

The Age of Discovery, roughly from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, was a time when European explorers sailed the wide oceans of the world in search of new lands. This is a period that has been romanticized by many, painting men like Christopher Columbus as skilled voyagers, braving the great open seas in search for new ways to travel and trade. For the people in the lands that these men “discovered,” this was a time period that marked the beginning of a long history of genocide and slavery at the hands of sea pirates from lands previously unknown to the indigenous cultures. As the sea pirates found new lands and people to conquer in the name of civilization, they were introduced to varied foreign cultures. From the pirate’s perspective, many of the cultural traditions of the people they “discovered” were viewed as barbaric and primitive because they were so foreign to the “civilized” pirates. In the Polynesian Islands, one of these “primitive” cultural practices was tattooing. However, instead of simply making note of the tattoo traditions of the Polynesian peoples, the Europeans began appropriating the tattoo and returning home with tattooed skin as a souvenir of their time with the “savages.” It is among these individuals that we find the first sailors intent on showing their tattoos off in public performances, telling tales of lust, torture, and savage barbarism. It is among these early tattooed sideshow performances that one finds some of America’s first imperialist representations of Island peoples as brutal savages in need of civilization.

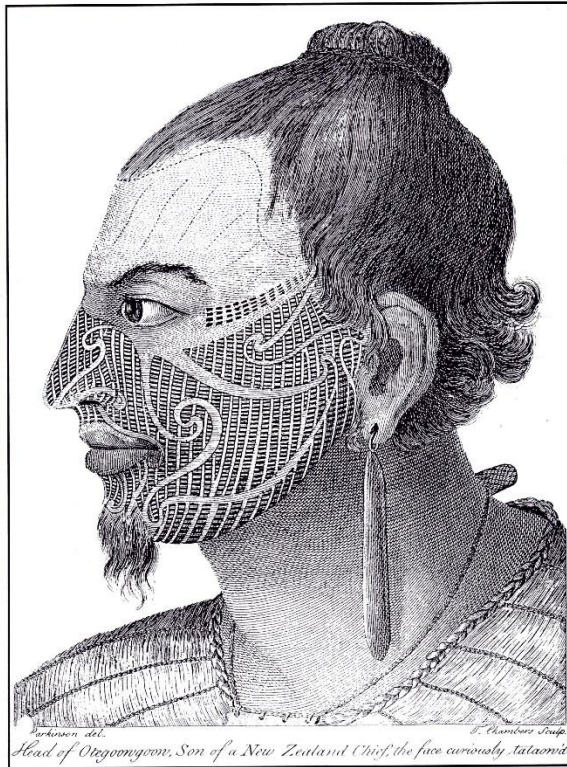


One of the most influential voyagers with regard to the history of tattooing in Western culture is Captain James Cook. Cook was a member of the British Navy, and in 1768 the young lieutenant was given the command of the *HMS Endeavour* and sent into the South Pacific on a scientific mission to record the transit of Venus.(cite Journal) This mission led Cook to the islands of Tahiti, New Zealand, and other Polynesian islands where he charted the geography of the islands, took note of their flora and fauna, and interacted with indigenous populations. Cook's first mission to the Polynesian Islands was so successful that the captain was commissioned to return two more times, in 1772 and 1776, in order to chart the geography of the Islands. During his last voyage in 1779, Cook was killed by indigenous Hawaiians for attempting to kidnap a Hawaiian chief. CITE

The journals of James Cook and his naturalist Joseph Banks, entitled *A Journal of a Voyage Round the World in H.M.S. Endeavour 1768-1771*, was eventually published, greatly

influencing European scholar's understanding of the geography and landscape of the islands he visited. The journals were also invaluable to European understanding of the indigenous cultures in the Polynesian Islands. In his journals, Cook writes about his experiences with the Native populations, expressing a cold ambivalence in his recitation of the many customs that must have seemed so foreign to the Englishman so far away from home. For example, when exploring New Zealand the captain was introduced to the Maori custom of cannibalism, but instead of writing about the custom with disgust or a sense of superiority, Cook simply notes "Tuesday the 14th...they confirm the custom of eating their enemies so that this is a thing no longer to be doubted." (Cook 126) This kind of objective language can be found throughout Cook's records of his experience as he discusses fighting, trading, sailing and living so close to the Natives.

Although Cook's tone throughout the journal is not expressively colonialist, his language and actions prophetically insinuate future colonization. For example, Cook states, "It was the Opinion of every body [*sic*] on board that all sorts of European grain, fruit, Plants, etc., would thrive here; in short, was this Country settled by an industrious people they would very soon be supplied not only with the necessaries, but many of the Luxuries, of Life." (Cook Chapter 6, Animals, Timber, New Zealand) Though imperial in nature, Cook's language does not reduce the island peoples to savage barbarians: a characterization that is apparent in many of the European travel journals that followed Cook's. However, throughout his journals, there are instances that show that the Captain thought the best recourse for perceived injustices was violence. For example, there are multiple points in Cook's journal in which he states that he killed a native for slight crimes like stealing. CITE Instead of learning the social rules of the places he visited, and trying to solve his problems through diplomacy, the captain chose to use violence to subdue the local populations and, thus, exert his power to dominate.



