

“The Art of Remaining Useful:”
How Work and Survive in a Traveling Show

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History 452
11/24/12

Adam Bardy a workingman for Ringling recalled from his experience “there are two traditions you observe strictly in the circus if you expect to get very far. One is that you make yourself generally useful, the other that your usefulness continue even when the show cannot afford to pay you.”¹ This is a very important statement when understanding the life and labor in the circus during the early 1900's. The idea of usefulness defined circus workers and performers, from how they interacted with each other, to how animals were treated, to how important one became as he attempted to rise among the ranks. All of this was determined by how useful one was and how long one could remain so. The most important thing about an entity like the circus during the early years of the twentieth century was that money, above all else, was the supreme ruler and money was made and maintained by those who were willing to remain useful.

Usefulness was understood where a career in the circus was concerned. When P.T. Barnum hired Bob Sherwood, he made it clear that Sherwood would do anything and everything he wanted him to do. Barnum hired Sherwood to be a clown, among other things, such as a tightrope walker, horizontal bar performer and pantomimist. At the end of Sherwood's contract, Barnum was sure to add just one more thing. He made it clear that Sherwood was “to make himself generally useful.”² During this time, particularly throughout the Great Depression, many men were out of work. Skilled labor for circuses, such as trapeze artists, would have been difficult to replace compared to the unskilled labor of the workingman. However anyone, particularly those who lost their usefulness, could easily find themselves out of work in a time when other employment was not readily available. It is important to state that many people who found themselves employees of the circus did so because they were outliers of society. Most performers, even some workers, toiled all week long not because of the pay or the social status

¹Adam Bardy, *The Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy*, (Adam Bardy, 1986) 66.

²Bardy, 66.

working for the circus brought them. It was simply all they knew.

This is a different side of the circus than one would see today. There are several aspects that defined the circus of this era. Many scholarly sources have examined these hardships. But this paper will not focus solely on the hardships suffered by the workers or the performers, it will also argue that although there was racism and sexism throughout the circus, that even those within the normal gender and racial boundaries of those times, could possibly transcend the prejudices of the twenty first century to find stardom. Or, at the very least, circus workers could maintain a bed to sleep in and three meals a day, as long as the individual remained useful.

Scholarly work on this topic can be found in *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top* written by Janet M. Davis and published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2002. This is the most recent scholarly work pertaining to this topic. It discussed the hardships of workers and women, but added very little about people of color.³

In *Big Top Boss: John Ringling North and the Circus*, David Lewis Hammerstrom briefly discussed the segregation of the sexes and the living conditions on the trains. However, this source was mainly about John Ringling himself and never really got into the issue of gender and race. Hammerstrom did create a valuable argument about how strict and hard living conditions were for almost everyone involved with the show.⁴

Clicko, by Neil Parsons, is a biography about Franz Taibosh. It is the only scholarly source found about how people of color were treated in the circus, particularly with Ringling Brothers. It discussed how people of color were treated as sideshow performers when most of the

³Janet M Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁴David Lewis Hammerstrom, *Big Top Boss: John Ringling North and the Circus*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

other research only showed how men of color were treated as general laborers.⁵

Ringlingville USA: The Stupendous Story of Seven Brothers and Their Stunning Circus Success by Jerry Apps was more of an amateur history of the circus. However it has many primary sources that can be accessed directly from the text itself that help to look at the treatment of women in the circus.⁶ *Modoc* by Ralph Helfer⁷ and the journal article “*Killing the Elephant*”: *Murderous Beasts and the Thrill of Retribution* by Amy Louise Wood gave an argument for the treatment of animals and how if they lost their general usefulness they could go from being a star attraction to being executed publicly or sold.⁸

Highbrow Lowbrow argued that in the early twentieth century popular entertainment was beginning to take shape. No longer was entertainment exclusively for the upper class. Anyone could bring their family and enjoy the show. This is vital to this thesis because it will show why star performers were so important to the circus.⁹ In *Staging Race*, Sotiropoulos argued that in America during the twentieth century, people of color played stereotypes to sell to the white community what they thought they wanted to see as far as an African American act. However, they used those shows to introduce black culture to the white community.¹⁰ In *Rank Ladies* Kibler argued that although women during the early twentieth century were subject to exploitation like African Americans in *Staging Race* these women were providing for themselves in a time when work for women was not readily available. These sources pertain to vaudeville

⁵Neil Parsons, *Clicko: The Wild Dancing Bushman*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁶Jerry Apps, *Ringlingville USA: The Stupendous Story of Seven Siblings and their Stunning Circus Success*, (Baraboo: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2005).

⁷Ralph Helfer, *Modoc: The True Story of the Greatest Elephant That Ever Lived*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997).

⁸Amy Louise Wood, “*Killing the Elephant*”: *Murderous Beasts and the Thrill of Retribution*, *Journal of the Gilded Age & Progressive Era*, Jul2012, Vol. 11 Issue 3.

⁹Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988)

¹⁰Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

and the entertainment atmosphere of the early twentieth century not to the circus specifically.¹¹

Usefulness in the circus started at the bottom with the working man and rose to the highest ranking performer. Adam Bardy, a worker for Ringling during the early twentieth century said, “Circus Life in the roaring twenties was as rough and tough a life as anyone could ever imagine, on rainy days since most workers only had the clothes they had on their backs. It meant you would go to bed in the circus sleeping car at night and put your wet clothes on again the next morning. You had to wait for a sunny day to dry out.” This is representative of how hard life was as a worker.¹² Joe Mckennon remembered from his time with the circus that workers were also referred to as roustabouts.¹³ Roustabouts were the true heart and soul of the circus. Without them, nothing moved or was assembled. The stars needed the 'circus bums' to create the stage in order for them to shine. Although these men were the heartbeat of the show they, more than anyone else, had to remain generally useful. In return for his usefulness, a roustabout was given three meals a day and place to sleep. Many were glad to have some form of stability in their lives, although their living conditions were harsh and confining.¹⁴

In the world of roustabouts there was absolutely no notion of gender equality. Workers felt that their job should be void of women. It was strictly a man's world and each man understood the rules of being a roustabout. He followed his orders and minded his own business. Each workingman knew his place and in return for his obedience no one asked questions of him. He got “Three square meals a day, a place to flop, and enough money for booze.” Many men saw this world in the same light as the military of the day, a place of hard work and rough men doing

¹¹M. Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 199).

¹²Bardy, 10.

¹³Joe Mckennon, *Written by a Man Who Was There: Circus Lingo*, (Sarasota: Carnival Publishers, 1980) 5.

¹⁴Bardy, 34.

things women have no business doing.¹⁵

Tiny Kline's memoir was instrumental in forming this thesis. She said the life of workers was secretive, a place a man could escape his past. Kline worked around these men everyday during her career with Ringling. She recalled roustabouts were known only by a nickname, usually referring to where they were from or their nationality. The only people who knew their true name was the boss of their department and the cashier who paid their wages. Nicknames consisted of Boston, Dutch or Blackie, to name a few examples.¹⁶ It was easy for former convicts and trouble makers to join the ranks of the lowly roustabout so that when the train pulled into Sarasota at the end of each tour in November, it caused the local people to cringe.¹⁷

Ringling employed almost three times as many workers as it did performers and like all tent shows, tried to pay as little as possible to roustabouts. This was especially true during the Depression. Cheap labor was an asset to any show. Drifters often showed up without a penny and signed up for work.¹⁸ African American workingmen always made less than white workers. The salary recorded by Walter L. Main Circus showed that men of color were paid two dollars a week. White workers made three dollars a week.¹⁹ Kline, who worked for Ringling throughout the early 1900's, no doubt saw many working men come and go. She explained how any worker was expendable with a readily available group of unemployed men waiting to take his place. Although there was an uneasy element to the life of a roustabout, the circus could give one a secure feeling in harsh times. The men had regular work, with the promise of weekly pay. Kline understood the hardships endured in a traveling show. She also understood the security one could

¹⁵Jill Freedman, *Circus Days*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1975) 10.

