailey who established the business infrastructure that allowed the Barnum & Bailey show to flourish. Many historians have pointed out the curious fact that P.T. Barnum's name is still thought of today in connection to the circus, even though most his career was spent in other areas of the entertainment industry. For this, Barnum owes James Bailey a debt of gratitude. Bailey created a lasting circus empire as he purchased or partnered with other shows to narrow the playing field and give the Barnum & Bailey show greater market share. This made their show such a success that the Ringling Brothers Circus found it advantageous to continue using the Barnum & Bailey names for over a century after their deaths until the show closed in 2017. Bailey lay the foundations for the Ringling Brothers to monopolize the field. As Bailey had already consolidated the largest circuses and Wild West Shows under his control, with the purchase of his estate, the Ringlings had control of the traveling amusement industry with this one transaction.

Much of the lack of scholarly attention to Bailey is likely due to his reserved nature and noted lack of interest in the spotlight, meaning there were fewer articles on Bailey than his highly flamboyant and always publicity-hungry partner, P.T. Barnum.[335] At times Bailey even made efforts to purposefully conceal his own business activities; using other individuals to negotiate on his behalf and arrange purchases in secret, and

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P.T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man (Columbia University Press, 1995); Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*; Jerry Apps, *Tents, Tigers and the Ringling Brothers* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2007).

[335] Bailey's reluctance to take the spotlight was frequently mentioned by his contemporaries. Examples include: The Circus Colossal, clipping, n.d., Microfilm, Reel 3, Townsend Walsh Circus Scrapbooks, BRTC, NYPL; Phrenological Sketch of James A. Bailey, n.d., Box 1, Folder 7, Crain Collection, HRC; Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1896; Barnum & Bailey Route Book, 1897, Box 47, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

keeping his name off the marquee of some shows under his control. These reasons, along with Bailey's smaller archival footprint in comparison to the amount of available Barnum material, have led to Bailey's absence in much of the literature on the growth of the traveling amusement industry.

This chapter does not purport to be a full biography of Bailey's life. It is an examination of his business history and strategy that places Bailey within the context of Gilded Age industrialization and the corporate revolution, examining how his patterns of merger and acquisition led to his domination of the traveling amusement industry. Bailey's name was not the only recognizable one in the Gilded Age circus industry. Men such as Adam Forepaugh, the Sells Brothers, and William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody also had successful traveling amusements; however, the shows that bore these men's names ultimately fell under the control of James Bailey. Throughout his career, Bailey had many partners, and men such as Cooper, Hutchinson, and Cole will appear and disappear at various points in this chapter as Bailey created, dissolved, and rearranged partnerships many times over. A major purpose of this study is to explore the interconnectedness of traveling amusements, which is well-demonstrated by Bailey's career. One cannot tell the story of James Bailey's business history without also discussing Buffalo Bill Cody, P.T. Barnum, Adam Forepaugh, The Ringling Brothers and others Bailey partnered with, managed, or sought advice from.

Bailey's story also illustrates the significance of middle managers, and demonstrates how amusement owners weighed their personal relationships in relation to business outcomes. Bailey's relationship with his brother-in-law Joseph T. McCaddon who acted as Bailey's personal representative on several of his touring shows, as well as

Buffalo Bill Cody's relationship with his business partner and publicity manager Nate Salsbury were, at times, unstable and fraught with emotional conflicts. However, in these relationships, these men put aside personal differences when advantageous for business reasons. Amusement proprietors' search for profit superseded personal resentments.

Bailey's talent for organization as well as his careful selection of skillful partners and managers account for much of his success in the amusement industry; however, as his career illustrates, he also benefitted from luck and timing. Bailey was a part of the first generation of amusement impresarios that experienced the extreme growth of the industry resulting from the transition to rail travel in the 1870s. But Bailey was a younger member of this generation who reaped the gains of partnering with established showmen such as P.T. Barnum and Adam Forepaugh, who brought their names, flair for advertising, and capital to their partnerships. This also made Bailey well-positioned to purchase their holdings after their deaths, bringing him closer to a monopoly of the field. The Ringling Brothers may be considered the second generation of amusement impresarios as they did not begin their show until 1884, and did not begin touring on rail until 1890, and they did not pose a major threat to Bailey's control of the entertainment market until the final years of his life. This chapter ends with analysis of the Ringling Brothers' purchase of Bailey's interests following his death. Readers will note that minstrelsy does not play a large role in this chapter, given that Bailey did not have a hand in this genre. In minstrelsy, showman J.H. Haverly used many of the same strategies as Bailey to strengthen his control of the minstrel show market; however, this would ironically contribute to the genre's decline in popularity, as will be explored in the following chapter.

Developments in transportation and technology spurred growth in the traveling amusement industry, in terms of both the physical size of shows as well as the amount of money made by those who quickly capitalized on these new inventions. Because of this increased size, owners of such amusements firms developed new labor and management patterns, leading to a new model of amusement entrepreneurship wherein the role of managing a company's business was almost completely divorced from creative work on the show itself. Initially, as explored in the previous chapter, there was considerable competition in traveling amusements as proprietors sought to differentiate themselves; however, as firms grew larger and achieved financial success, competition gave way to consolidation. Lamoreaux remarked that during the merger wave of the 1890s, "consolidation undoubtedly facilitated the attainment of stable oligopolistic patterns of behavior by substantially reducing the number of firms in the industry, [and] by removing individualistic entrepreneurs from positions where they could disrupt the market."[336] It was Bailey's knack for arranging successful mergers and acquisitions that explains his dominance of the amusement field, demonstrating how amusement impresarios used the same strategies as the "robber barons" and captains of industry to bring the entertainment industry in to the world of industrial capitalism.

While the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth would be his most enduring legacy, James A. Bailey began his career in the amusement industry long before he partnered with P.T. Barnum. Born in 1847 in Detroit, Michigan, as James A. McGinnis, he ran away from home at age 11. He worked as a hired farm hand and then a bellboy

[336] Lamoreaux, "Industrial Organization and Market Behavior: The Great Merger Movement in American Industry," 171.

until 1860 when he started work with the Robinson & Lake Circus. James McGinnis was hired by the show's general agent, Frederick Bailey, whose surname James adopted. James Bailey took a brief break from the amusement industry to serve as a Sutler's clerk in the Union Army during the Civil War but then returned to the Robinson & Lake show, working in the advance department until 1869.[337] By this point, Bailey had established a reputation as a hard-working, responsible employee, and was offered a proprietary interest in the concert privileges of the Hemmings, Cooper and Whitby circus. "Privileges" referred to everything sold on the circus lot that was not a ticket to the main show, including concessions, tickets to the side show or post-show concert, and souvenirs. Rather than managing these operations themselves, owners of large shows would often grant an outside individual the exclusive "privilege" to sell these items in exchange for a daily fee or cut of the profit. In 1871, Bailey took on greater responsibility with the Hemmings & Cooper show (Whitby was murdered while working the front door during the 1870 season), acting as the advertising and general contracting agent and splitting concert, side-show and concession privileges with George Middleton.[338] Ownership of this show was re-organized again the following year and this time Bailey became a co-owner, with a one-quarter interest in the show, now titled James E. Cooper's International Circus.[339]

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[337] "James A. Bailey Obituary," June 1906, Clipping, T-CLP James Bailey, BRTC, NYPL; "James Anthony Bailey: Death of the Famous Circus Promoter - His Characteristic Career."
[338] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.
[339] Articles of Agreement between Richard Hemmings, James E. Cooper and James A. Bailey, 1871, Box 41, Folder 1, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

By 1873, Bailey's share increased when he bought out another owner's quarter, making Bailey and Cooper equal partners.[340] Cooper and Bailey's show made waves when they embarked on an ambitious international tour in 1876, spending three years traveling to Australia, New Zealand, Peru, and Brazil. Although this tour was not incredibly profitable, with the loss of several valuable animals from storms at sea and low turn-out in South America, Cooper and Bailey established a name for themselves as formidable players in the amusement industry. Colleagues in the show business followed news of the tour as trade papers printed Bailey's dispatches from overseas. If moving a big show by rail in the United States was a challenge, moving a show halfway across the world was an even bigger task. Not to mention, the state of Australian infrastructure at the time and the lack of major transcontinental railroads on that continent meant that the show had to move back and forth from traveling by rail to traveling by sea.[341] As no American show had attempted such a grand international tour at the time, Cooper and Bailey established themselves as pioneers of the amusement industry.

Cooper and Bailey profited from the failure of smaller circuses. Not only did this eliminate competition, but when shows closed, their property was put up at auction, allowing Cooper and Bailey to purchase quality goods at a low price, such as in 1875 when they acquired several animals and a calliope from the defunct Great Eastern Circus. Their biggest purchase was in 1878 when they purchased Howes Great London Show & Sanger's Royal British Menagerie for $23,000. The Howes show had been quite

[340] Articles of Agreement Between James E. Cooper and James A. Bailey, 1877, Box 41, Folder 2, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[341] Personal Memorandum Book of James A. Bailey for Australian Tour, 1877, Box 41, Folder 1, McCaddon Collection, PUL; Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.

successful in the 1870s, but suffered "considerable legal shenanigans" that led to the sale to Cooper and Bailey who re-christened the now combined shows with the lengthy title The Great London Circus and International Allied Shows, combined with Sanger's Royal British Menagerie.[342]

In the 1780s, Cooper and Bailey's main competitor was P.T. Barnum. Although Barnum was a relative newcomer to the circus industry when his show first began in 1871, he had the benefit of a pre-existing reputation as a purveyor of popular amusements, and the capital that came along with it. As Barnum already had a great deal of fame, the opening of his circus was met with great interest from the press, generating much free publicity. From the existing sources, it appears as if Barnum expected that he would have no trouble dominating the circus business; however, he found that Bailey was not willing to capitulate. As one commentator described it, "Instead of giving the 'great' P.T. an open path, 'Little Jimmy' threw himself directly in his way, so annoying the impatient Phineas that he sent for him, saying: 'Young man, I advise you to get out of my way, and stay out of it, for if you don't I shall wipe you and your show from the face of the earth."[343] Bailey did not alter his activities in response to this threat, allegedly leading Barnum to offer Bailey $50,000 to sign a non-compete agreement where the two shows would plan their routes so as not to cover the same territory in one season. Bailey refused, telling Barnum "Remember…I have warned you. I mean to fight."[344]

Interestingly, just as would occur later with Adam Forepaugh and the white elephant affair, one of the most heated episodes between Barnum and Bailey prior to their

[342] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.
[343] Untitled Clipping (1), n.d., MWEZ + n.c. 9542, BRTC, NYPL.
[344] Untitled Clipping (2), n.d., MWEZ + n.c. 9542, BRTC, NYPL.

partnership revolved around elephants. In March of 1880, one of Cooper and Bailey's elephants, Hebe, gave birth to the first elephant born in captivity. This was a momentous event, reported internationally and scientists, naturalists, and the general public were all eager to see the baby. So widely-known was this event that several newspapers simply referred to the Cooper & Bailey show as the "Baby Elephant Show."[345] P.T. Barnum offered Bailey one hundred thousand dollars cash for the baby elephant. It's unclear, even from Barnum's own writing, whether this was a serious offer or just meant to make sure Barnum's name stayed in the press; however, Cooper and Bailey "gleefully rejected" the offer.[346] Cooper and Bailey attempted to turn this offer against Barnum, posting advertisements with headlines reading "What Barnum Thinks of the Baby Elephant," suggesting that Barnum cared more about the elephant as a money-maker than a living creature that deserved to remain with its mother. As it turns out, Barnum admired Bailey's clever use of the media in this case, as well as his business acumen and work ethic and "confessed that he had met his match among showmen, at last, in J.A. Bailey."[347]

Eager to have Bailey on his side, Barnum arranged a deal with James L. Hutchinson, Barnum's former employee and then-current manager of privileges for Cooper and Bailey, whereby if Hutchinson could convince Bailey to partner with Barnum, Hutchinson could also have an interest in the show "without a money

[345] "Amusements."
[346] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 324.
[347] "Barnum," *New York Spirit of the Times*, April 11, 1891, MWEZ + n.c. 9542, BRTC, NYPL.

consideration."[348] Cooper was looking to retire, and the merging of his show with P.T. Barnum's provided him an opportunity to smoothly exit the business with Bailey buying out his portion of their show before the merger. The Barnum, Bailey, and Hutchinson show toured for its first season in 1881 under the monstrous title P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth and the Great London Circus Combined with Sanger's Royal British Menagerie and Grand International Allied Shows.[349]

The Barnum & Bailey Show, which had various lengthy official titles but was most commonly abbreviated as Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth, met with great success. During the first years of its existence, Hutchinson remained a co-owner, although his name was not often used in advertising. For the 1886-1887 season, Bailey took a leave of absence from the show for reasons of health. It appears that Bailey began experiencing anxiety in 1885 following the death of Jumbo the elephant. Jumbo had been Barnum & Bailey's greatest attraction and the centerpiece of their advertising since they purchased him from the London Zoo in 1882. Although Jumbo perished as the result of a freak train accident, Bailey had Barnum draft a note formally absolving Bailey from responsibility in the elephant's death, and letters from Barnum show that Bailey urged Hutchinson to do the same. Annotations on these documents from Bailey's brother-in-law James T. McCaddon note that these letters were penned when Bailey was "on the verge of a nervous breakdown." It was the season after this incident when Bailey took time away from the business, bringing his former partner, Cooper, out of retirement to manage

[348] Whiting Allen, "James Anthony Bailey," in *Captains of Industry*, 1902, Box 2, Folder 12, Crain Collection, HRC.
[349] C.G. Sturtevant, "P.T. Barnum of Connecticut," n.d., Clipping, Box 1, Folder 9, John Kelley Papers, CWM; Allen, "James Anthony Bailey."

his interests along with Hutchinson and another veteran showman, W. W. Cole. Barnum and Hutchinson were concerned that Bailey may not return to the business. In correspondence marked "Private," Barnum wrote to Hutchinson about meetings with other potential partners who might take Bailey's place should he withdraw. The partners were hopeful Bailey would return, with Barnum writing to Hutchinson that "If Bailey keeps quiet and can stop thinking, I think he will recover."[350] Bailey indeed recovered, and when he made his return to the circus in 1888, it was as equal partners with Barnum. The details of exactly how it was that Cole, Hutchinson, and Cooper made their exit are unclear. In an interview, Barnum claimed that during Bailey's absence, tension grew between the four remaining partners and that "the real trouble with all of us was the fact that we had all become so thundering rich," that none of them was truly devoting their full attention to the management of the show in the same way that Bailey always had.[351] In this telling of the story of their partnership, Barnum bought out Cole, Hutchinson, and Cooper and then sold half the interest in the show back to Bailey. The New York Clipper reported that it was Bailey who purchased Cole, Hutchinson, and Cooper's interest directly.[352] Whether Barnum's telling of this event is correct or not, the sentiment within is confirmed by numerous primary sources. Contemporaries in show business frequently commented that Bailey was the "brains" of the operation, the one with the talent for management, and for recognizing talent in other managers he hired as subordinates to

[350] P.T. Barnum to J.L. Hutchinson, June 29, 1885, Box 2, Folder 4, Crain Collection, HRC.
[351] "Barnum & Bailey Join."
[352] "A Big Deal," *The New York Clipper*, November 5, 1887.

coordinate the activities of his ever-growing show business empire. Shortly after Bailey's return to the circus, he and Barnum began arranging their biggest merger yet.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Barnum & Bailey's main rival in the 1880s was Adam Forepaugh. As demonstrated with the white elephant affair and their brief joint exhibition in 1884, this competition was sometimes advantageous to both shows, but at other moments Forepaugh remained a thorn in Barnum & Bailey's side. Periodically, the two shows managed to cooperate and form non-compete agreements with one another, each agreeing to show in designated territory, thus eliminating competition from each other. On occasion, Forepaugh and Barnum & Bailey also agreed to let one another rent their home lot, Forepaugh's in Philadelphia, and Barnum & Bailey's in Bridgeport, Connecticut, during the touring season. In 1889 Barnum wrote Bailey urging him to send an agent to negotiate with Forepaugh for use of the Philadelphia lot, threatening to withhold use of the Bridgeport lot.[353] Barnum believed that visiting each other's home territory would bring great crowds to each show, as it would be a novelty for local audiences. This also ensured that each show would gain headlines as the local presses reported on the quality of the rivals of their home-town heroes. Although these two shows were competitors, they recognized the value in these mutually-beneficial deals. By cooperating, the Barnum & Bailey and Forepaugh shows both remained prominent in the press, thus denying smaller shows their moment in the headlines.