The most important aspect of James Cook's journals to this study lies in the fact that this document is noted to be the first instance of a European using the word tattoo, or "tattoo" as Cook originally wrote it, in reference to permanently marking the body. (Cite OED) In discussing the Maori tradition of tattooing, Cook states, "Both sexes paint their Bodys, [*sic*] Tattow, as it is called in their Language." (P.93) Cook goes on to describe the methods and tools used by the Maori when applying tattoos. Again, Cook's description of tattooing, an act that he surely saw as primitive, was seemingly objective and ambivalent despite his colonial disposition when interacting with the native populations.

Cook may have been ambivalent in his recording of the practice of tattooing, the Captain did understand the interest that Europeans would have in seeing a tattooed Native. During Cook's second voyage to the Polynesian Islands in 1774, the captain kidnapped two Tahitians, named Omai and Tupia, to be his interpreters and guides; but upon returning to England, Cook

sold Omai to be put on public display. (DeMello 48) Indeed, Omai was not the first member of an island culture to be put on public display as a human oddity. In 1691, a man named Prince Jeoly was enslaved by Spanish voyagers and then purchased by a European businessman to be put on display for the purpose of showing off his tattoos.(DeMello 47) The man was renamed The Painted Prince, and he was displayed in public places for a short period before he succumbed to small pox. With Prince Jeoly, and Omai, we have early iterations of putting a human body on display in Western culture as an oddity; as a representation of what it meant to be uncivilized. Clearly, the purpose was not just to display Native people with darker skin than white Europeans that made these men worthy of display, but, instead, their particular style of tattoos; thus linking the symbol of a tattoo with ideas of racial superiority, and Native barbarism.

Historians that specialize in tattooing have often claimed that Cook's journals introduced, or reintroduced, tattooing into Western culture, however, recent work by Anna Friedman suggests that tattooing was a well-known practice in cultures around the world at the time of Cook's voyages, including Europe. Friedman notes that tattooing has been a part of various cultures going back to ancient times, but throughout history the popularity of the practice has "waxed and waned." (17) To support her claim, Friedman quotes the journals of a French explorer, named Charles Pierre Claret de Fleurieu, dated 1791: "We should be wrong to suppose the tattooing is peculiar to nations half-savage; we see it practiced by civilized Europeans; time immemorial, the sailors [from around the world]...have known this custom." (17) Where Friedman sees the confusion is in the word tattooing. For Friedman, the practice of tattooing had various names such as scratching, decorating, or marking, but Cook's journals solidified the word tattoo as the official word used for permanently marking the skin with ink. Thus, when scholars began researching "tattooing," it was common to see Cook as the first explorer to

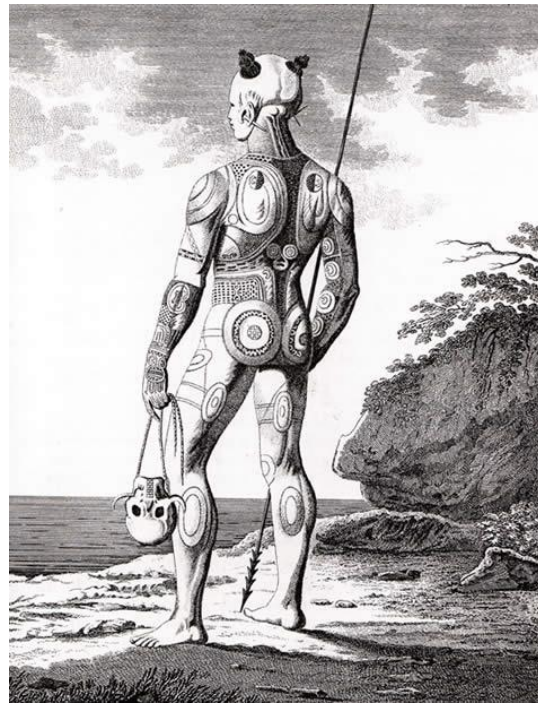
remark upon the custom. Friedman argues that this has created a myth in the history of tattooing that Cook was the person to “introduce” tattooing into Western society.

Friedman’s indictment of historical scholarship for missing the larger context of the practice of tattooing is important, however, Cook is still an immensely important figure regarding tattoo history because the Polynesian tattoo culture that he recorded was to become exceedingly popular in the West among sailors; the most stereotypical tattooed man in Western culture. Western Europeans, and Americans, may have been aware of the practice of tattooing, but it is not until White voyagers begin returning home with extensive Polynesian tattoos that we begin to see discussions of tattooing in popular media forms. Thus, when tattooed men eventually start performing in American theaters, it was not simply the tattoo that was of interest to the audience, but, instead, the audience must have been drawn to stories that tattooed performers told. It is the stories that present some of the first depictions of Island cultures as savage, barbarians.