¹⁶Tiny Kline, *Circus Queen and Tinker Bell: The Memoir of Tiny Kline*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008) 126.

¹⁷Hammerstrom, 45.

¹⁸ Hammerstrom, 45.

¹⁹Davis, 71.

feel from the regular employment the circus offered.²⁰ However if a roustabout lost his usefulness he was in danger of harsh punishment, such as steep fines or redlighting. Mckennon being a roustabout himself would have been aware of such punishments.²¹

The ways workingmen remained useful varied from day to day. After the first trains began to roll onto the lot around six in the morning and the placement of the tents were determined, things were unloaded and erected. Tents like the menagerie tent and the “big top” began to go up by the hands of the canvas men. African American workers and white workers were almost always separated into segregated work gangs.²²

The “big top” required particular attention. “The big top gang” was a special group of roustabouts consisting of eighty-five of the strongest canvas men. Those men were split into two groups.²³ One group set the stakes, the other used sledgehammers weighing seventeen to twenty four pounds. Using the sledges, the men stood in a circle and took turns hammering the stakes into the ground. The workers usually sang rhythmically as they hammered. The groups sang with their leader “I had a little dog/ his name was jack / he got killed/ on a railroad track.” When it took a few more beats to get the stake down, the leader added a musical “hit it hard, hit it, hit it!” Kline, although not a worker herself, would have seen these men setting up the circus grounds every morning.²⁴ Pictures depicted these groups of men at work (See figure 1).²⁵ As they worked another group called “pole riggers” placed the center pole into position on the ground so it could be lifted into place. Both tasks of hammering and setting the center pole took the workingmen a total of forty-five minutes.²⁶ It was hard work at the best of times but when inclement weather

²⁰Kline, 126.

²¹Mckennon, *Written by a Man Who Was There: Circus Lingo*.(Sarasota: Carnival Publishers, 1980) 5.

²²Davis, 71

²³Davis, 46.

²⁴Kline, 182.

²⁵“Ringling Bros. Circus,” (Oct. 26, 1902), Accessed Nov. 14, 2012, <http://circusworld.wisconsinhistory.org/>.

²⁶Davis, 47.

was added, like rain and cold, it made the task that much more miserable. It made for slippery ropes and frozen fingers. Add wind to the mixture and putting up a tent was all but impossible.²⁷

After the initial work on the big top was finished more men were signaled by a whistle to start raising the poles and piecing together the canvas for the sides and the roof.²⁸ After working for Ringling Mckennon recalled life for the common worker. It was a long and hard process to get the tents up before the crowds began to arrive. However, this was by no means the end to the roustabouts' day. After the menagerie and "big top" tents were up, everyone had other tasks to attend to to remain useful. The workingmen were required to be a jack of all trades. Many, after setting up the tents, also worked in the concession department. These salesmen were called candy butchers. They were divided into two groups, men who sold concessions outside and seat butchers who sold concessions in the stands. This was one of the many ways workers had to learn to multitask in their daily lives.²⁹

A better example of how workers had to remain generally useful is apparent when one examines the dining tent. This tent was the one structure that everyone working a show was guaranteed to enter at some point during the day. Tiny Kline, who worked for Ringling as a performer, remembered the daily lives of the staff as being strenuous and long. She recalled how the dining tent was the first tent to go up and was constructed by the cooks and their staff. Their day started early and ended late. The dining tent was put up around six in the morning. Dinner was the last meal served on the lot, around four or five o'clock in the evening. By six, all plates were washed and stored in crates, ready to be shipped to the next destination. After the dishes, the cook and dishwashers began to remove stakes and roll up the canvas of the tent. That was,

²⁷Candy Stand Book, Ringling Bros, Show, Season of 1906 in Jerry Apps, *Ringlingville: The Stupendous Story of Seven Siblings and Their Stunning Circus Success*, (Baraboo: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2005) 128.

²⁸Davis 49.

²⁹Joe Mckennon, *Written by a Man Who Was There: Logistics American Circus*, (Sarasota: Carnival Publishers, 1977) 9.

however, not the end of their day. Throughout the day and while the show was still going on, the workers had already begun to break down the 'tent city' they had created earlier that morning. It was now the dining tent staff's job to help break down the remainder of the canvas. They called this job "hanging around for cherry pie," because these tasks were expected of them without pay. These tasks could also include picking up chairs from the grandstand and stacking them in wagons or tearing down the menagerie tent. Their day ended around ten or eleven o'clock at night. These men had truly learned the art of "remaining generally useful." The next morning there was nothing left to remind the townspeople of what was once there except for rings of sawdust and puddles of unsold pink lemonade spilled onto the ground.³⁰

Workingmen were almost always separated from performers. The dining tent was set up with a partition in the center. Performers ate on one side and roustabouts on the other. On the workers' side of the partition, white workers sat at one end while African Americans sat at the other. It was forbidden for a male worker or staff member to talk to an unmarried female performer. If he was caught doing so he could be fined and if he persisted he could eventually be fired.³¹ Being fired meant one could be redlighted. Being redlighted referred to when a circus no longer had use of a worker and would throw him off the train, either at the next stop or sometimes while the train was still moving. This recollection of punishment comes from Mckennon's own personal experience as a circus roustabout.³²

Bardy, a roustabout for Ringling, remembered what it felt like to be in the presence of John Ringling and the other men who ran the show. He recalled how the bosses seemed like royalty to most workers and made sure to maintain the strict hierarchy within the show. Roustabouts were glad to simply catch a glimpse of a person such as John Ringling. He had a

³⁰Kline, 177, 178.

³¹George Speaight, *A History of the Circus*, (London: Tantivy Press, 1980) 152.

³²Mckennon, *Written by a Man Who Was There: Circus Lingo*

special chair set up in the entrance of the “big top.” Often he sat there with the important men who ran the circus. The workers often tried to steal a look at Ringling and his circus royalty.³³

The only performers workers were permitted to talk to were clowns. Workers and clowns maintained a strange relationship. Roustabouts were notorious for spending money on booze and gambling. On the other hand, clowns were notorious for being trustworthy and honest. This led some of the roustabouts to give half of their weekly earnings to the clowns to hold during the duration of the tour. The clowns generally wanted nothing in return and asked no questions. They returned the money when asked and the only thing that could break a deal was if the worker did not give the clown his money every week or asked to draw out the money before a tour was over. If this happened, the clown returned all the money and refused to save for that worker again.³⁴

There was a hierarchy throughout circus life that ruled everyone and was determined by one's usefulness combined with one's popularity as a performer. Since roustabouts had no chance at popularity and therefore made little money for the show, they were naturally at the bottom of the hierarchy. Kline, as a performer, was entangled in the social hierarchy that ruled circus life. She, and everyone on a show, had to learn how to maintain the social structure.³⁵ Levine believed that in the early 1900's entertainment was less about the upper class and more about the middle class. Using Levine's argument about the emergence of popular culture hierarchy in the early twentieth century, one can see why popularity played such a big part in circus life. If anyone was able to come and see the show, the boss wanted acts that pulled in as much revenue as possible. The bigger the star, the more people filled the seats. More people in the stands meant more money for the show. This, in turn, caused that performer to rise in the overall hierarchy.³⁶

³³Bardy, 34.