Non-compete agreements such as these were commonplace among large traveling amusements. The Ringling Brothers especially were keen on making these deals. At

[353] P.T. Barnum to James A. Bailey, August 26, 1889, Box 2, Folder 4, Crain Collection, HRC.

various times they had agreements with the Hagenbeck-Wallace show saying the two entertainments would not show in the same location within two months of one another, as well as an agreement with the Forepaugh show that divided up territory with each show promising not to show in the same location at all.[354] Deals such as this were an essential step in the consolidation of traveling amusements. They demonstrate the willingness of competitors to work together when mutually beneficial, and established, if not friendship, cordial relations between business adversaries. At a moment when cartels were forming in numerous industries, traveling amusements similarly maintained alliances between rivals to the detriment of smaller competitors. As Barnum explained in Social Darwinian language, when his name remained prominent in the press it caused patrons to "wait for me, and by withholding their patronage from the smaller and less attractive shows while they turn out *en masse* to see my Greatest Show on Earth, foster and secure the 'survival of the fittest.'"[355]

Determined to demonstrate that they were indeed the "fittest," Barnum and Bailey continually looked for opportunities to increase their share of the entertainment market, and in 1888, Barnum wrote Bailey with insider information that Forepaugh was looking to retire. Forepaugh did not want to relinquish his business entirely, and Barnum suggested several possible arrangements to Bailey wherein they might combine with Forepaugh in a joint-stock company with Barnum & Bailey holding the majority of the shares. Forepaugh also insisted that as part of any deal, his son, Adam Forepaugh Jr., was

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[354] David W. Watt, "Side Lights on the Circus Business: Part Fifteen," *Bandwagon* 44, no. 6 (December 2000): 57–65; Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 66.
[355] *Barnum's Illustrated News* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Courier Company Show Printing House, 1879) reprinted in *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader,* ed. James W. Cook, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

to remain employed with the show. Barnum was not eager to work with the elder Forepaugh on a personal level, writing to Bailey: "I don't like Forepaugh any better than you do, but he is a stubborn old chap with considerable horse sense and his show is a continual annoyance and injury to us and also a menace." But Barnum felt it was worth pursuing this opportunity, for if Barnum & Bailey were to gain a controlling interest in the Forepaugh show they "would have a complete Monopoly which nobody would ever dare to assail."[356] Barnum was unsure of exactly what to do with the Forepaugh show should this deal come to fruition. Should they keep it touring under the Forepaugh name? Should they combine it with their big show? Should they have the old Forepaugh show rebrand as a second Barnum & Bailey show and have shows on each coast?

Plans changed course the next year when Forepaugh's health began declining rapidly. Rumors in trade presses claimed that Forepaugh was negotiating with "some British interest" to take over his show. Richard E. Conover noted that this was quite possibly Barnum & Bailey, given that their show was in London at the time of these reports. This particular deal never went through and Forepaugh died on Janurary 27th, 1890 with no set plans in place for transferring the ownership of his show. Bailey dispatched his friend and former business partner James E. Cooper "as a front to negotiate with the Forepaugh estate."[357] Cooper purchased the entire show from Forepaugh's widow for $160,000, agreeing to keep the Forepaugh name in the title, and to hire on Adam Forepaugh, Jr. The next month, two appendices were made to this original contract, the first permitting Cooper to dispose of part of the interest of the show

[356] P.T. Barnum to James A. Bailey, August 27, 1888, Box 2, Folder 4, Crain Collection, HRC.
[357] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.

to Bailey and the second allowing Cooper and Bailey to bring in Barnum as well, making all three equal partners.[358] Bailey persuaded his brother-in-law Joseph T. McCaddon, a young but experienced showman, to manage and travel with the Forepaugh show. Barnum and Bailey kept their ownership of the Forepaugh show hidden from the press for two years. Conover notes that it's unclear whether this fact was common knowledge among showmen, but there is no printed evidence in newspapers or advertisements admitting anything other than that Cooper was the sole proprietor.[359] The success of a circus was often measured by the number of railroad cars the show traveled on, and in 1890 with the Barnum & Bailey show running roughly 60 cars and the Forepaugh show about 50, these two shows eclipsed the competition.

Ultimately, control of these greatest circuses passed in to the hands of just one man; James A. Bailey. This was largely because the early 1890s witnessed the deaths of the first generation of circus impresarios; Adam Forepaugh, P.T. Barnum, and James E. Cooper, respectively. Following P.T. Barnum's death from heart failure in 1891, negotiations between Bailey and Barnum's heirs continued for years. The Barnum heirs sold Bailey their interest in the Forepaugh show without a fight, but held on to their half interest in the Greatest Show on Earth as the parties struggled to reach a satisfactory agreement. Both sides alternated between wanting to buy the others' share and wanting to sell. Bailey attempted to use his ownership of the Forepaugh show as a bargaining chip, claiming that since he already owned one show and they could reach no agreement about Barnum & Bailey, he would simply sell all the Barnum & Bailey property at auction.

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[358] Articles of Agreement between James E. Cooper, James A. Bailey, and P.T. Barnum, 1890, Box 42, Folder 7, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[359] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.

Ultimately, this threat did not induce the Barnum heirs to bend to Bailey's whims. In September of 1894, a deal was finalized wherein Bailey purchased the Barnum heirs' half of the Greatest Show on Earth for $75,000.

Ownership of the Forepaugh show, while initially an aid to Barnum & Bailey, became more hassle than it was worth. As it turned out, it was quite difficult to route two big shows so they would both stay out of one another's way, but still visit cities large enough to be profitable. After he achieved full ownership, Bailey offered one-quarter of the Forepaugh show to brother-in-law McCaddon in 1892; however, the Panic of 1893 caused serious financial difficulties, leading Bailey to repossess McCaddon's interest. Bailey then rented the Forepaugh title to McCaddon in 1894, which McCaddon put on the road as a smaller 40-car show, but the public was not pleased with this smaller spectacle, and ultimately Bailey and McCaddon retired the Forepaugh title completely for the season of 1894.[360] The only benefit of the Panic of 1893 was that it put several smaller shows, such as the Robinson show out of business, clearing the playing field for the Greatest Show on Earth.[361] However, just as Bailey was beginning to monopolize the circus industry, a new genre of traveling amusement was rapidly rising in popularity and threatening Bailey's market share: The Wild West Show.

The Wild West Show began in 1882. William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody is commonly credited with inventing the genre, an outdoor show that combined features of rodeo, such as trick riding and shooting, with elements of the circus, especially in its use of pageants depicting epic battles of the West, reminiscent of circus "specs." Cody first

[360] Conover; James A. Bailey Business Papers, n.d., Box 42, Folder 7, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[361] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.

earned a name for himself as a guide and scout for the U.S. Army in the Plains. Always a flashy and outgoing character, Cody attracted the attention of dime novelist Ned Buntline who turned Cody's life into a thrilling story that attracted readers eager for stories of the "Wild West."[362] Buntline's novels were not true stories, but highly romanticized, making Cody in to an epic hero, standing alongside Davy Crockett and "Wild Bill" Hickok as near-mythological figures of the frontier. Cody further capitalized on this fame by, ironically, leaving the guiding and scouting work that had made him famous and taking up a career in show business, first performing in stage adaptations of Buntline's novels in 1872. Throughout the 1870s, Cody's performances began including more elements of what would eventually become his Wild West Show. He hired Indian performers for his stage melodramas, and eventually this expanded to arena shows where an international cast of performers exhibited their talents in riding, shooting, and some sideshow acts. As Louis Warren described in his authoritative work on Cody, these arena shows naturally led audiences and commentators to draw comparisons to the circus.[363] The Wild West Show took to the rails in 1883 and quickly became an international success.

Although Cody was the show's namesake, he was never alone in management or ownership. The show began in 1882; however, there are conflicting tales of its origins. Three men, Cody, William "Doc" Carver, and Nate Salsbury each claim that they originated the idea. Cody claims he came up for the idea for the show and invited dentist-turned-performer Doc Carver to join him. Cody then approached experienced actor and manager Nate Salsbury to join in on the show's ownership and management, but

[362] Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*.
[363] Warren, 229.

Salsbury, citing personal dislike for Carver, declined. Salsbury wrote that when he heard of Carver's involvement, he told Cody "I did not want to have anything to do with Doctor Carver for he is a fakir in the show business and as Cody once expressed it 'went West on a piano stool.'"[364] The show went ahead without Salsbury under the title Buffalo Bill and Doc Carver's Wild West, Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition. Warren notes the significant fact that "throughout the long life of this entertainment, Cody and his managers refused to call it a show, preferring to emphasize its educational value with the word 'exhibition'" echoing the circus' emphasis on its morality by highlighting its instructional content.[365] The Wild West borrowed other elements of the circus as well, including the manner of loading and unloading trains and the hiring of private detectives to ward off gamblers and other "undesirables."[366] The show's first season, while popular with audiences, was incredibly chaotic behind the scenes and almost did not return for a second year. Carver was, allegedly, not the most talented performer and had a volatile temperament, even once leading to an open display of violence against both a horse and a human assistant in the show ring. Alcohol flowed freely in performers' tents, with managers Cody and Carver taking part in the hard drinking causing the show to miss performances or give lackluster performances.[367] This did not attract the middle-class audience that Cody had hoped for and at the end of the season, with the show barely breaking even, Cody and Carver parted ways.

[364] Reminiscences of Nate Salsbury, 1899, Folder 16, BRTC, NYPL.
[365] Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 220.
[366] Warren, 229.
[367] Warren, 231.

Cody then approached Salsbury for a second time. According to Salsbury, Cody claimed that if they did not partner, he would disband the show entirely. Salsbury was an experienced showman, having been a pioneer of the developing performance genre of musical comedy. He led a troupe, Salsbury's Troubadors, on successful tours of the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Salsbury initially did not travel with the Wild West and continued to travel and perform with his Troubadors, but as the Wild West proved its staying-power, Salsbury dissolved the Troubadors in 1889 and took on the day-to-day management of the Wild West.[368] Although the show had similarities to the circus, the Wild West Show still offered patrons something new and exciting. Unlike the circus, which had existed in for centuries in various forms across the globe, Buffalo Bill's Wild West had few competitors in terms of providing audiences with similar content. The Pawnee Bill Show, and 101 Ranch Show, which entered the national touring market in 1888 and 1907 respectively, did pose later challenges to Buffalo Bill; however, as the originator of the genre, Buffalo Bill's Wild West acted as the standard to which all other Wild West shows were compared.[369]

Buffalo Bill's Wild West grew in reputation in the United States and in 1887, the show set sail for London, embarking on a tour of Europe lasting until 1890. This tour was a smashing success. European audiences viewed the Wild West Show as a truly unique and "American" spectacle. The show's novelty attracted notable visitors, including

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[368] Agreement to Terminate Salsbury's Troubadors, February 19, 1889, Cody Collection, BBCW.

[369] Michael Wallis, *The Real Wild West: The 101 Ranch and the Creation of the American West* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000); Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*; Joy S Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

royalty, and they even gave a special private performance to Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle.[370] This helped solidify the show's respectability; however, after the Wild West Show's return to the United States, it was refused performance space at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Not to be deterred, in a now-legendary maneuver, Cody and Salsbury set up their show just outside of the entrance to the fair and sold over three million tickets in 1893, making over a million dollars in profit.[371]

This success came with a drawback, as Salsbury was concerned that the show would not be able to sustain this momentum. Although it was a traveling show, the Wild West found that it was most profitable when it played long engagements in one central location, rather than the one-day stands of the circus. As they had already played most of the major cities in the United States, Salsbury was concerned about the future of the show and began seeking ways in which the show might reorganize to make one or two-day stands feasible. To accomplish this, Cody and Salsbury brought in the master of routing and management, James A. Bailey. As noted, the 1894 season was difficult for showmen due to the financial Panic of 1893. Bailey retired the Forepaugh show at the end of the touring season due to poor sales and the Wild West was struggling to maintain the popularity it had seen at the World's Fair. This context made the possibility of working together appeal to all three men.

In 1894, this business relationship began in secret, and the language in the contract indicates that Bailey, while cooperative, was keeping these new business associates at arms' length. This contract specified that although they were entering this

[370] Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 418.
[371] Warren, 419.

agreement, the parties were not considering themselves co-partners and none of them had the right to sign the others' names on any legal or financial document. While keeping Bailey's involvement with the Wild West Show a secret from the public, Cody, Salsbury, and Bailey entered into an agreement wherein Cody and Salsbury would provide for all aspects related to performance, including show properties, costumes, and performers' salaries, and Bailey would cover all costs and equipment related to transportation as well as the salaries of the advance crews and train men. They agreed to split the profits, Bailey taking fifty percent, and Cody and Salsbury the remaining fifty. The only one of the three who was contractually obligated to be with the show the entire season was Cody, who according to the agreement, was required to be "in the saddle" at every performance. It is clear from this agreement that Bailey was brought on to see to the business aspects of the Wild West show, with a provision included stating that Cody and Salsbury would feed and board 150 men appointed by Bailey "who may be engaged directly in the management and handling of show property…amongst which personal employees directly under the sole and exclusive control of James A. Bailey" included a superintendent, personal representative, book-keeper, ticket sellers, and an inspector of door-keepers and ticket counters. Bailey insisted that his personnel have access to the show's financial records at any time. Furthermore, the contract also stipulated that Cody and Salsbury "personally indemnify, each for himself, the said James A. Bailey from any loss or damages arising out of the conduct of their part of the said entertainment."[372] Bailey appointed his nephew Joseph T. McCaddon manager of show operations and his

[372] Articles of Agreement between William F. Cody, Nate Salsbury, and James A. Bailey, 1894, Box 42, Folder 15, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

personal representative. McCaddon, who was quickly becoming an indispensable part of Bailey's entertainment empire, had been working for Bailey as his representative with the Forepaugh show, but as noted above, Bailey chose to retire the Forepaugh title after the poor season of 1894, making both McCaddon, as well as the Forepaugh show's rail cars and equipment, available for Buffalo Bill's Wild West.[373]

This arrangement proved lucrative for all involved and they continually renewed the initial one-year partnership contract. Although there were differences in performance style and content, the circus and the Wild West show were both traveling amusements and thus competing in the same entertainment market. The agreement between Barnum, Cody, and Salsbury was most advantageous for Bailey. From Bailey's perspective, it almost functioned as a non-compete agreement but with the added bonus that Bailey would also share in the profits from the Wild West Show. Bailey used his existing resources, cars and equipment from the defunct Forepaugh show, in the Wild West show, generating income from equipment that otherwise would have sat stale. In 1887 Bailey brought in circus man W. W. Cole to the Wild West deal and the now four partners each had an even twenty-five percent of the endeavor. Finally, in 1903, following Salsbury's death, Bailey and Cody became joint partners in the Wild West Show.[374]

For Bailey, acquiring an interest in the Wild West was a move of horizontal integration that gave him wider control of the entertainment field, domestically and abroad. The initial 1894 contract specified what areas of the country the Wild West Show would visit and gave Bailey "the sole right to exhibit [the circus] in all other states not

[373] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.
[374] Articles of Agreement between William F. Cody and James A. Bailey, December 23, 1903, Box 42, Folder 15, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

herein enumerated." Although the Wild West Show and the Greatest Show on Earth were different forms of amusement, they might have competed for the same audiences in the market for a large spectacular entertainment. An audience that attended the Wild West Show may not be interested in spending more money to see the circus a month later, making it beneficial for both shows to keep the two out of one another's way.

This careful attention to routing became even more important when Bailey chose to resurrect the Forepaugh title in 1895. During the negotiations with Barnum's heirs, just prior to putting the Forepaugh show on hiatus, Bailey wrote: "I find that the care and responsibility of conducting two shows is a greater strain upon me than my health will permit."[375] This may explain why Bailey brought in additional partners to run this second circus. Bailey partnered with the Sells Brothers: Ephraim, Lewis, and Peter, experienced circus men. Each became one-quarter owner of the newly rechristened Forepaugh-Sells Circus.[376] Bailey now had his hand in three major traveling amusements all touring at once. Bailey continued to route the shows so that they stayed out of one another's way, and found that one effective way to accomplish this was to send one show overseas.

Bailey was familiar with international tours from his early days in the business touring Australia and South America with the Cooper & Bailey show. In the mid-1880s, Bailey and Barnum began considering the possibility of a European tour for their Greatest Show on Earth. Bailey noted that the scale of American circuses had surpassed any in Europe and believed that their show would draw great crowds on the other side of

[375] James A. Bailey to P.T. Barnum Heirs, April 29, 1893, Box 41, Folder 1, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[376] Articles of Agreement between James A. Bailey, William W. Cole, Lew Sells, and Peter Sells, 1900, Box 42, Folder 20, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

the Atlantic. Barnum was somewhat hesitant, especially during Bailey's brief departure from the show business in, but was advised by colleagues that their show could charge a premium price and attract royalty as it was something quite novel for European audiences.[377] This was tested prior to Barnum's death when the Barnum & Bailey circus performed in London for the winter of 1889-1890. In 1897, the Greatest Show on Earth embarked on a five-year tour of Europe, spending the first two touring seasons in England before visiting the continent. This extended tour meant that it would be financially advantageous for Barnum and Bailey to purchase rail cars and winter quarters in Europe, rather than rent. The custom train cars, constructed by W.R. Renshaw of Staffordshire, England, were the longest yet constructed for the British railway system.[378] After the Barnum & Bailey circus returned to the United States, Bailey arranged for Buffalo Bill's Wild West to tour Europe, making use of the train cars and winter quarters already in Bailey's possession. In this manner, Bailey even further eliminated the problem of his two shows competing with one another by keeping them on separate continents.