Sailors and Stories

After Cook’s voyages to the Polynesian islands, Europeans began sailing to the islands at a much more frequent pace. Cook had successfully mapped out much of the geography of the islands, making it an easy stop off point in the South Seas before going to Asia. Most of the sailors were merchants, and they came to islands in order to replenish supplies. (Denning 23) As the sailors were not coming to the islands to stay, they did not see a need to learn the customs of the native island cultures. However, the sailors would often participate in different islands tattoo culture as a sort of souvenir of their visit. According to historian Margo DeMello, without this “cross-fertilization,” it is unlikely that tattooing would have become a part of Western culture.(DeMello 46) Support for DeMello’s position is found in the fact that, by the time the

islands were colonized by the British in 1840, missionaries had begun to demonize the practice as an example of primitive evil, and by the twentieth century most of the islands had stopped, or been prevented from, tattooing. (Footnote William Pasco and Edward Roberts and Missionaries.)



The social meaning of tattoos in Polynesian cultures differed for each of the islands. For Maoris of New Zealand, tattooing (or *Moko* as the Maori called it) was connected to warfare, for Tahitians it was a mark that placed an individual in a social hierarchy, and in most Polynesian cultures a tattoo was somehow related to religious rites.(GELL 2) Anthropologist Alfred Gell's work, *Wrapping in Images*, is the seminal scholarly work on Polynesian tattooing and its relation to social/political/religious meaning for different island cultures. For Gell, the tattoo, and lack thereof, in cultures that tattooed extensively, was a symbol that was the result of a society's development, but it was also a symbol of belonging in a larger social context. (3) The various islands had differing degrees to which they tattooed, but each of the tattoo cultures was in some

way indicative of the way larger social institutions developed on different islands. GELL When the voyagers arrived in the Polynesian islands, they had not understood the importance and meaning of tattooing in the cultures that they would soon colonize. The voyagers were, and all ways would be, outsiders. DENNING! For the white Europeans tattooing was simply an oddity practiced by a primitive culture. When the European sailors began appropriating the tattoo, they took the symbol back to Europe and left behind the cultural meaning. Thus, Polynesian tattooing came to Western shores as a symbol without a meaning; a hollow shell of what tattooing meant for the people that developed the practice.

By 1824, Polynesian culture was not just of interest to voyagers as discussion of tattooing can be found in American literary magazines. In an article entitled “New Zealand,” published in *The North American Review*, the author discusses cultural practices in New Zealand, and the “discoveries” of Captain James Cook. With regard to tattooing, the author states, “Marks were made on the body in commemoration of some single event...They are also employed as the distinguishing badges of tribes...of the New Zealanders...the pattern after which the face of a chief is tattooed is a kind of coat of arms.” (NAR New Zealand p.349) The presentation of the Maori’s tattoo culture in this article is basically accurate and respectful of the practice as the author is trying to understand the tattoo as it relates to some practice in Western culture. For example, like Henri de Tonti, the author here remarks that the tattoo is a “kind of coat of arms.” This comparison of the tattoo with the Western practice of families developing a coat of arms suggests that the author sees tattoos as something comparable to a cultural practice in Western culture. This is not to say that the author sees Maori culture as comparable to Western culture as the author goes on to state, “this singular custom has its foundation in purposes of utility, and accomplishes ends which other savages attain in a much ruder, and more imperfect manner...The

ornamental has...added something to the stock of human enjoyment, and perhaps to human advancement, by exercising the imagination.” (Ibid 350) This statement suggests that, while the author is relatively accurately presenting the importance of the tattoo to the Maori, they still see the practice of tattooing as a step on the ladder of civilization that the “savage” Maori were still climbing. This presentation of tattooing in American media shows the early stages of American concepts of tattooing; as a meaningful cultural practice of savages.



An insightful presentation of Polynesian tattooing can also be found in adventure literature from the early-nineteenth century. One example of this is George Lillie Craik’s *The New Zealanders*, published in 1830. Craik’s work tells the story of John Rutherford, an extensively tattooed sailor who was taken captive by the Maori, but the book’s main purpose is to examine Maori customs. The facts of Rutherford’s captivity are questionable, as a later edition of the book, edited by James Drummond, states in the introduction, “Craik [did not have]

sufficient means of testing the accuracy of Rutherford's story. Unfortunately there are many points on which the narrative is not only inaccurate but misleading.” (cite Drummond p.3)

However, Craik’s book does present the story, accurate or not, of one of the West’s first known tattooed man sideshow. According to Craik’s account, based on Rutherford’s journals, Rutherford had been taken captive by Maoris after his ship was ambushed on New Zealand’s South East coast.(Drummond 3) By the time Rutherford had arrived in New Zealand, the Maori were likely exposed to many violent encounters with white voyagers, thus, it is unsurprising that they would develop a tendency to attack incoming vessels. Rutherford and his shipmates were attacked by Maoris and Rutherford was subsequently taken captive by a Chief named Aimy

After a few days in captivity, Rutherford gives an account of his tattooing as he states, “The whole of the natives having then seated themselves on the ground in a ring, we were brought into the middle and, being stripped of our clothes, and laid on our backs, we were each of us held down by five or six men, while two others commenced the operation of tattooing us.” (Craik p. 135) Now, this depiction of tattooing suggests that the tattoo was undertaken unwillingly, and that may have been the case, but the fact that the sailor also had tattoos in the Tahitian tradition as well as the Maori, and the fact that the lines of his tattoos were clean, suggests that Rutherford likely obtained the tattoos in order to fit in; likely assuming that he was never going to return to England. Rutherford’s account suggests that the Maori adopted the Englishman after the attack on his ship, although there was obviously a fine line between captivity and adoption in Maori culture. Rutherford escaped his captivity after being asked by Aimy to lead a European vessel into another ambush ten years after Rutherford arrived. Rutherford, instead, announced himself as a “white New Zealander” and was taken back to England by the ship’s captain. Rutherford’s

narrative can be characterized as a story of a captive that had accepted his captivity, and lived by the customs of his captors.