³⁴George Bishop, *The World of Clowns*, (Los Angeles: Brooke House Publishers, 1976) 56.

³⁵Kline, 118.

³⁶Levine, 162, 164.

Slightly above the roustabout was the clown. If in the world of roustabouts usefulness meant multitasking oneself with various hard labor, usefulness to a performer boiled down to the generation of revenue. Star performers generated the most revenue and clowns were rarely star performers.³⁷ Fred Bradna was the equestrian director for Ringling for forty years. The equestrian director, as Bradna described it was “the stage manager and master of ceremonies of the entire performance.”³⁸ Bradna was responsible for all performers, giving him an innate understanding of every act. Bradna recalled how what it meant to be a clown slowly changed over the years. Clowns had to defy the imagination by juggling, acting or tumbling. Their personalities made each of them unique. Their acts were hard and dangerous. Harry Ritley, who fell from a pyramid of tables took such a jolt upon landing that when he retired nobody cared to copy his act.³⁹

The clown's act originated as a solo performance that was often seen as social commentary. Slivers Oakley used to perform a solo act where he played baseball and argued with the umpire, poking fun at America's obsession with its national pastime. Later, the circus bosses became torn about the image of the clown. John and Charley Ringling argued over the future of the acts.⁴⁰ Fred Bradna was not only the equestrian director he was also the ringmaster for Ringling at the time⁴¹ and he recalled “Mr. John maintained that the long build-up the solo clowns required to establish rapport with the onlookers slowed the show and therefore hurt production. Mr Charley as emphatically insisted that the clowns be allowed to develop their art in their own way.” To John, the clowns were not living up to their usefulness by slowing show.

³⁷Bishop, 56.

³⁸Bradna, 5.

³⁹Fred Bradna, *The Big Top: My Forty Years With the Greatest Show on Earth*, (New York:Simon and Schuster, 1952) 217, 225.

⁴⁰Bradna, 216, 217.

⁴¹*A Day at the Circus by Our Special Artist*, Palestine Daily Herald, October 14, 1905, Image 3, Accessed Oct, 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

He was afraid the long buildup would bore the crowd and turn away audiences, therefore costing the show money. After Charles' death in 1925, John eliminated the clown solo. Bradna felt as a result that today most of the clowns run around the hippodrome track doing little production numbers singly or in groups, but they are allowed very little time in which to project.⁴²

Emmett Kelly, a famous clown for Ringling, remembered an interesting aspect to the life of the clown was the way they were extremely accepting of one another. They formed somewhat of a family unit among themselves. Kelly said of this relationship, "Some clowns aren't amusing except when they are working in a performance. Others are naturally dead-pan and seldom wear a smile except the one they painted on, but nearly all are good-humored and we all get along pretty well. In a circus, we mostly have to work so hard there is little time for fighting anything except time space and weather." Clowns seemed to have a different idea of hierarchy. In a world of strict boundaries it is interesting to see a group of people who were willing to put those boundaries aside even if it was only among themselves. Clowns were not as competitive like the rest of the acts in a show. They were more content with their place among the hierarchy.⁴³

Tiny Kline, a performer for Ringling, was subject to the greatest symbol of status among the "big top" performers, the dressing room. Kline recalled that the location of each trunk revealed the performer's position within the hierarchy. The trunks were set up in rows. The first row was the most spacious and reserved for star performers. The last rows of the dressing room were considered the worst because of their location. The performers in the last rows were beside a section of canvas left open for all of the performers to leave and make their way to the "big top." Not only did the person end up with a smaller space, but also encountered constant foot traffic and bad weather, often becoming drenched when it rained. In the men's tent the clowns were the

⁴²Bradna, 216, 217.

⁴³Emmett Kelly, *Clown: My Life in Tatters and Smiles*, (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1954) 267.

lowest, but were the only exception to the dressing room hierarchy.⁴⁴ With the potential for rain, clowns were allowed to be placed one row farther in because of their makeup. Instead, the last row was reserved for western acts since their props and costumes were made of leather and could withstand the weather.⁴⁵ Fred Bradna the stage manager for Ringling remembers how eventually because of the weather conditions and because clowns were constantly coming in and out of the dressing tent as they were the acts that entertained the crowd while the star performers set up the next act, they were eventually given their own dressing room called “clown alley.”⁴⁶

Kline started her career as a burlesque dancer. She remembered what it was like to be part of dressing room politics. On the women's side of the dressing tent equestrian acts, such as bareback riders, or aerialists held the prime spots. The last spots were reserved for ballet girls, statue girls and burlesque dancers.⁴⁷ Statue girls were usually topless or scantily clad, painted white, bronze, or black with grease paint. Statue girls stood perfectly still during the show to imitate famous works of art. They were seen as low in status because they were not as useful as star performers in bringing in revenue. Their acts were not dangerous and were seen as trivial and less skilled by many of the other performers.⁴⁸ The highest paid performers could receive up to \$350 a week, whereas ballet and statue girls in 1906 only made seven to ten dollars a week.⁴⁹

Life for women in the circus was strict. The rules were said to apply to all employees but most rules were made for and applied to women in particular. Off the stage women were not “to dress in flashy, loud style” they had to be neat and modest. They were not allowed to visit with family in cities where the show was appearing without permission. Women were not allowed to

⁴⁴Kline, 118.

⁴⁵Bishop, 55.

⁴⁶Bradna, 223.

⁴⁷Kline, 118.

⁴⁸Davis, 84.

⁴⁹Ringling Brothers Performers Ledger, 1906 in Jerry Apps, *Ringlingville: The Stupendous Story of Seven Siblings and Their Stunning Circus Success*, (Baraboo: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2005) 128.

stay at hotels or to talk or visit with male members of the show. “Accidental” meetings in town were not tolerated. This played right into the idea of remaining useful. Performers who would tarnish the wholesome name of a family show such as Ringling and cost the show revenue could quickly find themselves no longer useful. Charles Ringling even stated that these rules may seem harsh but management has learned through experience that they are necessary.⁵⁰

In many cases it was argued that the rules were put in place to protect women, but since the circus was only concerned with usefulness and profit those in charge also sought to exploit women. Sexual displays at the circus escaped state regulation. State officials not only ignored the circus' spectacle of female nudity, they condoned it.⁵¹ Women were seen in some cases as sexual objects and nothing more when it came to the circus. An account from Howard Bone, who worked for a sideshow, demonstrated through personal observation what it may have been like for a woman who was not considered a star attraction.

Step right up gents! We got em! We got em all!... (Velma steps onto the platform), Princess Arabia with a taste of hoochie-koochie she used to do for the Sultan himself before she escaped to the U.S.A. (Velma goes into her pelvic dance. She bumps toward the crowd)...Now you're wondering if shes got that red hair in...er...'other places' on her body? Why don't you find out? All it takes is twenty-five cents, two bits, one quarter of a dollar...for a million dollar show.