According to Conover, the Barnum & Bailey circus' 1898 season was the most successful in the show's history. The average weekly profits for their 45-week season were roughly £2,428. In what would be the "master financial move of his career," Bailey formed a joint-stock company, Barnum & Bailey, Ltd., in Great Britain in 1899. With an

[377] P.T. Barnum to J.L. Hutchinson, June 29, 1885, Box 2, Folder 4, Crain Collection, HRC.
[378] "Roster of the 1897-1902 Barnum & Bailey European Circus Train," *The Story of the Last Great Circus Train* (blog), accessed January 23, 2021, https://www.themetrains.com/rbbb-circus-trains-roster-1897-1902-the-barnum-and-bailey-european-train.htm.

initial capitalization of £400,000 with 400,000 shares at £1 each, the company made 266,667 shares available to the public, reserving the remainder for Bailey (113,333 shares), Joseph T. McCaddon (10,000 shares) and George Starr (10,000 shares).[379] When stocks of Barnum & Bailey, Ltd. became available for public purchase on April 18, 1899, British financial presses reported that there was great interest, and ultimately there were more applications for stocks than could be fulfilled.[380] The *Financial News* proclaimed that "Business Generally Dull, But Barnum and Bailey A Bright Spot in the Market." They remarked that "the Industrial department would have been quite idle yesterday had it not been for the activity in Barnum and Bailey's shares. They opened strong, and remained so throughout the day, a large number being dealt in. The closing price was 11s.-11s.6d. premium."[381]

Although any engagement with the stock market brings an inherent risk, Bailey entered the market at a beneficial time. Prior to incorporating Barnum & Bailey, Ltd. Bailey consulted with lawyers who assured him that "We shall doubtless have several years of prosperity and wide fluctuations in values. At present the tide runs all one way. This confidence in continued prosperity seems to be universal. Bankers, especially, express great confidence as so far as can now be seen, there is not a cloud on the horizon."[382] The press attributed much of the success of these sales to the public's

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[379] Agreement in re Barnum & Bailey, Limited, May 12, 1899, Box 41, Folder 2, McCaddon Collection, PUL; Barnum & Bailey, Ltd: Minute Book no. 1, February 1895, Box 44, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[380] *The Financier*, April 19, 1899, Box 44, Clipping in Barnum & Bailey, Ltd. Minute Book no. 1, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[381] "Business Generally Dull, But Barnum & Bailey a Bright Spot in the Market," *Financial News*, April 19, 1899, Box 42, Folder 21, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[382] Hull & Horton to James A. Bailey, February 15, 1899, Box 41, Folder 2, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

"confidence in [Bailey] and in the greatest show on earth."[383] Dispelling the notion that Barnum & Bailey, Ltd. might be a company with only short-term success, *The Financier* made bold claims about the significance of the amusement industry, writing "we are satisfied that within a very limited period it will be realized that the importance of food, drink, smoking, clothing and other commodities which are dispensed by some of the leading industrial companies of this great country are not more essential to the welfare and to the requirements of this vast community than their amusements at the proper time, proper place, and in proper manner."[384]

This confidence was further roused by Bailey's public announcement that he was voluntarily resigning all claims to dividends in the company's first three years until a dividend of at least 20% was paid to the rest of the shareholders.[385] While, as noted in the *Financial Times*, sacrifices and concessions on the part of vendors were often viewed as a sign of "something having gone wrong," public perceptions of Bailey as a solid businessman inclined to sound financial decisions led to views that this concession was instead a true "act of generosity."[386] This demonstrates the significance of developing a public persona as a celebrity businessman, and a respectable one at that. Bailey's pre-existing positive reputation aided him in the sale of stocks as people trusted that he was acting in the best interest of potential shareholders.

Bailey impressed co-directors of the company McCaddon and Starr to join him in the promise not to take profits until the rest of the shareholders received a 20% dividend.

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[383] "Business Generally Dull, But Barnum & Bailey a Bright Spot in the Market."
[384] *The Financier*, April 19, 1899, Box 44, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[385] "Business Generally Dull, But Barnum & Bailey a Bright Spot in the Market."
[386] *The Financial Times*, April 19, 1899, Box 42, Folder 21, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

Through the press, Starr told the public that he hoped this decision would quell "any vacillating opinion that may be expressed with regard to the continued prosperity of this, the greatest show on earth. It will also ensure to you the intentions of the directors to remain amongst you."[387] As this article noted, this was not only beneficial for the sale of Barnum & Bailey, Ltd. stocks, but also great advertising for the Greatest Show on Earth itself, distancing the circus even further from an unscrupulous reputation. Bailey, McCaddon, and Starr served as the first Directors of the company. Unsurprisingly, Bailey was elected managing director, and in addition to his stock in the company, he was awarded a salary of £4,000 per annum as well as a £1,000 payment for serving as one of the regular directors of the company.[388] Several years later, McCaddon would resign his directorship as the result of a perceived personal slight from Bailey. It is worth taking a moment to examine the relationship between Bailey and his brother-in-law McCaddon as it again highlights the significance of a managerial hierarchy in Bailey's business success.

As mergers and acquisitions were Bailey's primary strategy for increasing market share, his reliance on middle managers increased as his holdings grew. Much of Bailey's success hinged on his recognizing talent in colleagues and choosing highly capable partners and managers to oversee his affairs when he could not personally be present. For years, his brother-in-law Joseph T. McCaddon was a valuable asset to Bailey. McCaddon had his own career in show business prior to his working with Bailey. By 1890 he was partial owner of a Minneapolis museum when Bailey invited him to leave that business to

[387] Barnum & Bailey, Ltd: Minute Book no. 1.
[388] Barnum & Bailey, Ltd: Minute Book no. 1.

travel with his newly-acquired Forepaugh show as Bailey's personal representative. Bailey was so interested in working with McCaddon that when McCaddon's partners in the museum refused to let him leave the business, Bailey offered to loan McCaddon the money to purchase their stock, and then send a capable manager to run the museum while McCaddon worked for Bailey.[389] Bailey sold a quarter-share in the Forepaugh show to McCaddon for a brief moment before repossessing it at the end of the 1893 season and temporarily ceasing to operate the Forepaugh show. While he was on tour with the Forepaugh show, McCaddon corresponded with Nate Salsbury of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, visiting the show during its unparalleled season outside the Chicago World's Fair. McCaddon is the one who first suggested to Bailey that working with Buffalo Bill might be advantageous for all involved.[390] Once the agreement went in to effect, Bailey once again dispatched McCaddon to oversee his interest in the Wild West and assist in the management of daily operations. When Bailey sent his Greatest Show on Earth to Europe in 1897, he again selected McCaddon to travel with the show. Unfortunately, during the circus' time in Europe the relationship between Bailey and McCaddon began to erode.

In January of 1904, McCaddon notified the board of trustees of Barnum & Bailey, Ltd. of his intent to resign his directorship, "as the director's fees are not commensurate with the duties required of a director of this company who is expected by the Board to devote his exclusive time and attention at all hours and every day in the year Sundays

[389] Telegrams between James A. Bailey and Joseph T. McCaddon, March 1890, Box 41, Folder 1, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[390] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*; Joseph T. McCaddon to James A. Bailey, August 16, 1904, Box 41, Folder 3, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

included to the interests of the Company."[391] This parting was not met with hostility, as the trustees included a note in the company's minute book expressing their thanks to McCaddon, writing "His long services, rendered at all times in the interest of the business, has been a record that he has every reason to be proud of. That he may meet with success in the future is the sincere wish of all with whom he has been associated and that he may enjoy good health and long life for many years to come."[392] McCaddon also expressed his feelings about this resignation in a letter to George Starr, one of the company's other directors, noting "No one regrets the severing of the old ties more than myself. I have been with Mr. Bailey and others of my friends at the staff for over a quarter of a century and companionships of that length of time cannot be lightly laid aside and I assure you it affects me deeply."[393]

McCaddon endeavored to enter business for himself, organizing a traveling amusement he would take on a European tour of his own. Evidently, McCaddon did not see this show as a competitor to Bailey's, as it would be a smaller affair. In a letter to Bailey, McCaddon wrote "I am organizing a medium size show for Europe to anticipate the yearning on the part of a number of American showmen who desire to make a trip to endeavor to repeat in a more modest way the success we achieved abroad."[394] Being aware of a stock of unused show equipment at the Barnum & Bailey show's winter quarters in Bridgeport, McCaddon asked his old colleague, brother-in-law, and friend if

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[391] Joseph T. McCaddon to Board of Trustees of Barnum & Bailey, Ltd., January 23, 1904, Box 41, Folder 4, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[392] Barnum & Bailey, Ltd: Minute Book no. 1.
[393] Joseph T. McCaddon to George Starr, n.d., Box 41, Folder 4, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[394] Joseph T. McCaddon to James A. Bailey, May 30, 1904, Box 41, Folder 4, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

he might purchase some of these unused properties. According to McCaddon in a May 1904 letter, the deal would be advantageous to both, since it would "enable [Bailey] to dispose of some property of little value to [Bailey], and part of which is deteriorating in value from year to year, and it will remove the property out of the country."[395] Despite McCaddon's insistence that Bailey had previously given a verbal agreement to sell McCaddon this equipment, Bailey responded to McCaddon refusing the sale. This interaction hinted at the fracturing of good relations between the two that came to a head in August of 1904.

In that month, McCaddon wrote Bailey a nineteen-page missive expressing his frustrations with his brother-in-law. In the letter, which one historian described as "both akin to the yelps of a whipped dog and a combination of censure, apology, and conciliation," McCaddon wrote that after over a quarter century of friendship and faithful service, he had little to show for his association with Bailey.[396] He accused Bailey of providing cash bonuses and financial favors to other business associates that he did not give to McCaddon. He questioned whether Bailey's reluctance to increase his financial compensation was because he "felt [McCaddon] should continue to work indeffinately[sic.] to compensate for the loss sustained by the Forepaugh Show during the panic years of 1892 and '93," which McCaddon felt was an unfair resentment given that he had since managed the Greatest Show on Earth during several extremely profitable years.[397] McCaddon also expressed concerns that Bailey had been tarnishing his

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[395] Joseph T. McCaddon to James A. Bailey, May 30, 1904, Box 41, Folder 4, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[396] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.
[397] Joseph T. McCaddon to James A. Bailey, August 16, 1904, Box 41, Folder 3, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

reputation by suggesting to mutual contacts that McCaddon was secretive about his business affairs, hiding things by answering correspondence and managing his accounts in private. McCaddon's tone reads as both defensive and deferential. He states numerous times throughout the letter that he hopes to maintain, if not a business relationship, then a positive personal and familial connection with Bailey. At the same time, the letter clearly lays out several years' worth of grievances with Bailey and McCaddon argues he deserved better treatment due to his decades of faithful, honest service.[398]

Despite the accusations in this letter, Bailey asked McCaddon to return to his service just a month later to operate his relaunch of the Forepaugh show as the new Forepaugh-Sells combine. He offered Bailey one quarter-interest in the show at no cost and a salary of $100 a week.[399] McCaddon refused, continuing his plans to put together his own traveling amusement to tour Europe. Unfortunately for McCaddon, this was not a successful venture. Despite earlier statements to Bailey implying that this "modest" show would be successful despite the presence of Bailey's enormous spectacles in Europe, McCaddon's show was indeed crushed by competition from the Bailey-operated Buffalo Bill's Wild West. After his show closed after only a short run in 1905, McCaddon found himself in legal trouble, charged with fraudulent bankruptcy in France. Upon fleeing to England, McCaddon was held by British authorities in the face of possible extradition. Adding personal heartache to the mix, McCaddon's wife passed away during this time, and McCaddon was without funds to transport her remains home to the United States or pay for funeral expenses. Luckily, his brother-in-law Bailey stepped in, apparently

[398] Joseph T. McCaddon to James A. Bailey, August 16, 1904, Box 41, Folder 3, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[399] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.

harboring no personal resentment to McCaddon. Although he acted undercover, Bailey provided the financial support to transport Mrs. McCaddon's remains and "was prepared to assist [McCaddon] in the defense against legal actions if necessary."[400] The charges against McCaddon were dropped and McCaddon returned to the United States, but did not return to Bailey's service prior to Bailey's death in 1907. Without his personal writings, it is impossible to say exactly what motivated Bailey to continue to reach out to McCaddon, whether it was a familial bond, pressure from his wife, McCaddon's sister, or a sincere belief that McCaddon was the best man for the job. Some clues hint at the latter, such as Bailey's offer to pay to get McCaddon out of the museum business to come work for Bailey's circus. In any case, the story of Bailey and McCaddon does reveal the extent to which Bailey relied on partners and managers underneath him to see to his affairs. Although McCaddon refused to partner on the Forepaugh-Sells venture, Bailey continued the project without him, ending up reluctant partners with his newest rivals: The Ringling Brothers.

The emergence of the Forepaugh-Sells combine was a significant moment in the history of the consolidation of traveling amusements, for not only did it link Bailey with the Sells Brothers, but it also brought the Ringlings in to the mix. The Ringling Brothers' circus began much later than either Barnum's or Bailey's. The five brothers who founded their circus benefit from the innovations of the previous generation of circus impresarios. The Ringlings, natives of Baraboo, Wisconsin, had had an interest in the show business since childhood, stemming from their visit to one of the large traveling riverboat shows that preceded railroad circuses. According to Alf T. Ringling, the brothers would "play"

[400] Conover.

circus as children, making tents out of discarded carpets. In their youth, each brother participated in their performances; Al did plate and hat spinning, Otto performed with his trained goat, Billy Rainbow, John performed clown songs, Charles did a riding act on their one pony, and Alf T. acted as a sort-of ring master, and all five performed in tumbling and gymnastic acts. Initially they charged neighbors five cents for this little show. Although growing this circus was their main ambition, as they aged, the brothers realized that organizing a touring circus would not be feasible until they accumulated greater capital. Instead, their first touring show was a concert company. After this venture met some moderate success they formed a partnership with circus veteran Yankee Robinson in 1884. As they themselves later acknowledged, this was a somewhat curious partnership, given that Robinson was at the time in his sixties, and two of the five Ringlings were still in their teens. The Ringlings were more interested in Robinson's name and endorsement than his performance ability. Robinson allegedly told patrons to the Ringling show that although he was aging and perhaps not long for life, it was his wish "to die in harness and connected with these [Ringling] boys, and if I could have my dying wish gratified it would be that my name should remain associated with that of the Ringling brothers, for I can tell you…the Ringling brothers are the future showmen of America. They are the coming men."[401] The business arrangement with Robinson was perhaps more beneficial to the Ringlings than Robinson himself. In his written account of their early career, Alfred T. Ringling wrote that Robinson was a partner "only in name…the consideration for his name and services was one-third of the concert

[401] Ringling, *Life Story of the Ringling Brothers*, 94.

receipts."[402] The concert was a separate ticketed performance that followed after the main show, that, according to existing financial records, almost always sold fewer tickets than the main show.

This indicates that although the boys dreamed of the circus from a young age, they were always keenly aware that it was a business. Commentators, and the Ringlings themselves, attributed much of their success to the brothers' cooperation and division of labor. Each of the five brothers who founded their circus had his own area of expertise as the show matured, with most stepping out of the ring to serve in other roles; Otto managed the finances, John handled routing, Alf T. organized relations with the press, Charlie oversaw advertising, and Al served as the show's equestrian director.[403] Two other Ringling Brothers, Gus and Henry, were not part of the show at its founding. Henry, the youngest, joined the show in 1886 but did not become a partner until after Otto died in 1911 and left his share of the company to Henry. Gus "signed on with the circus in 1890 and was content to work as an employee, not as a partner."[404] In their early years, the initial five Ringling brothers reinvested profits in the show, and, during the off-season in the winter when the circus was not performing, several of the brothers continued touring their smaller concert company to earn additional money for their main show. After earning enough capital to purchase two elephants in 1888, a sign of legitimacy in the circus industry, the Ringling brothers became a national presence,

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[402] Ringling, 94.
[403] The term "equestrian director" initially referred to the individual in charge of all of a circus' riding acts. As these acts were often the most popular in early circuses, the equestrian director frequently became the director of the entire show. Later, the term "ring master" was used interchangeably with equestrian director before eventually replacing the former.
[404] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 24.

expanding on to rails in 1890. Records show that the following year they profited $86,801 for their 1891 season, and the following year this increased to $131,551.[405]

While the Ringling's circus was up-and-coming in the 1890s, it was not yet a major threat to the Barnum & Bailey show. In the words of one circus historian "The Ringlings were a Chevrolet show, the Barnum & Bailey show was a Cadillac."[406] Unlike the Forepaugh show, the Ringlings survived the Panic of 1893 and had an even more profitable season than their previous one. Part of the Ringlings' continued success even with the existence of older, more-established spectacles such as Barnum & Bailey's was the Ringlings' solid base of support in their home territory of the Midwest. The non-compete agreements the Ringlings made with larger competitors such as the Forepaugh Show and Barnum & Bailey often required that these larger concerns cancel appearances in Midwestern states altogether. Thus, although they weren't the biggest or grandest show in the entire country, they could focus on being the biggest in their territory. They focused on "small towns in out-of-the way places, for the most part drawing huge crowds of people thirsting for entertainment."[407] When the Barnum & Bailey show left for Europe, the Ringlings were in great financial condition and sought to capitalize on their major competitor's departure from the country. Taking a jab at their absent competitor, in 1890, they advertised their show as "Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows: The Invincible Monarchs of Amusements, and beyond all dispute or doubt The Greatest Show on Earth."[408]

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[405] Apps, 51, 58.
[406] Apps, 58.
[407] Apps, 76.
[408] Apps, 89.

In 1905, the proprietors of the World's Greatest Shows and the Greatest Show on Earth came together on a joint venture. While the Ringlings had not been able to out-compete the Barnum & Bailey show when the two were on the same continent, the same was not true for the Forepaugh-Sells Bros. circus. Initially, Bailey thought that retiring the Forepaugh-Sells name, and instead launching a second Barnum & Bailey show to tour the U.S. would be the most beneficial move, as he felt the existing reputation of the Barnum & Bailey name would attract audiences that had not flocked to Forepaugh-Sells. At the time, Bailey co-owned the Forepaugh-Sells show with the remaining living Sells Bros. and long-time associate James E. Cooper. They ultimately abandoned plans for a second Barnum & Bailey show and the original Greatest Show on Earth returned to America, now facing serious competition from the Ringlings who had grown in their absence. When Bailey wrote McCaddon in September 1904 offering him a share in the Forepaugh-Sells show he feared the alternative would be a partnership with the Ringlings.[409]

Ultimately, the Bailey-Ringling partnership did take place; however, the public was not made aware of the rivals' joint involvement. Bailey, the Sells Brothers, and Cooper, co-owners of the Forepaugh-Sells show, announced that they would be selling all their show properties piecemeal at auction. The auction was a false front however, and Bailey immediately bid on the entire lot for $150,000.[410] Then Bailey sold a half-interest in the show to the Ringling Brothers.[411] Although colleagues in the show business knew

[409] Telegrams between James A. Bailey and Joseph T. McCaddon, September 1904, Box 41, Folder 4, McCaddon Collection, PUL.
[410] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.
[411] Articles of Agreement between James A. Bailey and the Ringling Brothers, 1905, Box 42, Folder 26, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

of this arrangement, the public was kept largely unaware that the Forepaugh-Sells show could just as easily be named Bailey-Ringling. At this point, the circus business in the United States closely resembled a trust. The Barnum & Bailey and Ringling shows were the two largest competitors, and not only did they continue to make non-compete agreements for these two shows, but they also secretly partnered together on the Forepaugh-Sells combine.