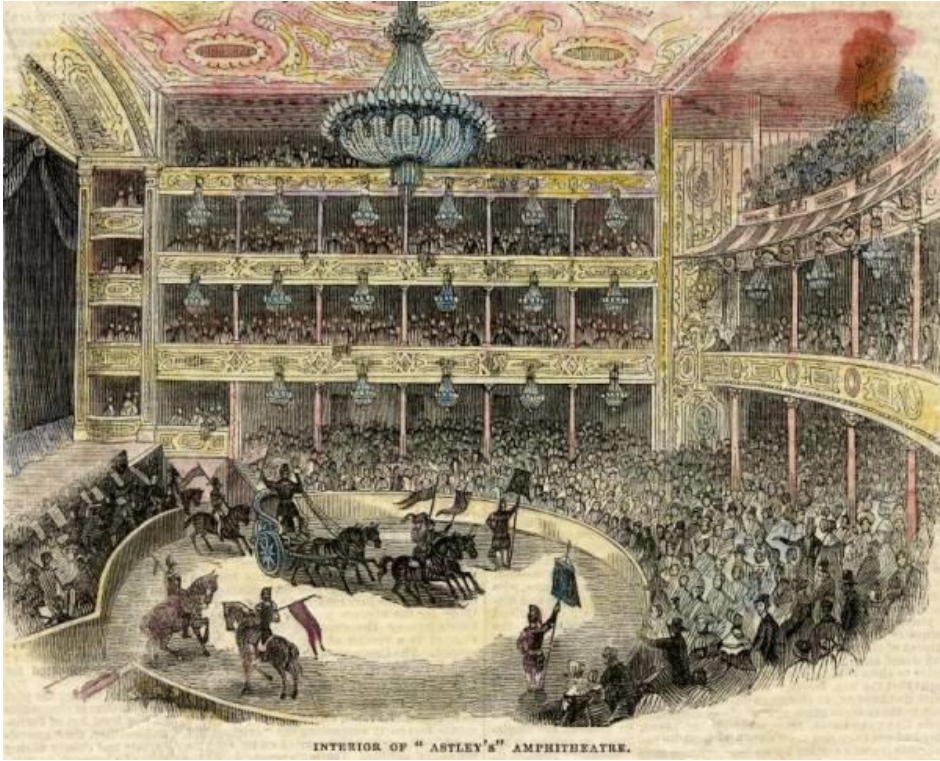
Although Craik's discussion of what a tattoo meant to Maoris is basically accurate, the author shows a clear colonial disposition with regard to how he sees the island culture. For example, in the introduction to this work, the author states: "The Mariner's Compass has brought the remotest ends of the earth together, and, in thus giving to civilized man the possession of all that is valuable in distant climes, has ensured to every barbarous people the power of losing their barbarism, sooner or later, by contact with the all-pervading progress of civilization." (Craik 2) This statement shows the author's conception of island cultures as barbarous savages that need to be colonized in order to be civilized. The author also sees tattooing as evidence of a culture being uncivilized as he remarks upon the tattooing tradition of Tahiti: "The practice of tattooing, we believe, has been discontinued in Otaheite; but the progress of civilization has not yet altogether banished it at the Sandwich Islands."(141) According to Craik, it is "civilization" that causes cultures to abstain from tattooing, thus the tattoo is a mark of the "uncivilized." By all accounts, this narrative clearly establishes a colonial disposition in depictions of Polynesian peoples, one that was clearly tied to the tradition of tattooing when Rutherford began touring England as a tattooed performer in 1828.

Upon returning to England, John Rutherford found it hard to make a living with extensive face tattoos, so he began making money by travelling the country with the circus. Though Rutherford was not the first tattooed white man to perform a tattooed man spectacle, that honor goes to the Frenchman Jean Baptiste Cabri in 1804, Rutherford was the first to go on stage and tell a story of being taken captive, forcibly tattooed, and then married to a chief's daughter.(Footnote Cabri) This narrative would become a staple of tattooed sideshows in

American theaters and sideshows during the nineteenth century. According to Craik, Rutherford did not like being displayed for money, but did it for a while in order to collect a certain sum of money so that he could return to the Polynesian Island of Tahiti. This seems plausible as he seems to disappear after 1830. However, Rutherford's likely fictitious tale of life among the "savages," torture, and savage barbarism would live on in European and American playhouses and circuses for almost one hundred years.