Sometimes in order to ensure ones usefulness an individual had to use other talents and skill sets not used by the star performers to generate revenue.⁵²

Kibler argued in *Rank Ladies*, that in a time when work was not always available for women, there were situations in which women may have chosen to become involved with exploitative means of employment. Kibler relates her argument to Vaudeville from turn of the

⁵⁰Charles Ringling, Ringling Brothers, “Suggestions and Rules: Employees,” ca. 1900 in Jerry Apps, *Ringlingville: The Stupendous Story of Seven Siblings and Their Stunning Circus Success*, (Baraboo: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2005) 43.

⁵¹Apps, 43.

⁵²Howard Bone, *Sideshow: My Life With Geeks, Freaks and Vagabonds in the Carny Trade*, (Northville: Sun Dog Press, 2001) 72.

century America. However the social situation of women outside of popular culture was generally the same. When taking that into account Kibler's argument can also be applied to the cultural stage of the circus, because like everyone else who was employed with the circus it gave them a regular sense of security. At least a single woman could support herself even if it meant doing the more unsavory and demeaning acts performed for the traveling show.⁵³

The more revenue one made for a show the more one made on a weekly basis. This was true in most cases and sometimes women even made more than men. Lilian Leitzel, one of the biggest stars in Ringling history, made two hundred dollars a week in 1917. Lizzie Rooney, a bareback rider, made fifty dollars a week. Her brother Charles, who was also a bareback rider, only made fifteen dollars a week because he was lesser known. Most of the time, women were paid much less. Sometimes they were only added on to the pay of their male counterparts if they were married or on a team and were not usually compensated individually for their performance. Harry Brandon, a clown with Gollmar Brothers, was paid thirty-five dollars a week when he performed with his wife. The following year he only made twenty-five dollars a week without his wife. Because of these situations it can be difficult to determine actual wage distribution between males and females. Although it would seem that in Brandon's case his wife only made ten dollars per week. Krao "The Missing Link" Farini, a female Sumatran sideshow performer only made fifty dollars a week. She was considered to be one of the highest paid sideshow acts in the circus because of her popularity.⁵⁴

However when one compares a star sideshow act like Farini, who made fifty dollars a week, to Leitzel's two hundred, there seems to be a clear gap between white and non-white performers. Perhaps there was no real difference since they performed in two different arenas

⁵³Kibler. 143,145.

⁵⁴Davis, 67, 68.

within the same circus, sideshow act versus headlining star. The true divide is apparent in that a person of color, like Farini, had no place in the minds of the bosses in the center ring. The sideshow was the only place for people of color to have a chance to perform. Consequently, they were much less useful to the circus in that capacity and their wages clearly reflected that fact.⁵⁵

For this reason, many famous sideshow acts centered around people of color. Howard Bone recalled a man named Steve, also known as “The Wild Man.” “The Wild Man” entered a pit filled with non-venomous snakes at the beginning of his act. Bone recalled that if no snakes were available chickens were used instead. Once in the pit, “The Wild Man” began to writhe and drool. Bone remembered grabbing a sledgehammer and beating the side of the pit to “prevent the wild savage from escaping.” Then the spectators watched as the actor held up a snake or chicken to show that it was real. He grabbed it with his mouth and bit off its head. Men of color had to play savages because that was what people paid to see. Based on racist preconceptions white audiences thought these men were exotic and unusual. In truth these men were nothing like the “savages” they portrayed in their acts, that is what people wanted to believe about them so that was the way they were sold to the public. That was their way of remaining useful to the show.⁵⁶

Franz Taibosh was a sideshow actor billed as Clicko, “The Wild Dancing Bushman.” Taibosh was provided with this fictional identity to appeal to the stereotypes that permeated society during the early twentieth century. He was portrayed as a savage for the entertainment of a white audience. In truth, Franz was a “direct” descendent of the tribal king, Matsatedi Taaibosh, who was the leader of the Korana clan in Southern Africa.⁵⁷ Taibosh is pictured in his costume giving some idea about his fictional identity (See Figure 2).⁵⁸ Before he was hired by Ringling,

⁵⁵Davis, 67.

⁵⁶Bone, 23, 25.

⁵⁷Parsons, 1.

⁵⁸“Publicity Postcard of Clio Wild Dancing Bushman,” (1928), In, Neil Parsons, *Clicko the Wild Dancing Bushman*,

Taibosh danced all over the world. However, he had to avoid certain areas where people threw stones or rotten eggs at him because they thought of him as being unacceptable simply because he was black.⁵⁹

Once Taibosh was hired by Ringling, “the upstart Wild Dancing Bushman” replaced the cone-headed “Zip the Pinhead” claiming the latter's position of sideshow stardom. Clicko stood on a stage outside the sideshow. He used a ukelele to attract crowds, despite the fact that he did not know how to play it. Although nothing about his act was genuine, people gathered around him and bought his ten cent cards. Taibosh was playing Clicko to remain useful to the show. Taibosh played his ukelele in return for a small amount of money, food and place to sleep.⁶⁰

Another person who played into the racial stereotypes of the early 1900's was Clicko's rival “Zip The Pinhead.” Kline remembered Zip fondly; they worked for Ringling at the same time and developed somewhat of a friendship. She recalled that Zip was born William Henry Johnson. He was the oldest, most established freak in the sideshow at the time. He was an African American man who started his career by playing the missing link for P.T. Barnum. He eventually inherited the title of the “What Is It?”⁶¹ When Clicko replaced him as the sideshow star, Zip reportedly became extremely jealous. Zip was intent on keeping his status in the hierarchy by imitating Clicko. In order to make himself more useful “he wore a white night shirt, which he whirled around in with mock savagery, making threatening gestures before dissolving into smiles and gentleness. Zip remained silent on stage, or answered questions by distorting his face and grunting hideously.”⁶² Zip was not supposed to utter a word in front of spectators.

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 136.

⁵⁹Parsons, 37.

⁶⁰Parsons, 98.

⁶¹Kline, 131.

⁶²Parsons, 98.

Instead, he played his violin and struck poses that were commanded by the announcer.⁶³

Fred Bradna recalled a sideshow group called the Ubangis who fell under his management. The Ubangi were a group of fifteen women from Africa. They were known for their enlarged lips. Disks were placed in the infant girls' lips and were increased in size every year. The bigger the lips in the Ubangi culture the more attractive the woman.⁶⁴ Pictures were taken of the Ubangi women showing their enlarged feature (See Figure 3).⁶⁵ Bradna called the Ubangi women the “greatest side show act of all time.” He also called them creatures, childish and barely human. Bradna, who spoke so harshly about the Ubangi with such demeaning racist remarks, was a boss for Ringling. It makes one wonder how many other bosses felt the same way about the Ubangi, Clicko or Zip, the people of color whom they employed.⁶⁶

Sotiropolous argued in *Staging Race* that racism in public venues such as vaudeville, which she covered in her book, or even the circus was not as easy to interpret as one would think from looking at the surface. She argued that although people of color could not escape the racist ideas that pervaded popular culture, they may have used them to their benefit. They took racial stereotypes and used them to sell to white people what they thought they wanted to see. However what the public did not understand was that at the same time these men, and sometimes women, were actually introducing and infusing popular culture and society with black music or dance.⁶⁷ Whether this can be transferred from vaudeville to the sideshow is hard to say, but it is true that as long one remained useful and gave the public what they wanted they, at the least, were given a sense of security through weekly compensation and room and board. Again, Kline remembered

⁶³Kline, 131.