The Ringling Brothers were well-timed to form a monopoly of the business. Just as Bailey began his wave of mergers and acquisitions as the older generation of successful showmen was passing away, the Ringlings received their greatest benefit upon Bailey's death. Bailey had done much of the work of consolidation for them, with his acquisitions of the Forepaugh show, Sells Brothers show, Buffalo Bill's Wild West, and performers, personnel, and equipment from several other defunct smaller shows. The Ringlings purchased all of Bailey's holdings in show business shortly after his death in 1906, giving them undisputed control of the traveling amusement market in the United States.

Following James Bailey's death of erysipelas on April 11, 1906, his widow, Ruth Bailey asked her brother, Joseph T. McCaddon, to manage the late Bailey's estate. McCaddon returned to directorship of Barnum & Bailey, Ltd.[412] In November of 1906, McCaddon was not only reinstated as one of five directors of the company, but unanimously appointed Chairman of the board. It was agreed that W.W. Cole would serve as managing director for the Greatest Show on Earth. Following Bailey's death, the

[412] George Starr to William F. Cody, May 2, 1906, Box 41, Folder 5, McCaddon Collection, PUL.

company struggled, compounded by the poor economic conditions in the United States in 1907.[413] According to rumors in *Billboard* magazine, Mrs. Bailey was eager to be out of the show business, desiring to sell her stock in the company as well as the rights to the Barnum & Bailey title.[414] The directors of the company notified shareholders of their desire to sell all the company's property and titles to one A.A. Stewart and liquidate the company in 1907. At a general meeting, some shareholders raised objections to the sale; however, ultimately their concerns mattered little as the Bailey estate, the board of directors, and other showmen in Bailey's "inner circle" owned 51% of the stock. It was not disclosed to shareholders that the purchaser, A.A. Stewart, was acting as an intermediary for the Ringling Brothers.[415] Although the Barnum & Bailey and Buffalo Bill shows had been successful, they did not result in major profits for investors. This was a result of the initial over-capitalization of the company based on the extraordinary success of the 1898 season that immediately preceded the company's formation. That was the first year the show played in Europe and the novelty of this large circus drew enormous crowds that dwindled with every year of the tour. After Barnum & Bailey, Ltd.'s liquidation, "the net loss on a ten-year investment was two shillings per share, a result which is not at all unique when angels flutter in show business."[416]

The Ringling's purchase of Barnum & Bailey included "all livestock, both horses and wild animals, and all real estate and buildings in this country and in England, owned

[413] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 138.
[414] James L. Hoff, "Status of the Barnum & Bailey Show," *Billboard*, October 26, 1907.
[415] "Barnum and Bailey, Limited," *The Financial News*, November 25, 1907, Box 42, Folder 29, McCaddon Collection, PUL; Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.
[416] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.

by the company for show purposes."[417] *Billboard* stated that with the Barnum & Bailey purchase, the Ringlings were "the real heads of the circus business in America."[418] The Ringlings now owned three large circuses: Their own World's Greatest Show, the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth, and the Forepaugh-Sells circus. The also owned all the physical equipment for Buffalo Bill's Wild West, as well as the winter quarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin, Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Stoke-on-Trent, England. Operating all three circuses at once was a challenge, and the Forepaugh-Sells show was the one that didn't make the cut. The Ringlings closed the show permanently at the end of 1911, selling it piecemeal at auction.[419] Their relationship with Buffalo Bill Cody also proved short-lived. The Ringlings partnered with Cody in 1908 in an arrangement similar to the one Cody had had with Bailey, wherein the Ringlings would provide the equipment and Cody the show. This partnership only lasted one season, with circus historians speculating that it was Cody's notoriously difficult temperament that made the Ringlings eager to dissolve their association with the frontiersman.[420]

As with any industry, there were still some smaller groups that tried to take back market share from the Ringlings. In 1910, in addition to the Ringlings' three circuses, there were nineteen other railroad shows on tour; however, none came close to the Ringling or Barnum & Bailey shows in terms of size. The Ringling and Barnum & Bailey circuses were tied for largest show, in terms of train cars, both running on eighty-four railcars that season. The next largest show, nearly forty cars smaller, was the Ringling's

[417] Hoff, "Status of the Barnum & Bailey Show."
[418] "Ringling Bros. Secure Barnum & Bailey Control," *Billboard*, September 21, 1907.
[419] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 138.
[420] Apps, 150.

third show, the Forepaugh-Sells circus on forty-seven. The next three largest shows were the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus on forty-five cars, John Robinson on forty-two, and Sells-Floto on thirty-one. Charles Ringling attempted to eliminate competition in the circus industry in 1910 when he called "all the circus showmen of America" to meet in Chicago and organize The Showmen's Association. His objective was to "kill the practice of opposition fights in the destruction of posted billing."[421] For a moment, it seemed this was successful as showmen agreed to association and elected a president, treasurer and secretary. However, as John Kelley, the Ringling Brothers' lawyer and the man elected secretary of Showmen's Assocation described it, the "professed piety of peace was but a gesture of the mind" and did little to curb competitive practices. Kelley notes that "the showman's heart (unchanging as the leopard's spots) has never shed its fantastic spirit for war."[422]

If the circus business was a war, the Ringling Brothers were the ultimate victors. Retired circus man David W. Watt commented in 1914 that "Today the Ringlings practically control the circus world. True they have competition, but with their two big shows and the other smaller ones they are interested in, they have a practical monopoly on the business."[423] This is a bit ironic, considering that earlier in their career the Ringlings publicly declared their disdain for monopolies. Their 1897 advertising pamphlet featured a ¾ page illustration depicting a medieval knight bearing a shield emblazoned with "Ringling Bros." standing on top of a dismembered foe whose shield reads "Monopoly" (see figure 5.1). This image, along with the accompanying article

[421] Brief Note on Circus History of John M. Kelley, n.d., John Kelley Papers, CWM.
[422] Brief Note on Circus History of John M. Kelley, n.d., John Kelley Papers, CWM.
[423] Watt, "Side Lights on the Circus Business: Part One," 27.

stating that they "most emphatically believe in good, active, honest competition, and always welcome it."[424] indicates that they desired to put forth a public image of themselves as the moral heroes, achieving victory over corrupt monopolists. This is in line with the Ringling's reputation as a "Sunday School" show, embodying all things respectable; however, their behind-the-scenes business activities illustrate that these circus men were shrewd capitalists, interested in gaining supremacy in the market at competitors' expense. The Ringlings' greatest step toward monopolization was that 1907 purchase of Barnum & Bailey, but their purchase of smaller shows continued throughout the 1910s and 1920s.[425]

Figure 5.1 "Victory over Monopoly" image accompanying a personal letter from the Ringling Brothers to their audience claiming that the Ringlings believed in "good, active, honest competition." Ringling Brothers Promotional Pamphlet, 1897, NYPL, MWEZ 4050

[424] Pamphlet for Ringling Bros. Circus, 1897, MWEZ + n.c. 4050, BRTC, NYPL.
[425] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*.

In 1919, a variety of factors led the Ringlings to combine their two largest shows in to the "Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows, The Greatest Show on Earth," the title that would endure until 2017. Otto and Al Ringling had passed away, leaving only three of the original five Ringling Brothers alive, with one of those three, Alf T., very sick. This decrease in the number of managers made it difficult to maintain control of multiple large traveling shows at once. The influenza epidemic of 1918 had caused the showmen to end the season after only fifteen performances leaving them short on cash. Furthermore, the country was in the midst of the First World War. As part of efforts to centralize government control of wartime production, President Woodrow Wilson established the United States Railroad Administration (USRA) in 1917. In the name of national defense, the USRA regulated railroad activities, including establishing pricing and usage regulations for locomotives. Although the Ringlings owned their own train cars, they still leased locomotives, eight in total, four for each circus. The USRA "told the surviving Ringling Brothers that for 1919 they could not make but four locomotives available to them."[426] Ultimately the war would end before the 1919 season began; however, due to the necessity of advanced planning, the Ringling and Barnum & Bailey combination was already in the works when news of the armistice reached the brothers.

Combining these two biggest shows only further cemented the Ringling name as the largest American circus and by 1921, they ran on ninety-six cars. Their closest competitors were running at approximately half this size. In 1921, five of these circuses; the Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, John Robinson, Sparks, and Al. G. Barnes circuses

[426] Apps, 202.

partnered together to form the American Circus Corporation (ACC).[427] The founders of the ACC argued that this combination would eliminate competition among its members, therefore greatly reducing each show's expenses. Among the benefits of this corporation, the founders noted that it would reduce each show's individual spending on hiring performers. Since circuses hired individual acts, when shows were competing with one another, they also had to offer competitive salaries to the most desirable performers. By eliminating competitive bidding among shows, amusement proprietors could reduce expenses in terms of performer salaries. There was also a great savings in terms of railroad costs since "with the consolidation [of several circuses,] routes are arranged so that the shows reach [their stands] at a minimum cost of transportation and minimum cost of operation and in nearly every instance only one circus a year in a town is arranged."[428] As these showmen collaborated to plan routes that eliminated competition, they could now do away with their advanced "skirmish" cars, further reducing expenses.

Once again the Ringling show benefit from the mergers arranged by others. In 1928, John Ringling, now the only surviving brother, purchased the ACC, cementing a Ringling monopoly.[429] In 1930, *Variety* reported that there was only one show remaining with any chance of competing with the Ringling concern; the 101 Ranch, a Wild West show operated by the Miller Brothers. This show was "the only remaining independent outfit bucking the Ringling-owned properties."[430] The Miller Brothers attempted to fight

[427] Description of History and Benefits of the American Circus Corporation, n.d., ACC Papers, CWM: The Sells-Floto circus had no connection to the Sells Brothers circus.
[428] Description of History and Benefits of the American Circus Corporation, ACC Papers, CWM.
[429] "Ringling Buys Out Five Circus Rivals," *The New York Times*, September 10, 1929.
[430] "Ringling Shows Earning 25% Net This Season," *Variety*, August 1930, 68.

the Ringling monopoly in court. In 1930, they accused John Ringling of trying to poach the 101 Ranch's star performer, cowboy-actor Tom Mix, to headline a new Wild West Show, possibly a resurrection of the Buffalo Bill title, which Ringling still owned.[431] Initially, the Millers sued John Ringling and Tom Mix for damages resulting from the loss of their star performer, as well as charges of slander. Ringling fought the charge, resulting in a jury trial, which appears to have released Ringling himself from fault but did find Mix in breach of contract, resulting in a $66,000 penalty[432] Zach Miller took to the radio to publicly accuse Ringling of operating a "circus trust," and engaging in underhanded tactics to outdo competitors, including tearing down or pasting over 101 Ranch advertisements.[433] The owners of the 101 Ranch Wild West Show then took their rivalry with Ringling a step further and filed a complaint in the U.S. District Court against John Ringling and his affiliated shows, alleging conspiracy to restrain trade. Miller filed a $1,040,000 complaint charging that the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey circus "conspired to create a monopoly in the circus business." The New York Times reported that Miller's complaint accused the Ringling show of "various illegal acts in the execution of their 'conspiracy;" however, this case does not appear to have been taken seriously, as there are no records or follow-up reports indicating that the case made it to court.[434]

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[431] "Mix and 'Bill Show' to Stand Off '101,'" *Variety*, January 22, 1930.
[432] "Series of Suits Against Ringling and Mix," *Variety*, March 1930, 66; "Tom Mix Attached, Quickly Released," *Variety*, September 26, 1933, 63.
[433] "Zack Miller Goes After Ringling on Radio, Berating 'Circus Trust,'" *Variety*, July 2, 1930.
[434] "Big Circus Concerns Sued for $1,040,000," *The New York Times*, April 7, 1931.

In fact, no court ever held a circus in violation of the Sherman Act. As historian Janet Davis noted, the relative size of the circus industry may play a role in this. She noted that when U.S. Steel was formed in 1901, it was worth $1 billion, while the Ringling Brothers purchased all of Bailey's amusement holdings for less than half a million dollars in 1907.[435] Although traveling amusement companies did not trade in the billions, they were still participants in the corporate revolution of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century. As the histories of James A. Bailey and the Ringling Brothers illustrate, amusement impresarios engaged in cartelization and consolidation to reduce competition in the field. Bailey also participated in the development of Chandler's "managerial capitalism," as he established a managerial hierarchy to manage his multiple shows. Finally, Bailey took his firm public in the United Kingdom with the formation of Barnum & Bailey, Ltd.

Thanks to the Ringling Brothers, Bailey's name did not fade from the public eye. The road for the Ringling's ascent was paved by James A. Bailey, who achieved a near-monopoly of the amusement industry prior to his death in 1906. When the Ringlings purchased Bailey's holdings, they became the owners of the two largest shows on the market, and with the 1929 purchase of the ACC they eliminated the only remaining circuses that could hope to compete, solidifying their own status as the kings of the amusement world. Unfortunately, that kingdom had far less power in 1929 than it had in Bailey's day due to the market crash in October of that year, as well as the rise of newer forms of amusement; vaudeville and motion pictures.

[435] Davis, *The Circus Age*, 40.

CHAPTER SIX

VAUDEVILLE, FILM, AND THE DECLINE OF TRAVELING AMUSEMENTS

By the second decade of the twentieth century, traveling amusements had lost much of their popularity due to the development of newer forms of entertainment; particularly vaudeville and film. This was not necessarily an unexpected development; entertainment genres wax and wane in popularity as advances in technology inspire novel forms of amusement and, as the popularity of traveling amusements themselves demonstrated, audiences enjoy novelty. The significance of this transition is that although circuses, minstrel shows, and Wild West shows faded from view, the business structures and audience expectations developed by traveling amusements persisted. The producers of new entertainments, many of whom began their entertainment careers working in traveling amusements, adhered to the patterns developed by men like Barnum, Bailey, Salsbury, and Haverly. They created a mass audience through national distribution networks, centralized control of multi-unit operations in a hierarchical manner, developed brands based on the identity of the producers (and later the production company), and heavily engaged in anti-competitive practices to seize as much market control as possible. That these strategies have persisted even beyond the 1930s, beyond the disappearance of vaudeville, minstrel shows, and Wild West shows entirely, only further demonstrates the lasting significance of traveling amusement showmen.

The period from 1890-1930 was one of gradual transition in the entertainment industry. Today, recorded media makes up most of the entertainment market; however, film did not suddenly appear on the scene in the 1890s and immediately put live entertainment out of business. In fact, traveling amusements, vaudeville and film were deeply intertwined. This makes this analysis of the ways in which early twentieth-century entertainment moguls learned and implemented the business practices of traveling amusements an essential part of any study of the film industry. To analyze the decline of traveling amusements, this chapter will first briefly discuss the birth of traveling amusements' two greatest rival entertainment genres: vaudeville and film, providing the reader with the necessary context for the following discussion. The chapter then turns to a deeper analysis of the ways in which vaudeville and film utilized strategies pioneered in traveling amusements; particularly brand-building based on the identity of the producer(s) rather than performers, and consolidation of the industry in the hands of a few. The last section of the chapter will discuss the fate of traveling amusements and how vaudeville and film pushed traveling amusements to the margins of the entertainment market despite their indebtedness to amusement impresarios for establishing the patterns that allowed them to flourish in the first place.

This was a transitional period in the entertainment industry. Just as I argue that to fully understand traveling amusements, one must analyze the industry as whole and see the connections between the various genres, the same is true of the transition from live entertainment to recorded media. Early film was *supplemental* to live entertainment, not a replacement. Film scholars acknowledge the early movie industry's relationship with vaudeville, as short films were included in many vaudeville programs; however, these

connections extend back to traveling amusements as well, in terms of personnel, organizational strategies, consolidation, and marketing tactics. The decline of traveling amusements is in many ways an example of Joseph Schumpeter's concept of "creative destruction."[436] Ultimately, vaudeville and film were so successful in implementing the business strategies first implemented by traveling amusements that they "destroyed" the very amusement genres that originated these tactics.