Tattooed Sideshows in America

An observable trend in post-industrial societies is a shift in popular entertainment forms from high class, theatrical performances, to more spectacular shows aimed at attracting working class audiences. This trend is first seen in England after the disappearance of court performances in the late eighteenth century. Court performances were put on by the monarch, and typically involved a high brow theatrical performance, such as Shakespeare. However, after industrialization court performances fell out of fashion, and entertainers began developing commercial theaters with the intention of making money. In order to reach a larger audience than a traditional theater, entertainers such as Philip Astley began providing variety shows that appealed to the burgeoning working class. Industrialization had brought masses of working class people into cities like London, and they now had enough money, albeit not much, to participate in the public sphere. Born from this is the variety show, and circus.



Philip Astley is credited with opening the first venue that presented the audience with a variety show. Astley was an ex-soldier who had served in the Seven Years War, and had distinguished himself by showing his skills on a horse. After returning to England, Astley traveled around for a while as a part of a travelling performance troupe, and in 1768 he opened up his own riding school. While running his school, Astley would give lessons in the mornings, and in the afternoon he would perform tricks on horseback. Aggravated that the weather could affect his show, in 1780 Astley built a round building with a large canvas roof and seating for his audience. Astley tried to keep the prices down to attract the largest audience, and he soon realized that more variety ensure returning customers. Thus, the performer began to include sideshows between the equestrian acts such as, acrobats, magicians, rope dancers, jugglers, and clowns. Ironically it was Astley's rival, Charles Hughes, who coined the name Circus (named for the circular stage) but Astley is the father of what we would consider the "circus." The circus

was, thus, born from the opportunities created by the creation of a working class audience, and the variety shows that Astley included would eventually be included in traditional English theaters. Similar trends can be found in the history of the American theater. (Cite Nickell)

The same trend can be found in the development of American popular entertainment forms post industrialization. America did not industrialize as quickly as England for many reasons, most importantly the countries dedication to a slave based, agrarian economy. However, by the early nineteenth century America had begun building railroads and manufacturing businesses which led to large population booms in American cities. In New York, the population rose from 25,000 in 1776, to over 300,000 in 1830. Like England, many of these new residents were part of the newly formed working class who could afford to spend a little bit of money on popular entertainment. Inevitably, this created some changes in popular entertainment forms like the theater as theater managers sought to appeal to a new, growing audience of working-class Americans.

The American theater finds its roots in, of course, in England. Theatrical performances became a part of American popular culture in the mid-eighteenth century, but the entertainment form was one that was made for upper-class society. The theater, in its early years, was a form of entertainment that focused on promoting ideas of pure womanhood and the art of elocution, typically showing sentimental dramas for high class audiences. (Dudden 14). However, theater historian Faye Dudden states, “Between 1790 and 1870 entrepreneurs came to realize that entertainment could be produced and sold like other mass-consumption items.”¹ With a growing working class, the theater began to see the benefit of appealing to this new class of audience that

¹ Ibid

was quickly showing its buying power. Moreover, the theater managers began to realize that the more a show pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable by society, the more money it made. As New York was one of America's largest port cities, it was only a matter of time before a sailor showed up from a voyage on the South Seas, tattooed and ready to profit from telling tall tales of his time among the savages.



The first tattooed man in American popular entertainment was a man by the name of James O'Connell. What we know to be true is that O'Connell was an Irish American sailor whose ship sank near the Caroline Islands in the late 1820s. After the shipwreck, O'Connell and his shipmate George Keenan lived among the Native Pohnapeian people for five years. (<https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2014/januaryfebruary/curio/marked-man-0>) During this time, likely in captivity of the Native culture, O'Connell and Keenan were tattooed on their torsos. In 1833 O'Connell and Keenan found their way off the island by way of an American ship named *Spy of Salem*, where he travelled to China. Eventually, O'Connell made his way to Canada and then into New York in 1835. However, upon returning to American in 1835, the ex-sailor's tattoo, which had been a symbol of assimilation in Pohnpei, now projected to Americans that he

had “gone native” and accepted a “savage” culture. Due to the stigma of the tattoos, O’Connell, like Rutherford, had a hard time finding work in New York, thus, he went into the entertainment industry as a way of survival.

(Map of Nineteenth Century New York Playhouses)

One of the first platforms that O’Connell found to perform was The Chatham Theater, in lower Manhattan, in 1838. CITE Manhattan was effectively the heart of the American entertainment industry in the early nineteenth century. The New York borough was home to a variety of playhouses and popular entertainment forms such as Niblo’s Garden, Barnum’s American Museum, The Old Bowery Theater, Elysian Fields and many other theaters where working-class audiences went to be entertained. It is in these theaters that American popular entertainment was shaped. As stated before, working class theaters were more likely to produce sensational content to appeal to their audiences; O’Connell’s tattooed man show fit perfectly.

It is impossible to know for sure the exact circumstances regarding the factual event of O’Connell’s tattooing. It is likely that O’Connell endured the procedure for the same reasons as most sailors did; as a gesture of good faith in order to be accepted in the island culture, or, like Rutherford, as a form of willing submission to the culture of his captors. Yet, when he began performing in American theaters, the tattooed man began telling a similar story as John Rutherford: that he was kidnapped, and tortured by savages in the form of a tattoo.