⁶⁴Bradna, 243.

⁶⁵Hary A. Atwell, “Three Ubangi Princesses,” (1931), In, Fred Bradna, *The Big Top: My Forty Years With the Greatest Show on Earth*, (New York:Simon and Schuster, 1952).

⁶⁶Bradna, 243

⁶⁷Sotiropolous, 107.

the security the circus offered with its promise of the necessary requirements of life.⁶⁸

Kline remembered another ethnic group that found opposition within the circus during her time with Ringling. Asian men were used as acrobatic performers. So unlike men of color, they were allowed to perform in the “big top.” However when it came to dressing room politics as with the rest of “big top” performers, they were not allowed to dress in the same area as everyone else. Instead they were given their own small tent known as a “hooligan” because “there was no class distinction among its occupants.” These men were not considered to be of lower status; they were considered to have no status whatsoever.⁶⁹

Racism and sexism existed throughout the circus. African American men and women were left out of the “center ring” and were not allowed to be star performers. Bradna, during his forty years with Ringling, felt that many star performers looked down on sideshow performers for racial reasons, but also because star acts took years to perfect.⁷⁰ For many performers the dedication it took to perfect their tricks was a family tradition. Emmett Kelly Jr., who eventually took over his father's famous clown persona Weary Willie, was born in Dyersburg, Tennessee, November 24th during the closing day of the circus. His father said that “he was bound to be born during the circus.” The idea of being born on show was a popular legend throughout the world of performers that helped them justify their dedication to their acts.⁷¹

Bardy, from his time as a roustabout, remembered how performers started young; they dedicated their entire life to their art.⁷² Kline, from her life as a performer, recalled how between the parades, washing and sewing costumes and performing in the big show, acts practiced every

⁶⁸Kline, 193.

⁶⁹Kline, 121.

⁷⁰Bradna, 172.

⁷¹Kelly, 92.

⁷²Bardy, 42.

spare moment they had.⁷³ Ella Bradna was a popular equestrian rider for Ringling during the twentieth century. Her husband Fred recalled how she started training when she was three years old, bareback riding with a mechanic. A mechanic was a device with a belt that hooked around the trainee's waist. The belt was attached to a rope that was left slack to prevent interference but could be pulled tight at any moment to prevent falling. At age eight Ella's father removed the mechanic and she trained for another five years. At thirteen she was allowed to join her family's act, but only after years of hard training.⁷⁴ Ella was eventually called “the worlds foremost equestriennes.” She said in an interview, “the work of an equestrienne is not taught in a day.” She wanted people to know her training had been hard and her life dedicated to her act.⁷⁵

Bradna, the stage manager for Ringling, from his personal and constant contact with the performers learned how dangerous the star acts could be. Aerialists, for example, when they missed a trick had to act fast or they could become paralyzed or die. Their head had to immediately be snapped forward, their arms locked to their body and their back and hips had to twist in the proper direction to bring the flier into the safety net without injury. These muscular adjustments had to become instinctive to ensure a successful fall.⁷⁶ The rule was never to hit the net with the front of the head, this almost always snapped the neck.⁷⁷ Bradna felt that only superb coordination, whether the trick succeeded or failed, saved the aerialist from death.⁷⁸

These death defying techniques were unfortunately not always so defying. It was known among performers that it was a real possibility that they could die in their trade. Some denied that fact, like Lillian Leitzel, who voiced in an interview that she had no fear of falling, instead

⁷³Kline, 193

⁷⁴Bradna, 150, 151.

⁷⁵*Europe Will Furnish Bareback Riders Child Labor Laws Hamper Training*, El Paso Herald., September 12, 1918, Page 5, Image 5, Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

⁷⁶Bradna, 172.

⁷⁷Robert Lewis Taylor, *Center Ring: The People of the Circus*, (Garden City: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1956) 186.

⁷⁸Bradna, 173.

she said the only thing that scared her was her costume getting ruined.⁷⁹ Lillian Leitzel was called “the greatest female gymnast in the world” this title is shown on a promotional poster for Ringling (See Figure 4).⁸⁰ Despite her denial, death was still a real threat in circus life. Bardy remembered from his time with Ringling how Karl Wallenda died at the age of 73 from falling off a tight rope.⁸¹ Tiny Kline's husband, Otto Kline, died in Madison Square Garden while performing an equestrian act. His hands slipped off the saddle horn and he fell under the horse he was riding and was stepped on.⁸² Despite her confidence in her self, Leitzel fell forty feet and suffered a spinal injury that paralyzed her from the neck down. She died the day after her accident on February 15, 1931⁸³

Hard work and death were realities of circus life. One remained useful by bringing in revenue, the more money made the more status given. Lillian Leitzel, for example, was an exception to many of the rules about remaining generally useful because she was such a huge star and therefore brought in a lot of revenue for Ringling. Bradna, who managed all acts for Ringling, called Leitzel “the greatest circus performer of all time.” Bradna also recalled that because of her status she was only required to perform a single aerial act. She was not required to march in the parade. Her contract allowed her to have her own stateroom on the train and a small private dressing tent. However the way to become a star act like Leitzel was to dedicate one's life to one's art, which meant training six to seven days a week with little or no personal time. This reality made the notion of running away with the circus seem laughable to those who had trained their entire lives like Leitzel or Ella Bradna. Bradna said that to be a performer it took “years of

⁷⁹*Circus Acrobat's Only Fear in Air is For Her Clothes*, New-York Tribune, April 01, 1912, Page 8, Image 8, Accessed Oct, 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

⁸⁰“Dainty Miss Leitzel,” (1918), Accessed Nov. 14, 2012, <http://circusworld.wisconsinhistory.org/>.

⁸¹Bardy, 36.

⁸²*Kline Meets Death Riding in New York*, Weekly Journal-Miner., June 09, 1915, Page 3. Image 3, Accessed Oct, 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

⁸³*Rope Breaks Circus Star Dives to Ring*, The Omaha Bee-News, February 1931, Page 1, Image 1, Accessed Oct, 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

training, hard falling and patience.” Life in the center ring was meant for serious professionals, not runaways who dreamt of instant success.⁸⁴

The more one made oneself useful, the higher one could rise. Tiny Kline and Emmett Kelly are good examples of usefulness overriding hierarchy. Kline started out in the circus as a statue girl and burlesque dancer. She began her career at the bottom of the caste system. To improve her status, she decided to learn the art of the iron jaw act. The iron jaw act was where the performer was suspended in mid-air by biting onto a leather strap. There was usually no safety net involved. Kline hung a guyline on the side of the “big top” or any place where she could suspend a cable that could support her weight. Eventually Kline said the pain of hanging by her teeth began to fade and she only felt it in her neck at night. By the third week the vertebrae in her neck stopped cracking when her mouth took all of the weight.⁸⁵ Images taken during this time can help one visualize what it must have been like to train in such an act (See Figure 5).⁸⁶ Eventually she was able to do the iron jaw act as if she had been performing it her entire life. She became famous for her “slide for life” routine where she held the strap in her mouth and slid down a cable from the top of the “big top” to the floor.⁸⁷

Emmett Kelly is one of the best examples of learning to become and stay generally useful. Kelly learned the art early in his career. He started his career as a cartoonist and illustrator for the circus, painting sideshow banners and the merry go round.⁸⁸ He eventually became a trapeze artist who performed as a clown on the side. “My contract called for me to do trapeze work and to double in clowning, which meant that the aerial work was my principal job and the clowning was secondary. In addition, I was to 'make ones self generally useful.' this was the joker in the

⁸⁴Bradna, 153.