Vaudeville began developing just as traveling amusements reached the peak of their popularity. Several of the major proprietors of vaudeville theaters and traveling musical revues began in circuses and minstrel shows, and credited their work on traveling amusements with teaching them the business skills necessary to flourish in the entertainment industry. Although it shares some similarities with British Music Hall performances, vaudeville was a "completely indigenous" American development, "the product of American saloon owners' attempts to attract free-spending drinkers by offering the added enticement of free shows to feed common people's insatiable appetite for fun."[437] These were variety shows, much like the ones offered in museums like Barnum's, and operators found the shows successful enough to begin making small tours. The name "vaudeville" was an attempt to make the shows sound more "high class" and respectable by using an elegant French term. The first vaudeville impresario was Tony Pastor, a veteran of both the minstrel stage and circus ring. After meeting great success as a performing clown, Pastor organized a variety show of his own and made small tours with this troupe in the 1860s, as well as performing in New York theaters in the off-

[436] Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
[437] Toll, *On With The Show*, 265.

season. In 1881, Pastor's success had grown such that he could afford a building of his own and he moved his company in to his Fourteenth Street Theater. Pastor was largely responsible for making vaudeville in to a family-friendly, respectable form of amusement. Using many of the same marketing tactics as his contemporaries in traveling amusements, Pastor courted middle-class women. In addition to heavily emphasizing the "cleanliness" of his shows in print advertisements, to get his desired patrons in the door, he even offered door prizes such as sewing machines or dress patterns.[438]

Pastor was a pioneer of vaudeville and had a successful career in New York, but compared to both his contemporaries in traveling amusements as well as the vaudeville impresarios who came after him, Pastor's business was limited. Pastor's style of vaudeville did not have the element of travel that later vaudevillians would embrace. The next generation of vaudeville managers set their sights on creating chains of theatres across the country and centralized booking offices so that they could contract performers for an entire season and have them relocate from theatre to theatre to keep programs fresh. As historian Robert Toll noted, Pastor's status as a performer was likely a significant factor in his choice to run one permanent theatre rather than a chain of theaters or touring companies. Pastor appeared on stage regularly throughout his entire career, putting him more in line with the older generation of amusement managers, the actor-manager who ran the business but also performed, than the modern show business impresarios like Bailey and Haverly who separated creative labor from managerial duties. The thought of taking time away from performing to focus on expanding his business may not have appealed to Pastor. The next generation of vaudeville impresarios, the men

[438] Toll, 269.

who created large national networks and pushed other forms of amusement off the map, were, like the proprietors of traveling amusements, businessmen, not performers.

At its peak in the early 1900s, there were two major vaudeville circuits, the Keith & Albee circuit, run by Benjamin Franklin, "B.F.," Keith and Edward Franklin Albee, and the Orpheum Circuit, begun by Gustav Walter and later operated by Morris Meyerfeld, Jr. New Yorkers Keith and Albee each began their careers in show business with circuses. During his twenties, B.F. Keith traveled with several different circuses, including Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth, as a hawker of various gadgets, patent medicines, and other merchandise. Keith wrote that the circus "offer[ed] more practical education for a limited period than the better average of other fields of labor, recreation and enjoyment combined."[439] Keith's partner Albee also spent time on the road with Barnum's show as a youth and, much like Keith, he recalled his circus days fondly. He wrote that after one tour with a circus "the die was cast, I was to be a showman." Albee directly credited his experiences with traveling circuses with preparing him for a successful career later in life, writing that regarding the circus, "in my opinion the advantages gained which fit a man for later years in business cannot be found in any other calling."[440]

After working with traveling circuses, Keith began working in the dime museum industry. Dime museums, like P.T. Barnum's American museum, the entertainment venture that preceded Barnum's entrance in to the circus business, featured elements of what we now consider "standard" museum exhibits like natural history collections or

[439] Mclean Jr., "Genesis of Vaudeville," 89.
[440] E.F. Albee, "15 Years with Circuses," *Variety*, January 3, 1924.

educational dioramas, but also featured side-show acts and displays of human oddities. For a short time, Keith's museum was a traveling exhibition, but this was not a successful venture and he later recalled that "this experience convinced me that I was not constituted for traveling under big expense on my own resources, and I abandoned the project entirely."[441] Instead, Keith opened a permanent museum in Boston. It was common for dime museums to have a theater where proprietors would bring in lecturers, plays, and variety acts. To distinguish himself from competition, Keith focused on variety acts, partnering with another circus veteran, George H. Batcheller. They presented an hourly variety show in their museum's 800-seat theatre, frequently changing up the acts to encourage patrons to return. Following in Tony Pastor's footsteps, Keith worked to ensure that his entertainments were "respectable," assuring patrons that his museum and theater were enjoyable and safe for women and children. They "removed the freaks" from the museum, refurbished the building in a luxurious manner, and in the attached theater, "instead of spotlighting curiosities and curios, there were now light operas rotating with stock company comedies and a first-rate variety show."[442]

Although Keith did bring in a variety of patrons to the museum, he found that the theater was not bringing in enough money to cover overhead. To make a profit, they would need to have a crowded house at all times.[443] Keith realized that one of the main problems was that "when the curtain lowered everyone left the place, and it was hard to

[441] Mclean Jr., "Genesis of Vaudeville," 90.
[442] Arthur Frank Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars: How the Keith-Albee and Orpheum Circuits Controlled the Big-Time and Its Performers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 27.
[443] Wertheim, 18.

get others in for the next performance."[444] To get around this problem, Keith thought, perhaps they would just never lower the curtain. Although the show would still repeat every hour, there was no announcement that it was starting over, it would simply start again with the first act. The format of the "continuous" was highly successful for Keith. So much so that, after hiring Albee as general manager, the two opened a second museum-theatre combo in Providence in 1887, followed by a third in Philadelphia in 1889. As historian Arthur Frank Wertheim described it, "Within a span of six years, Keith's tiny museum had mushroomed into a tristate circuit. The three theatres, the Philadelphia Bijou, the Providence Gaiety, and the Boston Bijou, were joined in a new company called B.F. Keith's Amusement Enterprises."[445]

Simultaneously, on the West coast, Gustav Walter, a German immigrant, was developing his own vaudeville circuit, The Orpheum. Much like East coast vaudeville that grew out of variety acts in saloons, Walter's vaudeville grew out of his experience with beer halls in German immigrant communities, where proprietors traditionally featured oompah bands, dancing, and comedy; however, unlike saloons, the beer halls were traditionally family-friendly, meaning that when Walter opened the Vienna Gardens in San Francisco in 1882 he faced less of a challenge in attracting a broad audience from the start. Walter cycled through several smaller concert hall businesses before opening the Orpheum Opera House in 1887. Like the Keith theatres, it exuded opulence and luxury in its design, and "by mixing knockabout comedy with opera and other forms of popular and high culture on the same playbill, Walter appealed to a wide range of San

[444] Mclean Jr., "Genesis of Vaudeville," 91.
[445] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 33.

Franciscans."[446] However, unlike Keith and Albee, Walter did not possess the same talent for the business side of show business, and after facing bankruptcy due to overspending on hiring European acts, he brought in investor Morris Meyerfeld, Jr. in 1893. Like Walter, Meyerfeld was also a German immigrant; however, Meyerfeld had no show business background, having made his fortune in the wholesale liquor business. Describing his first foray in to the entertainment industry with Walter, Meyerfeld wrote "I entered the field without any other qualification than a business experience entirely removed from the stage."[447] He remarked that Walter was "the worst businessman in the world" and Meyerfeld quickly took over the firm's financial affairs while Walter concentrated on scouting acts and managing the operations of the theater. Meyerfeld expanded their business and opened a second Orpheum in Los Angeles in 1894. The Orpheum circuit was born out of necessity to mitigate some of the challenges of operating a theater on the West coast since the East coast remained the major entertainment hub in the United States at the time. Traveling to the West coast was a significant time and financial commitment for performers, and, with the Orpheum being the only well-known vaudeville theatre in California, some did not see the value in this major undertaking for a run at only one theatre. After opening the Los Angeles theater, the Orpheum had the beginnings of a booking circuit. Acts would play a stand in Los Angeles and then move on to the original San Francisco theater. After the success of this strategy, Walter and Meyerfeld took even greater measures to expand their circuit. They opened a booking agency in New York and in the 1890s they opened five more theatres

[446] Wertheim, 47.
[447] Quoted in Wertheim, 52.

in the Midwest so that acts could perform along the way during their journey to the West coast. Walter passed away in 1898 and Meyerfeld was elected president of the Orpheum circuit. He was now invested in the show business completely, selling out his liquor interests "to see what a businessman could do with an institution like the theater."[448] In the 1890s, with the growth of these two circuits, Keith and Albee's in the East and Meyerfeld's Orpheum in the West, vaudeville became available to greater numbers of Americans.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, there was also another form of live variety entertainment that would give traveling amusements a run for their money: musical revues, the most famous being Ziegfeld's *Follies*. Revues are worth a moment of consideration here as they were similar to vaudeville in many ways, and the genre had a great impact on film, both in terms of content, performers, and business practices. Entertainment historian Robert Toll described Ziegfeld's revues as "the culmination of the first century of American show business."[449] At this point, it should not be a surprise that Florenz Ziegfeld also began his show business career with traveling amusements. He was one of the fabled youngsters who "ran away" to join a traveling show, spending a brief period with Buffalo Bill's Wild West before his father showed up to retrieve him. His father owned a classical music school and despite his attempts to push Florenz in to his line of work, Florenz found more enjoyment and satisfaction in vernacular culture. In many ways, Florenz Ziegfeld was a latter-day P.T. Barnum, a man with a talent for promotion and few qualms about staging humbugs if they drew a crowd. However, as

[448] Quoted in Wertheim, 59.
[449] Toll, *On With The Show*, 195.

part of the second generation of amusement impresarios, Ziegfeld found that by the 1890s, the public's taste and patience for humbugs had largely run out, but variety acts were very much in vogue. When the elder Ziegfeld was charged with organizing musical acts for the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, he sent Florenz abroad to engage classical musicians in Europe; however, his son returned with a handful of variety entertainers instead; jugglers, magicians, and trapeze artists. This variety program did not draw a huge crowd at the fair, so Florenz sought out a star. As Barnum had done with Jenny Lind decades earlier, Florenz took an act largely unknown in America and, thanks to his marketing savvy, made it a profitable sensation. For Ziegfeld, this was the German strongman Eugene Sandow. Riding on the success of a national tour with Sandow, Ziegfeld moved to New York City and began staging musical comedies that played in New York and on tour. These met with moderate success, but after a financially challenging 1906 tour, Ziegfeld branched out, and adapted the format of Parisian revue shows to appeal to a middle-class American audience. He called this show the *Follies of 1907*.[450]

The *Follies* were a "fast-paced collage of raucous, broad comedy, snappy production numbers, parodies of celebrities and fads, and lots of pretty women."[451] What separated the *Follies* from vaudeville was that, unlike vaudeville where performers traveled solo and the program at a theater might vary from night-to-night, the *Follies* was a complete show. Ziegfeld took the over-the-top spectacle of circuses, combined with the variety entertainment of minstrel shows and vaudeville, and produced a touring

[450] Toll, *On With The Show*.
[451] Toll, 302.

extravaganza. Some variety acts may have rotated in-and-out of a *Follies* show throughout the season, but there was always a stable corps of "Ziegfeld girls" each season who appeared on stage in more risqué outfits than had previously been acceptable for middle-class entertainment. "Girlie shows" and burlesque shows, although contemporaries of both traveling amusements and these later variety entertainments, never quite managed to reach the same status of "respectability." Ziegfeld capitalized on the desire to see beautiful women, but modified the risqué nature of the girlie show by emphasizing softer sensuality over overt sexuality. Although his "girls" danced on stage in revealing costumes, Ziegfeld aimed to make his acts appeal to both men and women. Toll noted that to accomplish this, "Ziegfeld was obsessed with presenting actual beauty-not the appearance of beauty." He costumed his performers in expensive costumes made of top-quality materials. He put his showgirls through rigorous training "in what amounted to a finishing school. The showgirls learned how to smile, to speak, to move, and to walk in the straight-backed, aloof Ziegfeld strut that showed off their costumes and their bodies."[452] By eliminating course and crude behavior, Ziegfeld cultivated an air of respectable elegance about his girls, and although their costumes showed more skin than had ever acceptable on a middle-class stage, the *Follies* were a hit among the middle-class.

The first year of the *Follies* Ziegfeld made $100,000 on his initial $13,000 investment. After two years, he abandoned his other ventures in full-length musicals and concentrated solely on the *Follies*. In addition to the production numbers focused on displays of feminine sensuality, Ziegfeld hired top-notch comedians including such

[452] Toll, 319.

famous names as Al Jolson, Fanny Brice, Bert Williams, and Will Rogers. Ziegfeld followed the Gilded Age trend of presenting "respectable" entertainments that appealed to an audience of middle-class patrons. Like his predecessors in traveling amusements, he also viewed himself not as an artist but as a servant of public whims. Ziegfeld himself was not a comedy fan, yet he recognized that comedy acts were some of his main draws. Describing how he produced his shows, Ziegfeld stated that he chose the acts he did "because the public wants them and is willing to pay exceedingly large prices to get the style of entertainment it most desires. I am not in business for my health. I desire to make money."[453] This statement, which could be a paraphrase of Haverly's motto of "Find out what the people want and then give them that thing," illustrates the extent to which profit-motivation had infiltrated the entertainment industry.[454] Ziegfeld was not out to force a social message on an unaccepting public through his shows, he was out to entertain and make money.

Branding was a key to this success. The *Follies* were known for their beautiful chorus dancers, but few if any audience members would be able to name any of the women on stage; they just knew they were "Ziegfeld girls." Ziegfeld made *his* name synonymous with beauty and sensual pleasure, not the names of his performers themselves. Just as audiences knew a Barnum show would be a larger-than-life spectacle or a Haverly show would be "high class" minstrelsy, they knew a Ziegfeld show would feature pretty women. This objectification of his employees demonstrates the declining power of the performer in turn-of-the-century entertainment. A "Ziegfeld girl" was

[453] Quoted in Toll, 316.
[454] Preliminary Pictorial of the Famous Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels, 1880, AMSC, HL.

anonymous, replaceable, like many interchangeable parts on an assembly line. This building of a brand based on the identity of the show's owner was a profitable tactic taken from traveling amusements. Although the cast changed each year, name recognition meant that audiences knew what to expect from the proprietor, giving the new show built-in publicity and saving advertising costs since the show's owner did not have to re-introduce the public to an entirely new entity. Ziegfeld was a curator of talent, and many of his headlining stars such as Al Jolson and Will Rogers went on to have successful careers in the film industry. The Ziegfeld-style musical production number was also a common feature in many 1930s musical films, inspiring the likes of director-choreographer Busby Berkeley. Both revues and vaudeville were popular at the time when the film industry was coming in to its own, and these shows provided significant inspiration for the makers of early films.

The men who pioneered the film industry were inventors and businessmen. The earliest films were recordings of "real life" events and performances, quite often circus and variety show performances, and film directing did not truly become an art form until several decades after the practice began. These early films were a supplement to live entertainment, not a replacement, thus it is crucial to understand film's connections to live entertainment to develop a full understanding of the history of cinema. In 1890, Thomas Edison and then-partner William Kennedy Laurie (W.K.L.) Dickson unveiled the kinetograph, their first motion-picture camera, and two years later the pair announced the accompanying kinetoscope, a device for projecting moving images on to a small screen. This ushered in the rise of the motion picture industry. It seems fitting that it was Thomas Edison who catalyzed the development of this industry. Film historian Charles

Musser described Edison as the "businessman's inventor," who had "earned his reputation as an inventor of utilitarian devices employed for the organization of large-scale enterprises."[455] With electric lighting and the telegraph, entrepreneurs, including, as we have seen, entertainment impresarios took their businesses to new heights. Even the phonograph, which would ultimately become known as a device for entertainment, was initially believed to have a business function, allowing businessmen to dictate and send recorded messages to associates across the country.[456] Edison's devices allowed for the growth and maintenance of large, geographically distant, corporate hierarchies, and throughout the 1890s and 1900s, the film industry joined these ranks. Of course, the difference in this case is that moving pictures were a product, not a tool for business operation. Still, this technological development transformed live entertainment in to a physical, mechanically reproducible, commodity, which only further accelerated the growth of the show business that had begun in 1871 when circuses took to the rails.

The first kinetoscope motion pictures were visible through "peephole" boxes, where patrons could, one at a time, step forward and lean in to the device to view the short film. The first kinetoscope parlor, owned by the Holland brothers of New York City, opened in April of 1894. There, patrons could pay twenty-five cents to use five kinetoscope machines, each with a different short film of around a minute each.[457] The parlor was a hit and in the year after the first one opened, the Edison Manufacturing Company made over $85,000 from the sale of kinetoscope machines and films.[458] After

[455] Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*, History of the American Cinema (New York: Scribner, 1990), 55.
[456] Musser, 57.
[457] Musser, 82.
[458] Musser, 85.

the success of the peephole, inventors set out to work on projection for a larger screen so that more than one viewer might view a motion picture at the same time. Edison had several foreign competitors with successful projection devices such as the Lumière brothers' cinématographe in France and Robert Paul's theatrograph in England, and Max Sklandowsky's bioscope in Germany. In the United States, W.K.L. Dickson grew dissatisfied working with Edison and left, partnering with the Latham family and their Lambda company to develop the eidoloscope in 1895.[459] Thomas Edison himself did not even invent his projector. C. Francis Jenkins and Thomas Armat invented the phantoscope in 1895, but the pair were unable to profitably exhibit it. They sought business help from the Raff & Gannon Kinetoscope Company, who eventually brought the phantoscope to the Edison Manufacturing Company where Edison agreed to begin manufacturing both the projectors and film to play on them. The phantoscope was re-christened "Edison's vitascope," banking on the reputation of the Edison name to attract consumers away from competitors' projected films.[460]

From their inception, motion pictures were heavily intertwined with vaudeville and variety entertainment. Many patrons first encountered projected films at vaudeville houses, where theater owners booked traveling film exhibitors as one of the shows' acts. At its core, vaudeville was a presentation of novelty entertainment and few things were more novel in the 1890s than motion pictures. In some cases, films appealed to vaudeville theater owners in that they allowed for a scene change to take place while the audience enjoyed a film projected in front of the closed curtain. House managers sometimes used

[459] Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*.
[460] Musser, 111.

films as "chasers," the acts that occurred at the top of continuous vaudeville shows that would signal to the audience that it was time to leave and let a new crowd enter because the show was back to the beginning. Using a film as a chaser meant that audiences could rotate in and out of the theater without creating a huge distraction for a live performer. Some have speculated that these acts were called "chasers" because they were boring or unpopular acts meant to chase audiences out, but Musser and others have noted that it is more likely that chasers were chosen due to cost. Managers would put a cheap act as a chaser, saving the more expensive acts for later in the bill when the house would be full and attentive. This was another part of the appeal of film to vaudeville managers. Films were popular, meaning a vaudeville manager could give audiences a high-quality attraction, even during the "chaser" spot, without paying a big-time star's salary.