O’Connell’s tale was that he and his crew were shipwrecked on the Caroline Islands and abducted by Pohnapeian natives.² According to O’Connell, his shipmates had “feared the Indians were cannibals,” (they weren’t) but O’Connell himself was brave and chose to meet the

² Ibid p. 11

natives while dancing an Irish jig for their entertainment.³ This, according to O'Connell, delighted the natives so much that they brought O'Connell and Keenan with them to their village, and then proceeded to tattoo the men against their will.⁴ O'Connell told his audience that he accepted his fate "like a martyr," while his shipmate Keenan "swore and raved," which caused the Native women to mimic and mock him later.⁵ O'Connell claimed that this was a sort of marriage ceremony, and due to his courage and bravery during the tattooing, he was given the chief's daughter. As for his shipmate, Keenan was wedded to a wife of "no rank" because of his "unwillingness to submit to the tattooing."⁶

O'Connell performed for a few theaters around Manhattan in the late 1830s, but he became a recurring show when he was hired by Phineas Taylor Barnum after the latter's acquisition of the American Museum in 1841. Barnum was America's first great showman, and is credited with being the father of modern advertising. Rather than presenting his audience with theatrical performances, Barnum's American Museum was an institution where one could find a variety of human oddities, foreign animals, artifacts, new scientific inventions, and anything else that Barnum thought would get people through the door. Barnum's museum, however, drew its audience in through the institution of deception into his shows.

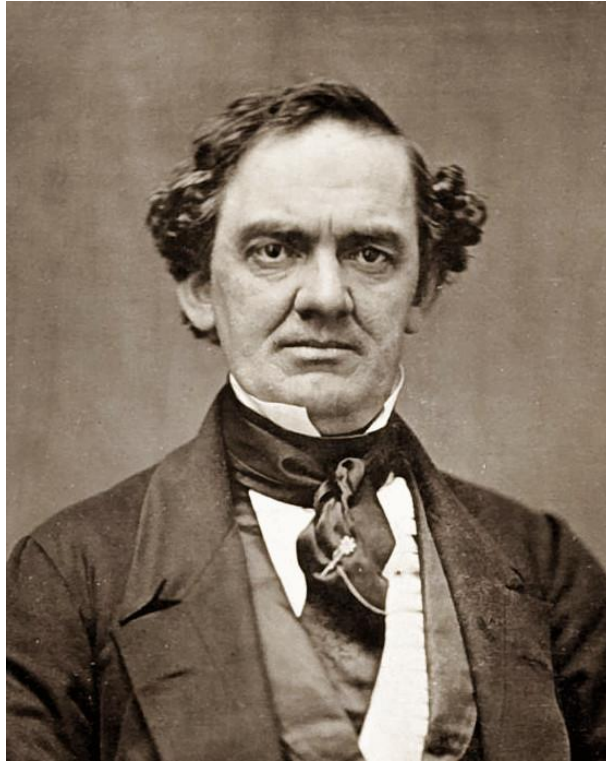
³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid p. 12