⁸⁵Kline, 216, 217.

⁸⁶Harry A. Atwell, “Iron Jaw Act,” (1932), Accessed Nov. 14, 2012, <http://circusworld.wisconsinhistory.org/>.

⁸⁷Kline, 45.

⁸⁸Kelly, 33, 39.

contract; all circuses had it in those days. To make ones self generally useful meant everything from riding parade to helping put up canvas, erect seats, load trunks and do whatever had to be done during a shortage of help.”⁸⁹

Men and women had to constantly remain useful throughout their careers. However this became more apparent during hard times. During World War II with workingmen off fighting, all able-bodied men and women took turns setting up and tearing down the show. High paid stars loaded trunks and women carried chairs. Despite these new difficulties, they were still expected to perform and march in the parade each day. Even the stars of the show had to pitch in because many of the workers were off fighting Hitler and the Japanese. Even Bradna who was a boss for Ringling remembered having to remain useful by taking part of the daily chores during this era.⁹⁰

Remaining useful was a rule everyone in the circus had to follow, even the animals. Henry Ringling North was the nephew of John Ringling and worked for the circus during the early twentieth century. North remembered Gargantua the gorilla. Gargantua was a star attraction for Ringling and billed as “the world's most terrifying creature.” He had air conditioning in his train car and thermostat controlled humidifiers to regulate his environment to that of the Congo. The only other train car that had air conditioning at that time was John Ringling's personal car.⁹¹ When photographers were finally allowed to photograph Gargantua they were met with scraps of hurled food. Gargantua was seen as an asset to Ringling and treated that way. They could not have one of their biggest money makers dying from climate issues. It was thought if Gargantua survived the season he would ensure “a fortune to the show. He's the toughest so-and-so who ever hit the lot.”⁹² Bradna, as the stage manager, had access to financial information that most

⁸⁹Kelly, 56.

⁹⁰Bradna, 94.

⁹¹Henry Ringling North, *The Circus Kings*, (Gainesville; University Press of Florida, 2008) 271.

⁹²Hammerstrom, 41,42.

circus employees would not have been aware of. He recalled during the Great Depression Ringling was in risk of losing everything. In a desperate attempt to save his circus Ringling found Gargantua and promoted him into a national sensation. Ringling and his management felt that if they could just get the show on the road that people would show up to see his “great ape.” Gargantua was not only useful as a star attraction he saved Ringling from bankruptcy.⁹³

Gargantua's air conditioned train car was an exception to train living similar to Lillian Leitzel who had her own private car. The average roustabout had to sleep in bunks stacked three high, usually workingmen slept two or three to a bunk. These conditions led people to sleep under a wagon or on one of the flat cars on a hot night. The cars were assigned by department in order to keep the various hierarchies and genders separate. Workingmen lived in one, staff and personnel in another. Single girls traveled in what was known as the “virgin car” and clowns lived in their own segregated car.⁹⁴

Life in the train car was without privacy. Married couples were usually put in the married peoples' car. Fred Bradna even recalled how he and his wife Ella had to live in this car. Bradna said that the car usually held sixty-four other couples and their children too. A couple was given a bunk on the car and the only privacy a newlywed could usually get was obtained when everyone else turned away to stare at the wall.⁹⁵ Even an act like Emmett Kelly, who was probably the most famous clown for Ringling, when he was married was simply given the lower bunk in the train car to share with his bride. Although this was considered the better bunk, it still was not the ideal place for a newlywed couple.⁹⁶

The opposite of Gargantua's situation was also true for any animal who had lost its

⁹³Bradna, 138.

⁹⁴Parkinson and Phillip, 130.

⁹⁵Bradna, 216, 217.

⁹⁶Kelly, 90.

usefulness to the circus. An elephant named Modoc was once billed as the “most daring, famous and bravest animal in the world.” She was known as Modoc “the golden elephant.”⁹⁷ Before Modoc left the circus, however, she started to go blind and killed a man in what was called self defense. Because of these actions, the circus decided to sell her. Her trainer attempted to defend her, but was told that his “love for animals” could never be understood. Her trainer was not a star and he did not bring in much revenue for the show. Modoc was at one time a star but had lived out her usefulness, therefore the trainer's pleas fell on deaf ears.⁹⁸

Modoc was considerably lucky compared to other “murderous” elephants. The elephant Topsy had at one point been called “the beloved baby elephant.” She was the first baby elephant held in captivity in the United States. She was executed for killing a man who had reportedly fed her a cigarette. Topsy was simultaneously poisoned, hung and electrocuted.⁹⁹ It was said that Topsy docilely picked up her front and rear foot as commanded in order to attach the electrodes. These seemed to worry her and she tried to kick them away, but after a sharp word of command, she allowed them to stay. When the executioner's hands flipped the switch there was a blue flame. “Topsy's trunk curled, her eyes closed and the great body surged forward in the chains and ropes.” After those movements Topsy became rigid and died.¹⁰⁰

Topsy was only one example of elephant executions during the early twentieth century. “Murderous Mary” was an elephant who was put to death in Erwin, Tennessee. It was said that her killings had caused her to forfeit her “right to live under the laws of Tennessee.”¹⁰¹ Mary was executed publicly by hanging her from a crane. They looped chains around her neck to lift her

⁹⁷Helfer, 247.

⁹⁸Helfer, 288.

⁹⁹*Topsy's Untimely Fate*, The Hawaiian Star. January 29, 1903, Page 4, Image 4, Accessed Oct. 18, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

¹⁰⁰*Topsy Assisted in Her Own Execution*. The St. Louis Republic., January 05, 1903, Page 5, Image 5. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

¹⁰¹*Viscous Elephant is Hanged*. Mexico Missouri Message., September 21, 1916, Image 2. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

massive body into the air. She struggled before dying of strangulation¹⁰²

Wood argued when talking about Topsy and the other “murderous” elephants that these animals were bringing in money with their executions and how the selling of these tickets reflected the ideas people had, at the time, about justice. It can also be said that these animals had outlived their usefulness and by being able to sell tickets to their execution they could once again bring in revenue for the show, making them as useful in death as they were in life.¹⁰³

The circus was a hard life. J. Hudson, a circus doctor for Ringling, said “Circus people work much harder than members of the public realize. The result of long hours and practice is that our social life is nonexistent.”¹⁰⁴ Bardy recalled from his days with Ringling how their lives were hard, dirty and strict and there was little to no relief for people who had made traveling shows a career. Once a performer had lived out their usefulness and neared retirement age, which was generally the age when a performer could no longer physically perform his or her act, it was up to the other performers in the show to provide for him or her. Since the circus did not offer retirement plans, the younger performers often took care of the retirees financially and found them a place to live out the rest of their days.¹⁰⁵

To make it in the circus, no matter one's gender, race or species, it was important to make oneself generally useful. It was important not to upset the hierarchy established through being useful. Anyone who could do these things, who trained hard and brought crowds, could ascend the ladder to stardom. Everyone except of course the roustabouts who lived in their dirty, manure filled world, and those who, because of race, were relegated to sideshow positions. The lot of roustabouts and sideshow performers was cast. They were not allowed to interact with anyone

¹⁰²*Elephant is Executed: “Murderous Mary,” Beast That Killed Virginia Hanged.* Hopkinsville Kentuckian., September 30, 1916, Page 4, Image 4. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

¹⁰³Wood, 1-3.