Many viewers, particularly those outside of urban hubs with a vaudeville theater, encountered films through traveling exhibitors who brought a projector and film with them from town-to-town across the country. Some of the more "high-class" exhibitors, such as those working for Lyman Howe, made the presentation of these silent films a hybrid experience of both live and recorded entertainment. They positioned live actors behind the screen to dub in dialogue, read the supertitles, or perform sound effects.[461] Traveling film exhibitors also borrowed promotional techniques from the showmen who pioneered traveling amusements. One trade paper described how "scores of picture companies toured the country with brass bands, lady orchestras, widespread billing and newspaper puffing that threatened to put the circus out of business. Swell advance agents

[461] Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907-1915*, History of the American Cinema (New York: Scribner, 1990).

swaggered about the theatre lobbies and hotel corridors, boasting of how their picture shows were 'packing them in.'"[462] Although this reporter speculated that film exhibitors could "put the circus out of business," his description of these exhibitors illustrates their indebtedness to these earlier showmen in terms of promotional techniques.

This indebtedness also extended to the subjects of the motion pictures themselves. Filmmakers with the Edison company "kinetographed over seventy-five motion pictures in 1894, and virtually every one drew on some type of popular culture amusement."[463] Most of the motion pictures of the 1890s were "actualities," films capturing real-life activities or performances, not fictional stories. Film was not yet an "art" of its own accord, but more a technology for reproducing and redistributing existing art forms and variety acts were a favorite subject. As these early motion pictures were only about a minute in length, short displays of acrobatics, juggling, dance, contortionists, animal acts, or other unique talents seen on variety stages naturally made for engaging subjects. The catalog of Edison pictures in the 1890s also had a substantial number of circus-related films.[464]

The advent of projection made peephole kinetoscope parlors less popular. By the early 1900s, film technology had progressed to the point where filmmakers could producer longer "feature" films, making films less of a variety act and more of a complete form of entertainment on their own. Kinetoscope parlors were replaced by theaters dedicated to motion-pictures and nickelodeons, affordable movie theaters open to patrons of all classes. By the end of 1906, Billboard published a report stating there were

[462] Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*, 371.
[463] Musser, 78.
[464] Musser, 165.

313 nickelodeons across 35 states.[465] Still, the feature films produced in the first decade of the twentieth century were not nearly as long as what we consider feature-length films today. To make sure customers felt they were getting their money's worth when they attended a motion-picture theater or nickelodeon, proprietors would add other live forms of entertainment to the bill. When attending a movie theater, patrons might also see vaudeville acts, educational lectures, or "illustrated songs" where live music was accompanied by slides or moving-pictures. This supports the notion that the first decades of the twentieth century were a transitional period in entertainment. As the film industry was still coming in to its own, live entertainment and recorded media were placed alongside one another and both still relied heavily on the content of traveling amusements for material, as illustrated by the popularity of circus-related films, blackface variety acts, and filmed side-show acts.

Just as the boundaries between film and vaudeville in terms of presentation and content were fuzzy, so too were the payrolls. Once it became clear that film was here to stay, amusement impresarios had two choices; embrace the business potential of new medium, or resist it. As film historian Eileen Bowser noted, with the advent of longer, story-based feature films, nickelodeons exploded in popularity and "the disastrous effect of nickelodeon madness on the vaudeville circuit of the country was quite enough to make enemies of the [live entertainment] impresarios."[466] Some of these amusement impresarios attempted to use their existing power to forcibly keep talent in live entertainment and away from film. Marc Klaw and his business partner Abraham Lincoln

[465] Musser, 425.
[466] Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907-1915*, 107.

Erlanger were powerful figures in the live entertainment industry in the early twentieth century, owning a chain of theaters, producing shows, managing a booking agency, and even owning both costume and construction companies. Klaw and Erlanger feared that their performers might abandon the stage for the screen, and actually added a clause to the performers' contracts, saying that any actor using their booking agency was forbidden from appearing in films.[467]

Other amusement impresarios felt they could not sway the coming tide of film, and instead chose to embrace it and perhaps get in on the ground floor. Several major vaudeville proprietors who had begun their careers on the road with the circus expanded their business holdings even further by investing in the film industry, in both production and exhibition. Gustav Walter, creator of the Orpheum circuit, was an early adopter. In 1896, he partnered with William L. Wright and incorporated the United States Animatoscope Company that attempted to develop a new projector. Vaudeville magnate B.F. Keith owned several motion-picture theaters in the Northeast and Canada. Charles Frohman, who had begun as a business manager for Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels, and his brother Daniel, after becoming successful producers of Broadway and touring plays, were involved in the film-production business with the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation alongside future Paramount Pictures founder Adolph Zukor and Jesse L. Lasky, another vaudeville producer. The general manager of the Western Vaudeville Managers Association, J.J. Murdoch, organized the International Projecting and Producing Company to stake his claim in motion-pictures.[468] At the turn of the twentieth

[467] Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907-1915*.
[468] Bowser.

century, there was clearly no firm boundary the between live entertainment and recorded media industries. Vaudeville and film were connected in terms of exhibition spaces, content, and the individuals working in production and distribution. That a large proportion of the men working in vaudeville and film began their entertainment careers working on traveling amusements should not be forgotten; especially when one analyzes the business practices that contributed to the growth of these new genres. Although traveling amusements faded from the entertainment scene, their successors, vaudeville and film, used the business strategies originated by traveling amusements to take greater market share for themselves. The most significant of these tactics were the creation of brand identity centered around the producers and consolidation of the market through mergers and acquisitions.

Just as it had been with traveling amusements, much of the motivation for creating a brand identity was to challenge negative stereotypes of these entertainments and project a sense of respectability. Both vaudeville and early film countered much of the same stigma that amusement impresarios faced decades before. Early variety entertainment's initial association with saloons and burlesque "girlie shows" meant that it was not seen as respectable entertainment. As Robert Toll and other historians have noted, one of Tony Pastor's major contributions to vaudeville was his success in "cleaning up" the amusement. Even the name "vaudeville" was an effort to give the entertainment a high-class sounding name and an association with refined European art, even though it was an indigenous American creation. Just as circus and minstrel show impresarios did with their traveling shows, Pastor and subsequent vaudeville theater owners emphasized the luxury and opulence of their performances. Advertisements for

Keith and Albee theaters use many of the same statements found in Barnum and Haverly ads from earlier decades, assuring audiences that they would find no objectionable content in their shows, that women and families were welcome and safe, and that a Keith show was synonymous with high quality. Just as traveling amusement impresarios did, Pastor, Keith, the Orpheum circuit, and other vaudeville theater owners aimed to associate their names with quality in their patron's minds.

Motion-pictures also faced reluctance from a wary public, concerned that kinetograph parlors and nickelodeons were places of vice. These amusement sites were affordable and open to all classes. Musser argued that the one-level nickelodeon theater was a more democratic site of amusement, since unlike theaters for traditional plays and concerts, there was no upper tier for the wealthy to separate themselves from the "riff-raff" in the pit. Nickelodeons were certainly popular in urban areas with the working class, which made some commentators concerned that "the dirty, dark, and smelly nickelodeons showing risqué entertainment" were antithetical to Victorian values. The men involved in the film industry (for as with live entertainment, the overwhelming majority of producers and studio executives were male) set out to change this perception on two fronts; exhibition and production. In both cases, they sought to accomplish this through branding. As they had with vaudeville theaters, owners of motion-picture theaters out to capture a middle-class audience began building grand "movie palaces."[469] As noted, some of these were in fact owned and operated by the same men who built

[469] Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 102.

vaudeville houses, using pre-existing brand recognition to their advantages as they sought to bring motion-pictures to a broad, and "respectable" audience.

In terms of production, film studios at the turn of the twentieth century built reputations centered around the image of the *studio*, not its directors or stars. Bowser noted that these film executives "wanted to popularize brand names, not individual items."[470] Although later, once the film industry relocated to Hollywood, studios would control exhibition by owning chains of theaters, early studios distributed films by selling them to "exchanges" who would in turn rent them to individual exhibitors. Many of these exchanges were controlled by studios, but exhibitors did maintain some power in this process in their ability to request certain films. As Bower explains it, before the Hollywood system, "films were perceived and sold by brand name…exhibitors, exchanges and the public were expected to request films by company names, not by specific titles or stars. The price to the distributor was the same for any brand and any film. Competition among producers consisted of selling a greater number of prints to the exchanges; that number…was determined by the popularity of their brand names."[471] At this time, most film studios did not even publicize actors' names and, even as certain directors such as D.W. Griffith earned reputations within the production industry as top-notch artists, their names were seldom mentioned in publicity materials or even reviews.[472] Just as traveling amusement proprietors established reputations such that audiences might buy tickets as soon as they saw that a Barnum show was coming to town without regard for who was on the bill, film companies like Biograph worked hard to

[470] Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907-1915*, 33.
[471] Bowser, 103.
[472] Bowser, 105.

establish themselves as trustworthy and popular brands. As one journalist wrote in 1910 "I do not know their staff, their producers, actors or anybody associated with the Company, yet mere mention of a Biograph picture seems to awaken in me a desire to see that picture."[473] Some of the lack of emphasis on star performers was due to technical limitations. It was difficult to create face recognition when film quality made actors' faces difficult to differentiate.[474] But perhaps even more important to studio executives was the financial consideration. As films were sold to distributors for the same price, they hoped to avoid paying the higher salary that a famous actor might demand.

This reveals yet another facet of traveling amusements at work in vaudeville and film. In each of these systems, power lay in the hands of the producers, owners, and managers, not the performers. Unlike entertainments that came before traveling amusement where companies were owned and operated by performers, from the Gilded Age on the entertainment industry was controlled by individuals who were not a part of the artistic production process. As noted above, in film, early studio executives sought to curb actors' power to negotiate for higher salaries by creating brand identities based on the studio, not individual artists. For vaudeville, Robert Toll identified Tony Pastor as a transitional figure in this system. Although Pastor's work was enormously significant in "cleaning up" vaudeville, Pastor remained a performer until the end. Toll states that "Pastor remained primary an early nineteenth-century trouper, an entertainer who thought in terms of running and performing in his own shows."[475] Perhaps this explains while Pastor seemed to remain content with his one successful New York theater, while later

[473] *Moving Picture World*, November 12, 1910.
[474] Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907-1915*.
[475] Toll, *On With The Show*, 269.

vaudeville proprietors sought to create entertainment empires. To amusement proprietors, performers were little more than "interchangeable parts," hired, fired, and shuffled around by company owners at-will. These decisions were made not to best fulfill the proprietor's grand artistic vision, but to create shows that would generate the greatest profit. The vaudeville system, where performers arranged their travel schedules through centralized booking agents, gave performers even less power.

As noted, the Orpheum "circuit" developed as a means to bring top-notch East coast performers to California in a profitable manner, by having the acts give performances along the journey in other Orpheum-owned houses in the Midwest. For performers, the benefit of booking a circuit like this was guaranteed jobs. Unlike a circus or minstrel show where performers were contracted with one show for an entire season and room and board were provided as part of the contract, vaudeville performers were "like nomadic herdsmen continually moving in search of greener pastures…vaudevillians traveled in search of better bookings, better reviews, and better contracts."[476] When performers arranged their own schedules, it "required mastery of innumerable details: knowledge of train schedules, fares, baggage charges for scenery, and room rates at local hotels."[477] Theater owners saw this as an opportunity, they developed booking agencies that would handle many of these details for performers and earn a profit by charging performers commissions. This was an appealing arrangement for many performers due to the sense of security a pre-arranged tour provided. In the 1890s, a performer might visit a booking agency in New York to speak with a representative of Keith theaters, or in

[476] Toll, 273.
[477] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 95.

Chicago they might arrange a deal with the Western Circuit of Vaudeville Theaters (WCTV), but at the end of the century, Albee concocted a plan to even further centralize booking agencies and wrest even more control of the industry out of the hands of performers. If competing chains cooperated to arrange bookings, they could regulate performer salaries, which would increase box-office profits. Orpheum's Meyerfeld, who believed that "vaudeville performers seem to spend all their time trying to scheme how they can get more money out of me for their acts" felt that this would be advantageous for all producers involved. In 1900, the Keith and Orpheum circuits, competitors, came together and created the Association of Vaudeville Managers of the United States (AVM). Ultimately, the Association gave performers more bookings, but "paid them less by regulating salaries and charging a 5 percent commission for its services."[478] In an ultimate display of power, the AVM threatened to blackball performers who did not use their services.

This led to formation of a vaudeville performers' union, the White Rats, that challenged the AVM, particularly over the 5 percent commission fee. The White Rats called for a walkout and strike that was successful in persuading AVM managers to meet with White Rats representatives. The AVM agreed to abolish the commission fee and not to blackball strikers; however, they did not follow through on either of these promises. Instead, theater owners sought to even further consolidate their operations. Keith and Albee set out to create an even stronger association of theaters, and Albee began pressuring non-AVM members to join together. Keith and Albee intimidated non-cooperative theater owners by purchasing other theaters nearby. They also threatened to

[478] Wertheim, 104.

blackball performers who booked any gigs at these hold-out theaters, restricting competitors' available talent. Keith even went so far as to interfere with one theater owners' ability to procure bank loans.[479] In 1907, Keith, now with an enormous circuit in his control, set out to negotiate another deal with Western vaudeville theater owners. In June of that year, all the most prominent figures in big-time vaudeville signed an agreement, linking together in what was known simply as The Combine. They divided the country in to eastern and western divisions, headed by Keith and Meyerfeld, respectively, and formed a new centralized theatrical booking organization called the United Booking Offices of America (UBO) creating a "great superstructure of vaudeville."[480]

Just as Bailey had done for the circus, and Haverly for minstrel shows, the Combine and UBO created an oligopoly in vaudeville. One commentator spoke of the impact of these organizations on the industry, stating that "It is in the booking office that vaudeville is run, actors are made or broken, theatres nourished or starved…It is the concentration of power in the hands of the small groups of men who control the booking offices which has made possible the trustification of vaudeville."[481] To protect the interests of the Combine, members also formed the Vaudeville Managers Protective Association (VMPA) in 1910. This was a response to the formation of the White Rats, meant to protect managers "and their business against, unwarranted attacks and to take, institute and maintain any and all lawful and proper measures which the association may

[479] Wertheim, 118.
[480] Wertheim, 123.
[481] Alfred L. Bernheim, "The Facts of Vaudeville," *Equity*, September 1923.

deem for the security and best interests of its members and their business."[482] In 1919, the still-remaining, although weakened, White Rats charged the VMPA with "blacklisting and conspiracy." A full-page ad in Billboard described their complaints, accusing the VMPA of threatening "to shoot the leaders of the White Rats," further explaining that "there are more ways than one of shooting the leaders, because they need not be shot physically, they can be shot and killed in reputation and in finance."[483]

The White Rats brought their complaints to the Federal Trade Commission, hoping to have the Commission find that the Combine was an illegal trust. The lawyer representing the defense for the VMPA was none other than John Kelley, long-time lawyer for the Ringling Brothers. The defense argued that the VMPA could not be in violation of the Clayton Anti-Trust Act because vaudeville was not involved in interstate commerce. They claimed that "the labor of a person was not a commodity or article of commerce; therefore, the work of vaudevillians was exempt from antitrust legislation. The transportation of baggage, scenery, and other property was only incidental to giving a stage appearance."[484] After nearly two years of investigation, the FTC representatives assigned to the case unanimously decided that there was not sufficient evidence to find that the VMPA engaged in unfair methods of competition or restrained interstate commerce. There was another unsuccessful attempt to sue the Combine in 1920; however, all federal courts involved dismissed the case, once again ruling that vaudeville

[482] Quoted in Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 189.
[483] Mountford, "Shooting the Leaders."
[484] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 235.

did not count as interstate commerce and was not subject to antitrust laws.[485] The "big time" vaudeville trust persisted, much to the dismay of the performers' rights movement.

The VMPA cases hint at an explanation for why show business is left out of most studies of turn-of-the-century business. One commentator in 1910 boldly claimed that "no private business is so hampered by inadequate laws, ignorant and bigoted reformers, as the show business."[486] People were unsure of how to classify this growing industry. The courts' ruling that vaudeville was not interstate commerce despite the fact that interstate travel was clearly an essential part of the business demonstrates how wily vaudeville managers exploited legal loopholes, creating and maintaining national syndicates and ruthlessly blacklisting those who refused to cooperate while remaining free from legal consequences. Managers insisted, successfully, that performance was not a commodity in a legal sense. The fact that live entertainment was a fairly ephemeral experience worked in their favor. Although there was backlash against the Combine, the fuzzy definition of a "commodity" worked in these entertainment impresarios' favor. This would not be the case with film however, as monopolization of the film industry raised greater public concern and brought stricter legal action. Although being charged with illegal monopolization was not a good thing for those accused, this history illustrates the growing awareness that the entertainment industry was now a significant part of the American business landscape in the early twentieth century, one that needed to be regulated and monitored like any other.