⁵ Ibid

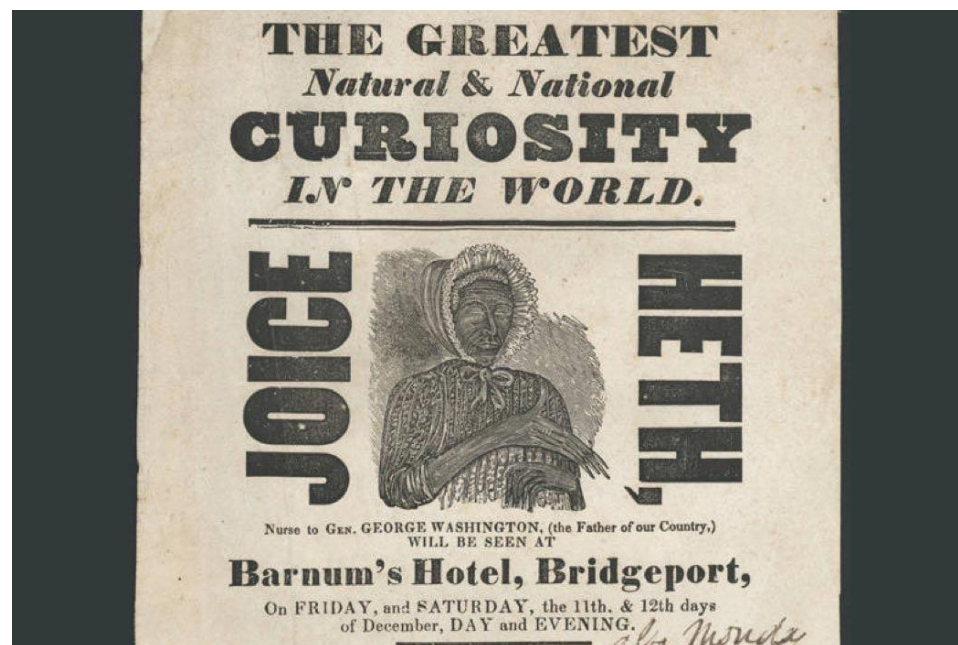
⁶ Ibid p. 14

P.T. Barnum: The Father of Advertising



Barnum learned the power of deception with his first endeavor in show business. In 1835, Barnum purchased a woman slave by the name of Joyce Heath. Heath had been a slave in Kentucky, but, likely due to her old age, she was sold to promoters R.W. Lindsay and Coley Bartram. Lindsay and Bartram tried to promote a show in which they presented Heath as the “mammy” who had nursed George Washington, but their show was unsuccessful. Barnum quickly bought Heath, and began promoting her exhibit at Niblo’s Garden with the same “mammy” story. Barnum instantly showed a knack for the show business as his advertisement of Heath’s show brought in much larger audiences than the attempts by Lindsay and Bartram. Further, after telling stories of her time with George Washington, the audience was allowed to ask her questions, and that is where Barnum’s true genius was shown. Though the poor woman was not actually HOW OLD, Barnum did train her on how to answer the kinds of questions that

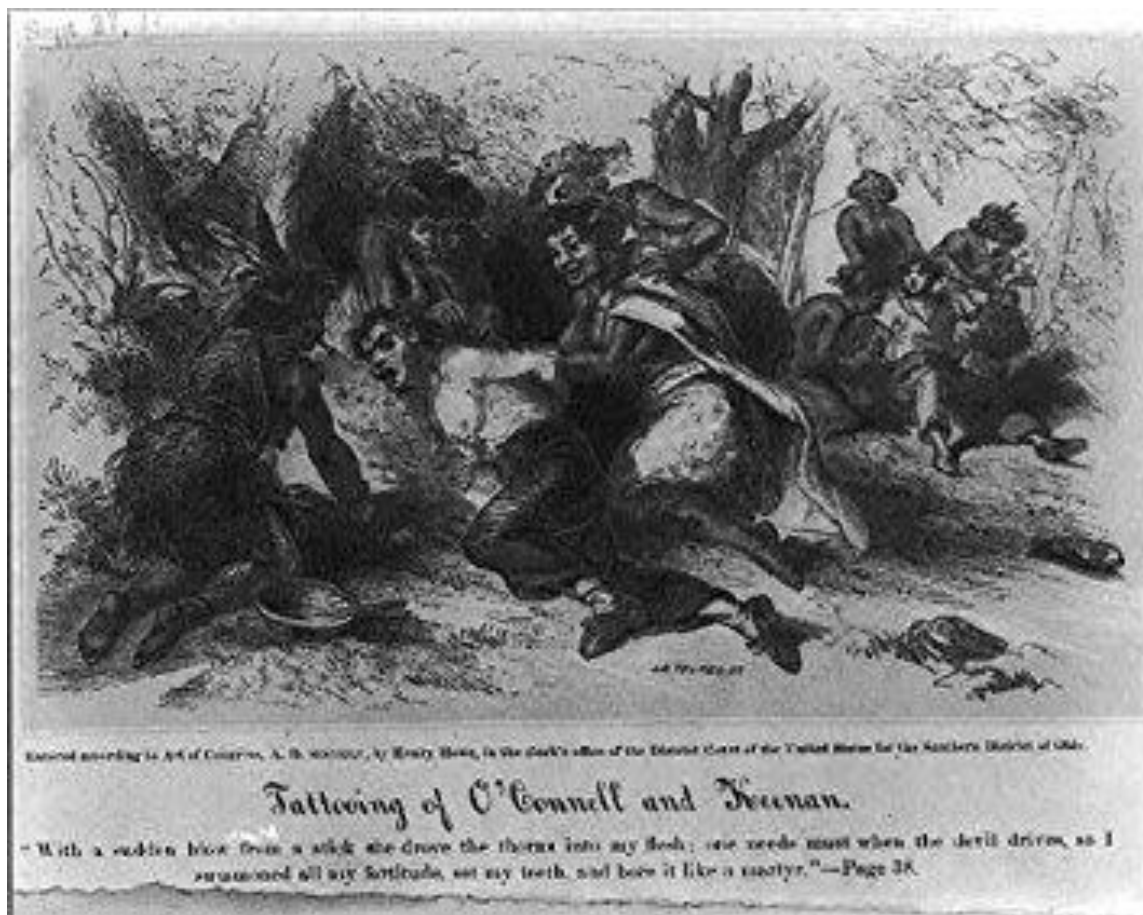
the audience was most likely to ask. This, in effect, made the show interesting as it blurred the lines between reality and fantasy. The audience left with an unsure feeling of whether or not the woman was actually HOW OLD. When Heath died, Barnum promoted a public autopsy to prove Heath's age. This inhumane spectacle brought in over fifteen hundred viewers, and the doctor found that Heath was not nearly as old as Barnum had claimed. However, Barnum simply said that the person being autopsied was not actually Heath and that she was off touring in Europe. This early experience with deception obviously left a mark on Barnum, as the showman would spend the rest of his career presenting shows that existed behind a veil of authenticity. (GET HARRIS AND CITE THIS)



Barnum was successful in his early entertainment endeavors and eventually bought American Museum in 1841. After a few years working the theater circuit, James O'Connell began working for Barnum as a regular human oddity; the tattooed man. Though the story O'Connell told was consistent with his performances in the other theaters, in 1845 Barnum cleverly added another layer to his show by selling a small book that O'Connell wrote which

detailed his experience. Within this book one can find clear examples of dehumanizing language. In discussing the native people of “New Holland” (Australia), O’Connell states, “The connecting link between apes and men, they have generally less resemblance to the African negro than the New-Zealander, and particularly, when old, resemble the monkey more than other human beings do.” Thus, O’Connell’s depiction not only discusses the “savage” nature of island cultures, but also suggests that they are some missing link in human development. This idea that island people are animal-like, sub-humans would later become a hallmark of colonial depictions of Island cultures.