¹⁰⁴J.Y. Hudson, *Circus Doctor*, (Boston: Little Brown Company, 1995) 174, 175.

¹⁰⁵Bardy, 11.

but each other. It is strange that in such a small, compact world there were so many communities that hardly ever touched. For all of their differences, however, there were many similarities. All aspects of the circus, no matter the rank in the hierarchy, were hard. There was no privacy and everyone worked and remained as useful as possible from morning until night with few exceptions. Henry North said from his experience “there is a harsh underworld character to life behind the canvas partitions. It is a world of sudden death and slow disintegration.”¹⁰⁶ So why would anyone choose a life in the circus? North also had this to say about his time with Ringling:

The Circus is a jealous wench indeed, that is an understatement. She is a ravaging hag who sucks your vitality as a vampire drinks blood, who kills the brightest stars with her crown and who will allow no private life to those who serve her; wrecking their homes, ruining their bodies and destroying the happiness of their loved ones by her insatiable demands. She is all of these things and yet, I love her as I love nothing else on earth.¹⁰⁷



Figure 1.

A small crowd watches as eight men drive stakes into the ground at Sherman Texas.

¹⁰⁶North, 33.

¹⁰⁷North, 13, 14.



Figure 2.

Publicity postcard of 'Clico Wild Dancing Bushamn.

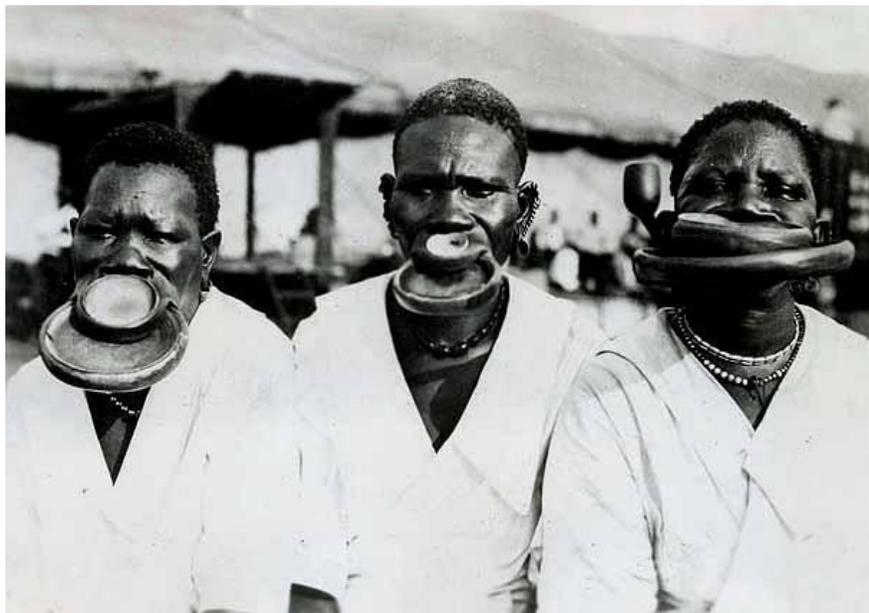


Figure 3.

Three Ubangi princesses part of the group of fifteen Congo natives who exhibited for Ringling in 1931-1932.

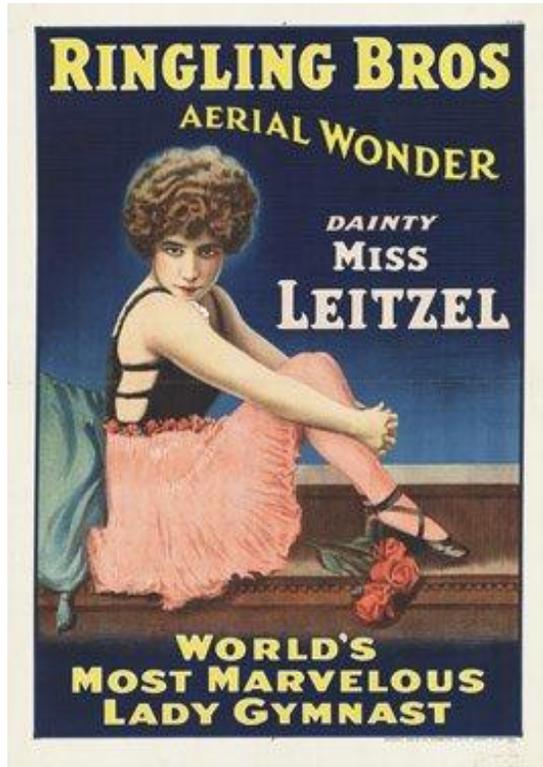


Figure 4.

Ringling promotional poster featuring Lillian Leitzel



Figure 5.

An aerialist performing an iron jaw act Ringling Brothers

Primary Sources

Atwell, Harry A. "Iron Jaw Act." (1932). Accessed Nov. 14, 2012.

<http://circusworld.wisconsinhistory.org/>.

Picture source showing the iron jaw act perfected by Tiny Kline and other performers in circus history.

Atwell, Hary A. "Three Ubangi Princesses." (1931). In. Fred Bradna. *The Big Top: My Forty Years With the Greatest Show on Earth*. New York:Simon and Schuster, 1952.

Bardy, Adam. *The Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy*. Adam Bardy. 1986.

Bardy is an interesting source. It is a primary source since Bardy worked for Ringling.

However it is also a self published work which must be taken into consideration. However it is one of the only primary sources to be found on what life was like to be a worker. The Importance of Bardy in this thesis is not to prove a point or to state any facts. Bardy is more used to set the tone and emotional feel of what it was like to be a workingman on a traveling show.

Bone, Howard. *Sideshow: My Life With Geeks, Freaks and Vagabonds in the Carny Trade*.

Northville: Sun Dog Press. 2001.

Bone gives a valuable firsthand account of life in and among the freaks in a sideshow. Bone helps to illustrate the gap between African Americans in the circus and sheds a light on the exploitation of women.

Bradna, Fred. *The Big Top: My Forty Years With the Greatest Show on Earth*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1952.

Fred Bradna was Ringling's equestrian director for over thirty years. He was a boss and witnessed many acts come and go in his time. Bradna thinks very highly of himself and has many racist ideas that come through in his memoir. However it is important to look at the circus through this lens as long as one keeps Bradna's prejudices in mind. Branda has much to say about the dangerous nature of aerialist acts, and the hardships endured by the people in the center ring that is actually rather relevant to the thesis.

Hudson, J.Y. *Circus Doctor*. Boston: Little Brown Company. 1995.

Not used very much, but provides an insightful quote about the life of every circus worker and performer.