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[485] Wertheim, 236.
[486] "Your Rights at the Show," *Denver Republican*, October 16, 1910, MWEZ + n.c. 7686, BRTC, NYPL.

As the amusement industry shifted from one composed of live entertainment to one that increasingly relied on tangible objects, namely film, it became further integrated in the "mainstream" business landscape, as entertainment became a physical commodity. Live performance did not instantly lose popularity once motion pictures came on to the scene. Early film was popular simultaneously with vaudeville, and as demonstrated above, there was considerable overlap in these early years in terms of exhibition, as films were shown during vaudeville programs and variety performers appeared live at nickelodeons. But with film, the industrial business practices begun in the traveling amusement industry reached new heights. The entertainment industry now had a tangible product in the form of a film reel, making it easier for commentators to draw comparisons to other industrial manufacturing businesses. Like vaudeville, the film industry also saw a great oligopoly at the turn of the twentieth century, but in this case, the federal courts successfully proved anticompetitive intent and violations of antitrust law. Thomas Edison was known for his eagerness in pursuing legal action regarding patents and copyrights and his Motion Picture Patents Company was no exception. Beginning in the 1890s, Edison brought suits against several companies for producing projectors he claimed infringed on his own patent. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Edison company set off on another round of patent suits, ultimately negotiating deals wherein Edison would offer these other companies licenses to use his inventions. In 1909, when his major competitor, Biograph, held out, Edison instead negotiated to form a holding company, the Motion Picture Patent Company (MPPC) Within the MPPC, also known as the "Edison Trust," "there were sixteen patents involved, coming from Edison, Biograph, the Armat Company and Vitagraph and covering the issues of the film stock, the cameras,

and the projectors. The Patents Company issued licenses, on the payment of royalties, to producers, distributors and exhibitors. Stock shares in the Patents Company were held equally by Edison and Biograph, except for those few needed to qualify the directors, and were kept by the Empire Trust in order that neither could sell without the other's knowledge. The scheme was a clever attempt to avoid the antitrust laws."[487] MPPC also negotiated with Eastman Kodak to guarantee exclusivity, agreeing that Kodak would supply film stock for MPPC companies and no one else. This also gave the MPPC leverage over exhibitors, as they charged exhibitors a $2 fee per week to use their projection machines, even though exhibitors had already purchased the projectors for themselves. By the end of 1909, the MPPC claimed that there were 6,000 theaters in the United States operating under their licenses, and 2,000 independent theaters.[488]

The MPPC was interested in keeping tabs on these independents, sending spies to independent theatres to ensure no unauthorized proprietors were using their projectors without a license. They also allegedly hired thugs with mob connections, the notorious "Goon Squad," to ensure adherence to their policies.[489] They also expanded from simply controlling use of projectors, to controlling distribution of films themselves. Members of the Edison Trust also formed the General Film Company in 1910, "the purpose of which was to purchase film exchanges in an attempt to 'cut out the middlemen' and control distribution for themselves."[490] If there are doubts about the General Film Company's aspiration for monopoly, one has to look no further than their own company blueprint,

[487] Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907-1915*, 29.
[488] Bowser, 6.
[489] Bowser, 150; Michael Glover Smith and Adam Selzer, *Flickering Empire: How Chicago Invented the U.S. Film Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
[490] Glover Smith and Selzer, *Flickering Empire*, 84.

which was suspiciously titled "Details of a Plan under Which Licensed Manufacturers and Importers Will Take Ove the Licensed Rental Businesses of the United States."[491]

Unsurprisingly, this led to charges of illegal monopolization. And in 1912, the MPPC found itself before the Supreme Court. The charges, originally filed with the federal court in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, read in part that "on or about April 1910, defendants set out to monopolize the business of all the rental exchanges in the United States, their purpose being to drive out of business all persons so engaged and to absorb to themselves the profits made theretofore made therein."[492] The district court ruled that MPPC was in violation of the Sherman Act, saying the court was certain that "the end and purpose of the plan [of MPPC] was to dominate and control the trade in all the accessories of the art and, in order to assure this, to control the entire motion picture business."[493] MPPC attempted to bring an appeal to the Supreme Court; however, the passing of the Clayton Act and a separate Supreme Court ruling in *Motion Picture Patents Co. v. Universal Film Manufacturing Co.,* ultimately led MPPC to abandon the Supreme Court appeal. As a stipulation of the district court decision, MPPC was dismantled in 1918, but this did not stop anti-competitive activity in the film industry. In fact, the rise of Hollywood as the center of filmmaking was in large part a reaction to the Edison Trust. Filmmakers sought territory without a strong Trust presence in which they might establish their own distribution networks. Although some film historians point to the establishment of the 1930s Hollywood studio system as the industrialization of the film industry, and Hollywood executives' development of chains of studio-owned

[491] Glover Smith and Selzer, *Flickering Empire*.
[492] *United States v. Motion Picture Patent Company*, 247 U.S. 524 (1918).
[493] "Orders Movie Trust to Be Broken Up," *The New York Times*, October 2, 1915.

theaters as anti-competitive activity, Hollywood did not originate these practices. The above section illustrates that by the 1930s, the film industry already had a history of industrial production techniques, studio brand identity, and consolidated control of distribution networks, all rooted in the business practices of traveling amusements.

Looking back from the twenty-first century perspective, it may be tempting to say that film was such a revolutionary medium that it was "destined" to eclipse traveling amusements. Even though early film stunts and special effects appear crude by today's standards, it is easy to see how film might have dazzled audiences with a sense of wonder and whimsy. It would then perhaps seem logical that film would have a detrimental effect on traveling amusements, formerly audiences' only option for spectacular entertainment. This is true; however, the artistic value of film was not the only cause for the decline of traveling amusements. Changing demographics, a shift away from Victorian social values, and changing economic circumstances all impacted traveling amusements. One must also remember that until the 1930s, film existed alongside (and sometimes within) vaudeville, illustrating that audiences still craved live entertainment; however, vaudeville and revues replaced traveling amusements as the most popular genres of live entertainment. By the 1930s, minstrel shows and Wild West shows ceased to exist in their original form. In circus, the monopolization of the field that had once been a boon for amusement moguls ultimately had negative consequences for the art form as a whole. Although John Ringling controlled the entire industry, it was now one major circus versus hundreds of vaudeville and movie theaters. Vaudeville and film utilized the strategies pioneered by amusement impresarios to create economies of scale with which old-school traveling amusements could not keep up.

Vaudeville was the final nail in the coffin of the traditional minstrel show. As minstrel show historian Robert Toll argued, minstrelsy faced several challenges in the late nineteenth century that necessitated a change in format. After the civil war, "minstrels lost their virtual monopoly on popular stage entertainment."[494] Although they had once been formidable competition for wagon circuses, the enormous spectacles of railroad circuses threatened to make the much simpler minstrel shows obsolete. J.H. Haverly was a pioneer in transforming the minstrel show. He formed enormous minstrel combinations of "FORTY COUNT 'EM FORTY" performers and added lavish sets and costumes to his shows to compete with the visual grandeur of the circus. Haverly also took great strides to "clean up" the minstrel show, just like his compatriots in other forms of traveling amusements. The variety segments of Haverly's minstrel shows included operatic and classical music performances. He eliminated the bawdy comedy of earlier minstrel shows, and removed much of the plantation-themed content that had once defined minstrelsy. As Toll described it, Haverly "had in essence created a new form—a gigantic composite of the most attractive features in popular entertainment, expertly packaged and promoted, grandly produced, purged of anything that might be offensive, and available wherever people would pay to see it."[495] However, in trying to "keep up" with other traveling amusements, Haverly removed many of the elements that had once differentiated minstrelsy from other types of shows.

Furthermore, for audiences who attended minstrel shows for their supposedly "authentic" depictions of black culture, there were newer troupes composed of black

[494] Toll, *Blacking Up*, 134.
[495] Toll, 148.

performers whose claims to "authenticity" appeared more legitimate. The most well-known of these troupes were still owned and managed by white men, such as Charles Callender's Georgia Minstrels (which Callender eventually sold to Haverly) as well as one owned by Charles and Gustave Frohman. There were several moderately successful black proprietors of black minstrel troupes such as Lew Johnson and Charles Hicks; however, "they simply could not match their white adversaries in influence and capital."[496] Black minstrels, responding to audience desires, continued to perform the racist caricatures of enslaved persons that had characterized the genre for decades. This left white minstrel troupes to find new material. Many began concentrating on parodies of urban immigrant ethnicities; Jews, Germans, Italians, already common acts on variety stages. This identity crisis greatly hindered late nineteenth century minstrel shows. As Toll writes, "white minstrels, caught between their 'authentic' black competitors and the versatility of variety and musical shows, prolonged the life of their form by shifting to more lavish productions, greater variety, urban topics, and even an abandonment of blackface. But these changes simply made it easier for vaudeville to absorb the blackface act and take minstrelsy's place."[497] Even troupes of black performers who relied on more traditional minstrel-show fare struggled. Famous performers such as Bert Williams left minstrel shows for other variety venues such as Ziegfeld's *Follies*. Blackface performance persisted, but the standalone minstrel show fell out of favor with the rise of vaudeville, revues, and musical comedies.

[496] Toll, 211.
[497] Toll, 274.

To analyze the decline of Wild West shows, it is necessary to return to the career of Buffalo Bill Cody, the original Wild West showman. His story illustrates not only the changing socio-cultural context that led to lack of interest in Wild West shows, but also demonstrates the extent to which by the early twentieth century effective business management was essential to perpetuating an entertainment. Talent and star power alone were no longer enough. While Buffalo Bill's show was not the only Wild West show, it was the original and the most popular and its regression represented the decline of the genre as a whole. Buffalo Bill's Wild West show struggled due to lack of effective management and leadership following James Bailey's death. Buffalo Bill was the star of the show, and an owner; however, he notably struggled with business affairs. This illustrates the scale of the changes in the entertainment industry. It was no longer possible for a show to survive based on content alone, no matter how popular that content may have been.

From the inception of the Wild West show, William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody needed a partner who was skilled in handling the behind-the-scenes management of his show, and Nate Salsbury took on this role from 1884 until his death in 1902. Salsbury's death certainly shook the Wild West show, but did not cause a full collapse due to Cody and Salsbury's partnership with James Bailey. Those who worked closely with Cody often commented on his "difficult" personality, compounded by a significant drinking habit.[498] In a scathing unpublished memoir entitled "Sixteen Years in Hell with Buffalo Bill," Salsbury expressed resentments toward Cody describing him as a drunk and a

[498] Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*; Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 507.

womanizer.[499] Cody's disreputable personal behavior was made in to a public spectacle when he attempted to divorce his wife, Louisa, and she refused, bringing the trial to court. Cody made several sensational claims about Louisa; that she attempted to poison him, refused him access to their home, and falsely accused him of murdering their daughter Arta.[500] This was especially problematic for Cody, whose shows had always glorified the domestic sphere and the sanctity of the home. The judge ruled in Louisa's favor and the two remained married which, despite his own desire, was probably best for Cody given that Louisa was much better than her husband at managing the family's finances. Historian Louis Warren credits Louisa's smart investments in creating enduring wealth for the Cody family.

Buffalo Bill, on the other hand, made several poor investments, reflecting what Warren described as Cody's "continuing, almost manic entrepreneurialism."[501] The project nearest his heart was creating the town of Cody, Wyoming. Speculator George Beck approached Cody with this project, eager to capitalize on the newly-passed 1894 Carey Act which stated that "any private developer who showed he had means and a plan to provide a water supply for an unclaimed desert acreage could file for the right to develop it."[502] Cody brought Salsbury in to the venture as well, but it never proved profitable. As Warren notes, "town founding was an ongoing gamble, in which Cody, Beck, Salsbury, and the other partners wagered heavy sums and much effort on a town

[499] Nathan Salsbury Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
[500] Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 501.
[501] Warren, 474.
[502] Warren, 483.

that might in the end prove to be more show than substance"[503] Difficult to get to, and difficult to farm, the few settlers that did reside in Cody were unhappy with their decision to move there. By 1910, residents had sued the town's owners at least twenty-six times. Cody also invested around $200,000 in the Campo Bonito mining works in Arizona. The manager of the mine, Lewis Getchell conned Cody, tricking Cody in to paying for fake expenses and employing men to essentially pretend to work in the mine, making it appear profitable when it was not. To avoid another public embarrassment, Cody never filed charges against Getchell and spent the rest of his life attempting to find a buyer for the mine.[504]

Although Cody, Wyoming still exists today and is home to the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, William F. Cody is still best remembered for his persona as a showman, not a town founder. And unlike Bailey, Salsbury, McCaddon, or Haverly who earned that title in their offstage labor, Cody was a "showman" known for appearing in the show. Salsbury passed away in 1902, followed by Bailey in 1906, at which point the Bailey heirs discovered that Cody was in debt to Bailey for $12,000. Cody claimed he had paid off this debt, but without proper documentation the heirs insisted that Cody pay it off by continuing to tour with the show but relinquishing his share of the profits until the debt was paid. In 1908, the Ringling Brothers purchased part of the Bailey estate that included the physical property of the Wild West show, and agreed to partner with Buffalo Bill for the 1908 touring season, but this arrangement only lasted one touring season. Circus historians speculate that this was due to Cody's notoriously difficult-to-work-with

[503] Warren, 478.
[504] Warren, 535.

personality.[505] The Ringlings then sold 1/3 of the show to Gordon "Pawnee Bill" Lillie, owner of a rival Wild West company, who agreed to "take up the reins as Cody's managing partner."[506] Lillie then negotiated with the Bailey heirs, purchasing their interest and splitting it with Cody; however, Cody could not pay for his share upfront so Lillie agreed to let Cody pay out of the show's profits for that season. The now-combined Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East show was a huge public draw, as audiences clamored to see the partnership of these once-time rivals much as they did for the temporary Barnum and Forepaugh collaboration decades prior.

The "Two Bills" show brought in good money from box-office sales; however as an enormous touring show it incurred considerable expenses and Cody was unable to pay his share of the wintering expenses. In 1913, he took a $20,000 loan from Henry Tammen, another show business rival who owned the Sells-Floto Circus. Tammen was ruthless, and when the Two Bills show arrived in Tammen's home town of Denver, they were greeted on the show lot by the sheriff and his deputies. Tammen had used his influence in Denver to push a series of foreclosure suits through the courts demanding immediate repayment of Cody's $20,000 loan. Tammen "seized all cash on hand, and then sold all properties at auction. Buffalo Bill's Wild West show was bankrupt."[507]

Cody toured with the Sells-Floto Circus in 1914 and 1915 under contract and also tried his hand in the burgeoning film industry forming "The Col. W.F. Cody ('Buffalo Bill') Historical Pictures Co." in which he partnered again with Tammen and Tammen's business partner Frederick G. Bonfils. Cody sought to make a film entitled *The Last*

[505] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 150.
[506] Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 533.
[507] Warren, 537.

Indian War which would reenact scenes from the Plains such as the Ghost Dance and the massacre at Wounded Knee featuring real veterans of the Plains campaigns as well as Indian performers with whom Cody had a positive working relationship. The film did not fare well at the box-office and Cody did not seek out another major film project. Tammen released Cody from his contract with the Sells-Floto Circus at the end of the 1915 season. Tammen refused to cancel Cody's $20,000 debt but agreed to stop taking payments from Cody's salary. Tammen also claimed ownership of the title "Buffalo Bill's Original Wild West." Cody then partnered with yet another rival show, the 101 Ranch, to put up the "Buffalo Bill (Himself) Pageant of Military Preparedness and 101 Ranch Wild West," but the aging showman was losing steam. William F. Cody passed away of an unspecified illness on January 10, 1917.[508]

Wild West shows, such as the 101 Ranch continued, but their popularity declined dramatically due to several changing currents in popular culture. The public was still interested in tales of the Wild West, but in the first decades of the twentieth-century, audiences began to crave a new kind of Western. Cody's Wild West show trafficked heavily in domestic scenes that glorified the sanctity of the home, such as the famous "Attack on the Settlers' Cabin" scene in Cody's show where heroic cowboys saved women and children from a brutal Indian attack. The new Western-focused stories, soon termed simply "westerns" turned away from these domestic themes. Scholars often credit Owen Wister's 1902 novel *The Virginian* with creating the western and the central trope of "a hero who ventures out to battle evil against the wishes of the good woman….in order to defend the honor he embodies. In the western, heroes must renounce domesticity

[508] Warren, 538–41.

to fight villainy."[509] Cody did remove the "Settler's Cabin" scene from his show in his later years; however, the Wild West Show did not embrace the message of this new western media. A little later on, a new stage cowboy rose to fame on the vaudeville circuit, this time with a persona that differed significantly from Cody's in a different manner. Cowboy comedian Will Rogers fashioned himself in to a populist figure, an everyman character whose comedy acts were often satirical critiques of what he felt were the greatest issues in society at the time, individualism and capitalism.[510] The two new types of cowboys, the "lone rider" who forsakes domestic life to battle evil and the lighthearted populist hero, pushed Cody's chivalrous domestic defender persona to the background. Although Cody's was not the only Wild West show, it was the original and the model for competitors, and as such, even after Cody's death other Wild West shows stuck to the Buffalo Bill model. With Buffalo Bill's passing, not only did the genre lose its most famous figure, but Wild West proprietors did not adapt to the popular themes of the day. This failure to "keep up" with new thematic trends contributed to loss of interest in the traditional Wild West show.

The other major factor that impacted the Wild West Show was film. Today we must acknowledge the enduring power of the western and the cultural impact of on-screen cowboys such as John Wayne. Western films began decades before Wayne's first screen appearance. *The Virginian* was published just as story films were gaining market share, and one of the earliest western films, *The Great Train Robbery* came out just one year later in 1903. As Louis Warren points out, these shows were not "Wild West shows

[509] Warren, 537.
[510] May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way*.

brought to the screen" in terms of thematic content as discussed above; however, many stars of the sawdust ring did transition to film.[511] One of the most famous cowboy-actors was Tom Mix, whose conflict with the Ringling Brothers was described in the previous chapter. Mix transitioned from live entertainment to screen, as did many of his fellow Wild West show performers, becoming some of the film industry's first stunt people.[512] The changing socio-cultural circumstances of the early twentieth century and the rise of film made the Wild West show in the Buffalo Bill tradition obsolete. Cody's talent and celebrity alone were not enough to keep his show afloat and he found himself in serious financial peril after the loss of his business partners Salsbury and Bailey. That the name and character Buffalo Bill have lived on as part of the American mythology of the "Old West" speaks to Cody's personal cultural impact; however, his inability to keep his popular show afloat after losing the business masterminds who ran operations behind-the-scenes illustrates the extent to which managerial skill had become a necessity in the entertainment industry.

Bailey's death was, of course, of monumental impact in the circus industry as well. As described in the previous chapter, after they purchased Bailey's estate, the Ringling Brothers maintained control of the circus industry throughout the 1920s, running a profitable business. They faced some challenges during this decade from a group of competitors who formed the American Circus Corporation (ACC); however, in 1929, John Ringling, then the only surviving brother, purchased the ACC, cementing his monopoly of the business. The stock market crash of that year took a heavy toll on

[511] Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 526.
[512] Andrew Brodie, *Shooting Cowboys and Indians: Silent Western Films, American Culture, and the Birth of Hollywood* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2003).

Ringling. The film industry struggled financially during the Great Depression but maintained relatively stable attendance figures and emerged from the 1930s as the dominant form of entertainment in the United States.[513] This was not the case for the circus where attendance declined dramatically, so much so that in 1931 the show closed for the season on September 14, the earliest closing in the Ringlings' history.[514] John was unable to meet the interest payment on a loan and in 1932 he was voted out of control of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus by creditors and partners. General management of the show was passed on to Samuel Gumpertz, previously a producer of kinetoscope films, who restored the show to profitability. John Ringling died in 1936 "a sick, defeated, and crushed man," having lost much of his fortune.[515]

The Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus continued performing until 2017, but as audiences grew accustomed to the on-demand nature of new entertainments, beginning with continuous vaudeville and continuing with film, radio, and television, waiting for "circus day" no longer had the same appeal. Film impacted both the circus and the Wild West show in that audiences no longer had to wait an entire year to see spectacular feats, especially given that many of the first "actuality" films featured variety performers. This is certainly one reason that helps explain the decline of traveling amusements; however, the cultural context alone does not offer a full explanation. One must also consider the social and business contexts of this transitional period in the

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[513] Philip John Davis and Morgan Iwan, eds., *Hollywood and the Great Depression: American Film, Politics and Society in the 1930s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); John F. Kasson, *The Little Girl Who Fought the Great Depression: Shirley Temple and 1930s America* (New York, NY: Norton, 2014); Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).
[514] Apps, *Ringlingville, USA*, 211.
[515] Apps, 214.

entertainment industry. Changing urban demographics contributed to the transformation, and ultimately elimination, of the minstrel show. The decline of Victorian social mores that sanctified domesticity led to lack of interest in Buffalo Bill-style Western narratives. Ziegfeld's transformation of the "girlie show" in to a socially acceptable form of entertainment, may have made the respectable, "Sunday School" content of the traveling circus less exciting. Innovation in distribution strategies, such as shifting the burden of travel costs on to performers in vaudeville, and leasing projectors and film reels to independent exhibitors created greater economies of scale for vaudeville and film, allowing them to put their entertainment before more patrons than a traveling a show could imagine. Traveling amusement impresarios successfully utilized tactics inspired by the industrial sector in growing and managing their businesses. The next generation of entertainment impresarios took these tactics and expanded upon them, and, in a move that reeks of Schumpeterian "creative destruction," used the business strategies originally developed by traveling amusements to push those traveling amusements out of the lime light.

CONCLUSION

In 1927, Americans witnessed another entertainment revolution with the debut of *The Jazz Singer*, the first feature-length film with synchronous recorded sound. Although *The Jazz Singer* ushered in the age of the "talkie," it also had unmistakable connections to live entertainments and traveling amusements. The film, which was based on a play, follows main character Jakie Rabinowitz as he defies his traditional Jewish family's expectations and becomes a jazz singer. At the film's climax, Rabinowitz spots his mother sitting in the front row at New York's Winter Garden Theatre as he performs the minstrel show tune "My Mammy," complete with blackface makeup. The man who played Rabinowitz, Al Jolson, began his career in show business by running away to join the Walter L. Main Circus when he was 14. Although he did not stay with the circus long, Jolson continued performing in vaudeville, and became famous for his blackface musical-comedy acts. Jolson also appeared for a time with Lew Dockstader's Minstrels and in numerous Broadway productions.[516] All of this speaks to the interconnectedness of the entertainment industry across media in the first decades of the twentieth century. Motion pictures, even talking pictures, did not immediately obliterate live entertainment. That vaudeville and minstrelsy remained popular film subjects further illustrates audiences' continued interest in these entertainment traditions. But even more than providing the

[516] Toll, *On With The Show*, 306.

performers and subject matter for films, traveling amusements created the foundations on which the movie industry was built.

In their work to legitimize the entertainment industry, traveling amusement proprietors established audience expectations that all future producers of popular culture would have to meet. Amusement impresarios used the latest technology to create spectacular entertainments and to develop audiences and distribution networks for those entertainments. By publicly showcasing their labor management processes, amusement owners broadcast the message that their companies were professional, organized, and systematic. Amusement owners also made themselves in to celebrities, developing brands concentrated on the image of the producer. And finally, traveling amusements consolidated the commercial entertainment industry in to the hands of a few.

In the process of becoming big business, traveling amusements became "big." With the use of the railroad, initially a decision born of financial considerations, amusement proprietors capitalized on audiences' desires for spectacle and novelty by expanding the size of their productions and incorporating dazzling displays of new technology like the electric light. Not only did transportation and communication technologies build the infrastructure for national amusement corporations, but the use of new technologies also had ramifications for cultural aesthetics. The circus, where audiences witnessed three larger-than-life performances simultaneously in three rings, and even Haverly's minstrel shows with hundreds of performers, entertained through overwhelm. Even more than the "panoramic perception" engendered by rail travel, traveling amusements fostered what Scott Bukatman termed "kaleidoscopic perception." This mode of viewing was equal parts "delirium, kinesis, and immersion…phenomena

associated with the lived experience of urban concentration and industrial expansion. Technology becomes enveloping, inescapable, and incomprehensible."[517] While, as Bukatman noted, this may have had the effect of soothing anxieties about modernization and urbanization in the late nineteenth century, it also "demonstrated a developing taste" for kaleidoscopic perception and an "aesthetic of astonishment" that only intensified with increased technological development over the course of the twentieth century.[518] From film, to television, to streaming, and now to virtual reality and "4D" experiences, spectacle, motion and immersion continue to attract. And in live entertainment as well, audiences expect spectacle. Broadway shows regularly feature impressive technical apparatuses, such as lifts and revolves, and the use of multimedia in stage productions has become so important in the theatrical world that several major university theatre programs, such as Yale and DePaul, now offer degrees in technical theatre with a focus on projection design. Traveling amusements, through their incorporation of emerging technology both on stage and in the infrastructure behind the scenes, helped establish the continued expectation that entertainment will be technologically dazzling.

With this use of technology, traveling amusement proprietors also used modern labor management techniques as an advertisement. By making the process of unloading trains and erecting tents part of the show, amusement proprietors created a form of performative scientific management that broadcast messages of their shows' sophistication and respectability. This highly public display of labor management in an entertaining manner acted as a hegemonic force in support of industrial capitalism.

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[517] Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2003), 114.
[518] Bukatman, 115.

Audiences enjoyed watching this highly-structured labor, and compared amusement laborers to machines and armies in a positive manner. As in other forms of industrial labor, amusement workers were forced to give up control of their labor, becoming subject to train schedules and stopwatches. This was just one of the many challenges facing amusement laborers, along with grueling working conditions, little chance for rest, and an ever-present threat of injury, whether from an on-the-job accident or violence from townsfolk hostile to outsiders.

Still, some amusement workers returned season after season and found solace in the showman's culture. The pictures, poems, and stories in company route books provide evidence that some workers did feel loyalty to one another, as well as a sense of a shared identity as "showmen," workers set apart from the rest of the modern industrial labor force. As a form of negotiated loyalty, amusement proprietors tacitly permitted some worker traditions, such as the "Hey Rube" that ran counter to their publicity statements ensuring audiences that these were safe, respectable places of amusement. Higher-ups also participated in recreational activities and fraternal organizations alongside laborers. Whether genuine or not, amusement impresarios painted themselves as "men of the people," and friendly, sometimes fatherly, figures within their company. This proto-welfare capitalism provided some marginal benefits for workers, while for company owners it aided in their larger goals of crafting public reputations as respectable businessmen.

The robber barons of show business or captains of the amusement industry, men like Bailey, Haverly, Barnum, and Salsbury were emblematic of the new type of businessman who emerged in the late nineteenth century. During the Gilded Age, money

and the desire to make money were no longer taboo subjects. Karen Halttunen described how in the first half of the nineteenth century, "Americans believed that the key to success was character formation."[519] For men, success was dependent on the cultivation of values such as industry, frugality and sobriety. While interest in these virtues did not entirely disappear in the late nineteenth century, Halttunen argued that several other qualities took a new prominence in success ideology: "aggressiveness, charm, and the arts of the confidence man."[520] Amusement impresarios embodied these three characteristics in a highly public manner, making them important cultural figures who represented this shift in values. As noted throughout this study, traveling amusements began the nineteenth century with a somewhat sullied reputation. Considered "humbugs," or "fakirs," amusement proprietors were not among the social elite of the antebellum era, but by the end of the century, traveling amusements were performing before royalty and P.T. Barnum's memoir was one of the best-selling books behind the Bible.[521]

Steven Mihm, one of the historians writing in the "history of capitalism" field, recently edited a new edition of P.T. Barnum's autobiography. In his introduction to the volume, Mihm asserted that "it's next to impossible to grasp the nature of American capitalism—much less American culture—without revisiting Barnum."[522] Mihm, along with James Cook and other scholars have depicted Barnum as a socially acceptable con man who utilized the "arts of deception" to put on playful frauds that audiences, for the most part, perceived as "good, clean, Yankee fun."[523] But Barnum was significant not

[519] Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 201.
[520] Halttunen, 202.
[521] Barnum, *Life of P.T. Barnum*, 2.
[522] Barnum, 4.
[523] Cook, *Arts of Deception*, 9.

only for the content of his amusements, but also for the way he packaged and sold them. As Mihm puts it, "humbug was at the heart of something bigger. Barnum built his empire using methods that would become standard features of modern capitalism: marketing, advertising, and public relations."[524] I concur with Mihm's assessment of Barnum, but throughout this study I have also argued that to fully understand the role of entertainment and entertainment producers in a capitalist society, it is necessary to look at the industry as a whole. Although he was a formidable figure, P.T. Barnum did not act alone. Barnum's fellow amusement proprietors such as Bailey, Haverly, and Salsbury, as well as middle managers such as McCaddon, helped make entertainment into "big business."

Much like the other famed Gilded Age industrialists like Carnegie or Rockefeller, entertainment impresarios such as James Bailey and J.H. Haverly were celebrity-businessmen. Major newspapers reported on the state of their businesses, their luxurious homes and their major mergers and acquisitions . Bailey was even included in the very first New York Social Register, and a profile of him appeared in a 1902 book titled "Captains of Industry."[525] As historians today work toward creating an interdisciplinary "history of capitalism," it is important to acknowledge the impact of entertainment workers on both popular culture and business, just as their Gilded Age contemporaries clearly did. These men pursued their naked profit-motive by creating a national market for entertainment and the infrastructure to serve consumers, shape their desires, and deliver an entertainment commodity meant for a mass audience.

[524] Barnum, *Life of P.T. Barnum*, 3.
[525] *The Social Register of New York*; Allen, "James Anthony Bailey."

Entertainment, celebrity, and business remain interconnected today, perhaps nowhere more visible than Donald Trump's career. Trump's reality TV persona on *The Apprentice* was entirely based on him projecting the image that he was a successful business mogul. Trump, who commentators have frequently compared to P.T. Barnum, used this as a selling point in his 2016 Presidential election campaign. Despite the fact that his businesses were not as successful as he told the public, many believed that the reality-TV persona was indeed reality.[526] This idea that Trump would be able to run a country as successfully as he ran his businesses increased his fitness for office in the minds of these supporters. Trump, ever the showman, leveraged that public image of the celebrity-businessman as part of his presidential campaign, demonstrating the real-life consequences of projecting "respectability" through one's identity as businessman. This was true of these Gilded Age impresarios as well. Although several of them faced bankruptcy, arrests for financial misconduct, and lost fortunes in stock-market speculation, they continued to tell audiences that they were successes, "rags-to-riches" capitalists, as a marketing tool for their shows.

Finally, the consolidation of traveling amusements, as represented by James Bailey and his successors the Ringling Brothers, was only a preview of the media consolidation that would intensify throughout the twentieth century and in to the twenty

[526] Michael M. Grynbaum and Ashley Parker, "Donald Trump the Political Showman, Born on 'The Apprentice,'" *The New York Times*, July 16, 2016; James Poniewozik, "Donald Trump Was the Real Winner of 'The Apprentice,'" *The New York Times*, September 28, 2020; Paul Schrodt, "Why 'The Apprentice' Made Donald Trump's Political Campaign Possible," *Business Insider*, November 8, 2016; Michael Greenwald, "How the 'Greatest Showman' Paved the Way for Donald Trump," *The Conversation*, December 10, 2017; Samantha Schmidt, "Why People Keep Comparing Donald Trump to P.T. Barnum, of Circus Fame," *The Washington Post*, January 17, 2017.

first. As traveling amusements grew larger, the number of substantial competitors grew smaller. Unsatisfied with non-compete agreements, Bailey partnered with or purchased competitors to shrink the playing field in the amusement industry. Had Bailey chosen to move in to minstrelsy and perhaps partner with or buy out Haverly he might have achieved a true monopoly on traveling amusements. Although critics, mostly those who were also within the amusement industry, decried the "circus trust," there were no major consequences for amusement impresarios who participated in anticompetitive activity as enforcement of the Sherman Act was relatively weak at the time. Although the Supreme Court has since launched several antitrust major cases against media and entertainment corporations, such as the 1948 Paramount decision, corporate consolidation is still a common feature in today's entertainment landscape. Between 1900-1925, there were more than sixty-four film studios in the United States, but after 1930, only eight studios brought in 95 percent of film revenues.[527] Today, reports find that just six corporations control 90 percent of all American media including film, television, and news.[528] For good or bad, traveling amusement impresarios were part of the "first wave" of entertainment and media consolidation during the Great Merger Movement of 1896-1904 and set a precedent of anticompetitive practices.

The types of traveling amusements that were popular at the turn of the twentieth century have now faded from the entertainment market. Blackface performances and the stereotypical characters from the minstrel stage unfortunately persisted (and in many

[527] Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.
[528] James B. Stewart, "When Media Mergers Limit More Than Competition," *The New York Times*, July 25, 2014.

ways, still persist) in radio, film, and television, but the traditional tripartite minstrel show disappeared as vaudeville and film entered the scene. Wild West Shows are also relics of the past, as cowboy performers found new homes in Hollywood. Modern day rodeos feature some of the trick riding and roping that were once staples of the Wild West ring; however, today, rodeo is a considered a "sport," rather than a "show." The pageantry, historical reenactments, and especially Native American content of the Wild West show, are not present at rodeos. The circus, while it outlasted other traveling amusements, is perhaps now breathing its dying breaths. The close of the Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth in 2017 was the end of a nearly 150-year old institution. The Ringling show's greatest direct competitor, the Big Apple Circus, described as the "off-off Broadway of the Ringling Bros." has also been struggling this last decade, filing for bankruptcy the same year the Greatest Show on Earth ended for good.[529] Cirque du Soleil is the most recognizable circus brand today, although the form of Cirque's shows differs in many significant ways from the big top productions of old. Many of Cirque's shows are non-touring productions housed in permanent theatres, and several Cirque shows feature adult themes and nudity. Cirque du Soleil is also struggling financially and filed for bankruptcy in 2020 with nearly $1 billion in debt, the COVID-19 pandemic having affected the show greatly.[530] Both Cirque du Soleil and the Big Apple Circus found buyers and avoided closing permanently for the time being; however, their financial struggles reflect waning interest in the circus.

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[529] Johnathan Stempel, "New York's Big Apple Circus Files For Bankruptcy," *Reuters*, November 21, 2016; Patrick J. Sauer, "How the Big Apple Circus Clawed Its Way Back From Bankruptcy," *Medium*, December 17, 2019.
[530] Jordan Valinsky, "Cirque Du Soleil Files For Bankruptcy Protection and Cutes 3,500 Jobs," *CNN*, June 29, 2020.

Despite their decline, the history of traveling amusements should not be read as a tragedy. Although minstrel shows and Wild West shows no longer exist, and the circus today is nowhere near as popular as it once was, the legacy of these amusement enterprises continues in the business practices of the entertainment industry today.

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