Kelly Emmett. *Clown: My Life in Tatters and Smiles*. New York: Prentice-Hall Inc.1954.

Kelly's memoir showed the hardships of clowns withing the circus. Kelly himself is also a great example of how by remaining useful a person could rise through the ranks.

Kline, Tiny. *Circus Queen and Tinker Bell: The Memoir of Tiny Kline*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 2008.

Kline's memoir is an important piece of research used in this thesis. Her memoir has been used throughout the scholarly works written about circus life. Kline provides an interesting viewpoint on dressing room politics and what the daily life of workingmen was like. Being a

performer for Ringling herself Kline is able to give first and accounts of all of this and more.

Mckennon, Joe. *Written by a Man Who Was There: Circus Lingo*. Sarasota: Carnival Publishers. 1980.

Mckennon is important in order to understand the various terms used in the circus and why they were used. Mckennon worked for Ringling and gives primary documentation about circus lingo.

Mckennon, Joe. *Written by a Man Who Was There: Logistics American Circus*. Sarasota: Carnival Publishers. 1977.

Another primary source from Mckennon, which shows the different roles of workers and how many men it took to run a show by breaking down various tasks throughout the circus.

North, Henry Ringling. *The Circus Kings*. Gainesville; University Press of Florida. 2008.

Good primary source written by a man who worked for Ringling. He was related to the Ringlings however only ever worked as a ticket seller or other lesser jobs. North like Bardy helps to provide interesting thoughts on feelings about the circus which help to promote the overall thesis.

Ringling, Charles. Ringling Brothers. "Suggestions and Rules: Employees" ca. 1900 in Jerry Apps. *Ringlingville: The Stupendous Story of Seven Siblings and Their Stunning Circus Success*. Baraboo: Wisconsin Historical Society Press. 2005.

An important primary source found in Jerry Apps book about Ringling. It shows rules that were put into place by Charles Ringling that pertained mainly toward women. Helped to show the strict nature of the circus toward women.

A Day at the Circus by Our Special Artist. Palestine Daily Herald. October 14, 1905. Image 3. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

A good primary source newspaper article showing Bradna's status within the circus.

Candy Stand Book. Ringling Bros. Show, Season of 1906 in Jerry Apps. *Ringlingville: The Stupendous Story of Seven Siblings and Their Stunning Circus Success*. Baraboo: Wisconsin Historical Society Press. 2005.

The Candy Stand Book is a document showing the hardships among workers. It talks about inclement weather and the what the workingmen had to endure from day to day.

Circus Acrobat's Only Fear in Air is For Her Clothes. New-York Tribune. April 01, 1912. Page 8, Image 8. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

Newspaper article that shows the over confident nature of Lillian Lietzel.

Elephant is Executed: "Murderous Mary" Beast That Killed Virginia Hanged. Hopkinsville Kentuckian. September 30, 1916. Page 4. Image 4. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

Another article about "murderous elephants." Helps to show the sick methods that were used to execute these elephants and what people were willing to pay to see.

Europe Will Furnish Bareback Riders Child Labor Laws Hamper Training. El Paso Herald. September 12, 1918. Page 5. Image 5. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. Good primary newspaper article showing the image of Ella Bradna, and her perspective on what it meant to be a performer.

Kline Meets Death Riding in New York. Weekly Journal-Miner. June 09, 1915. Page 3. Image 3. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. Newspaper article that helps illustrate the dangerous and often fatal nature of the center ring.

Ringling Brothers Performers Ledger. 1906 in Jerry Apps. *Ringlingville: The Stupendous Story of Seven Siblings and Their Stunning Circus Success*. Baraboo: Wisconsin Historical Society Press. 2005. A useful primary source that helps to show the pay difference between certain performers. This helps to illustrate where a person stood in the circus hierarchy.

Rope Breaks Circus Star Dives to Ring. The Omaha Bee-News. February 1931. Page 1. Image 1. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. Newspaper article showing the death of Lillian Lietzel and like Otto Kline article the dangerous nature of a show.

Topsy's Untimely Fate. The Hawaiian Star. January 29, 1903. Page 4. Image 4. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. Newspaper article helps to illustrate the fate of the “murderous elephant” Topsy.

Topsy Assisted in Her Own Execution. The St. Louis Republic. January 05, 1903. Page 5. Image 5. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. Another newspaper article that shows a similar opinion about Topsy.

Viscous Elephant is Hanged. Mexico Missouri Message. September 21, 1916. Image 2. Accessed Oct. 18. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. Newspaper article that helps to illustrate the fate of “murderous Mary” another elephant like Topsy.

“Ringling Bros. Circus.” (Oct. 26, 1902), Accessed Nov. 14, 2012. <http://circusworld.wisconsinhistory.org/>.

“Publicity Postcard of Clio Wild Dancing Bushman.” (1928), In, Neil Parsons. *Clicko the Wild Dancing Bushman*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 136.

“Dainty Miss Leitzel.” (1918), Accessed Nov. 14, 2012. <http://circusworld.wisconsinhistory.org/>.
Secondary Sources

Apps, Jerry. *Ringlingville USA: The Stupendous Story of Seven Siblings and their Stunning Circus Success*. Baraboo: Wisconsin Historical Society Press. 2005.

A good armature history about Ringling. The most important things about Apps book is that it contains many solid primary sources that are used throughout the thesis. It also helps shed

light on the exploitation of women in the circus.

Davis, Janet M. *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2002.

Davis has many of the same ideas that are presented in this thesis. Her book is the only in depth scholarly look at the circus. It provides many solid and useful arguments and information pertaining to the research.

Freedman, Jill. *Circus Days*. New York: Crown Publishers. 1975.

Gives important information about circus life.

Hammerstrom, David Lewis. *Big Top Boss: John Ringling North and the Circus*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1992.

Scholarly source that talks about labor and living conditions for Ringling. Presents good arguments for the treatment of circus employees.

Helfer, Ralph. *Modoc: The True Story of the Greatest Elephant That Ever Lived*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997.

Good amateur history about the treatment of animals.

Kibler, M. Alison. *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 199.

Alison argues that women who were exploited in vaudeville allowed themselves to be put into those situations in order to have regular work and pay in a time when women were not readily employed. Kibler's argument can be applied to the circus and is done so in the research.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1988.

A great source relating twentieth century vaudeville with the circus, this is a very important book for the research in this thesis. Levine's argument helps to illustrate the emergence of popular culture in early twentieth century America and how that may have effected the ideas behind star power in the circus.

Parsons, Neil. *Clicko: The Wild Dancing Bushman*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2009.

Scholarly source that has the best information on how African Americans were treated in the circus especially when talking about sideshows.

Sotiropolous, Karen. *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2006.

Like Levine's book on vaudeville, Sotiropolous argues that African Americans in vaudeville were caught up in racism but used that racism to bring black music and dance to the white population.

Speaught George. *A History of the Circus*. London: Tantivy Press. 1980.

Gives important information about the life of clowns and how they interacted with workingmen.

Wood, Amy Louise. "*Killing the Elephant*": *Murderous Beasts and the Thrill of Retribution*.
Journal of the Gilded Age & Progressive Era. Jul2012, Vol. 11 Issue 3.
Scholarly journal article that helps argue the point about the treatment of animals and the
importance of their executions to traveling shows.