After some time on the stage, an image was created that depicted O’Connell’s tattooing in order to advertise for his show.



Engraving according to Act of Congress, A. D. 1809, by Henry Bone, in the Clerk's office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of Ohio.

Tattooing of O'Connell and Keenan.

"With a sudden blow from a stick she drove the thorns into my flesh; one needs must when the devil drives, as I pronounced all my sottishness, set my teeth, and bore it like a martyr."—Page 38.

As one can see in this picture, O'Connell is surrounded by Pohnapeian women who are gazing maliciously at the sailor's misfortunes. His hands are seemingly being held behind his back by one woman, while another performs the tattooing, and two more simply watch. In the background one can see the George Keenan meeting a similar fate. The look on O'Connell's face is one of agony as he undergoes his tattooing. On Keenan the look is one of fear. Underneath this image O'Connell claims that he "bore it like a martyr." Though the image is consistent with O'Connell's tale, it does mark a transition from a theatrical performance to a visual representation. On the stage the sailor tells a story of captivity, in the image the audience sees the brutal torture by foreign women. The skin color of the two sailors is juxtaposed with the dark skin of the native women, thereby insinuating the purity of the men. The look on the face of the woman doing the tattooing is one of pure ecstasy. This image, thus, is one of the first examples in American popular culture of an image in which island cultures were depicted causing harm to a Western body due to their brutal, savage practices. This image projects the dangers one might find if they leave the safe constructs of Western society.

Importantly, this depiction is highly dissimilar to the recollection of O'Connell's tattooing in his book. For example, in discussing the tattooing O'Connell states, "One of my women produced a calabash of black liquid; another took my left hand...the third beauty then produced a small flat piece of wood with thorns...this she dipped in the black liquid, then rested the points of the thorns on the mark on my hand, and with a sudden blow from a stick, drove the thorns into my flesh...Between every blow my beauty dipped her thorns in the ink."(12-13) Indeed, O'Connell's first-hand account of his tattooing suggests that the man somewhat willingly went through with the operation, or at least accepted it. His narrative also suggests some overt sexual attraction to the women who were tattooing him as he calls them "my beauties."

Obviously, this would not have played to a crowd as well, so when O'Connell took the stage, and when this advertisement was made, the tattooing took on the form of forced torture, rather than cross-fertilization of the Island culture. Instead of showing the sailor, sitting happily while his "beauties" tattooed him, the image above shows a man writhing in pain from the torture brought on by the dangerous savages. This imagery was used to sell his show, but is also served to dehumanize the women, and demonize the practice of tattooing.

If one were to look only at tattooing and its history, this image may seem like the beginning of this imagery. However, at the time of O'Connell's show, America had a long history of captivity narratives, and imagery that depicted that captivity, which went back to the seventeenth century. When European colonizers landed in the Americas, unsurprisingly, there were already people populating the land.

These people, idiotically named Indians by the clueless voyagers who were not sure where they were, had their own cultures and traditions that were quite foreign to the colonizers. Due to the European's disinterest in learning the traditions of the Native Americans, certain practices were perceived by the Europeans to be savage and brutal. One of these practices was the act of taking enemies captive.



The Indians delivering up the English Captives in General Washington's Camp at the Siege of Fort Mifflin in North America in 1777.

Captivity Narratives

Once Europeans settled in the Americas, they almost immediately began fighting with the local Native populations over land, introducing a catalyst for violence and hostility between the two groups. Though taking enemies hostage was not a foreign practice to the Europeans, they weren't particularly fond of the act when it was done to them. In Amerindian cultures in the Northeast and Southwest; such as the Iroquois, Hurons, Delaware, Apache, Mohave, and Yavapai among others, it was a common practice to take enemies captive, especially women and children, for the purpose of ransom or adoption.(Namias 24) In fact, between 1675 and 1763 over sixteen hundred people were taken captive by Amerindian tribes in New England alone.(Namias 7) Taking enemy captives was a common practice which offered many strategic and social advantages. By taking captives, the cultures that employed this practice were often attempting to extract a ransom for their victims or to replace a family member who had died.[Namias 3] Most Euro-Americans who were taken captive survived, especially women: only 10% of women taken captive were killed. Assimilating captives was one of the major social advantages for Native Americans who engaged in this practice, as assimilation allowed for them to increase their populations, and ransom offered desirable goods. With the arrival of British and French colonizers, Native American cultures in the Northeast continued this practice against their new enemy as a way of waging war, thereby causing the Europeans to fear what they did not understand.[Namias 3] Born from the colonizer's publication of their experiences in captivity is the literary genre known as captivity narratives.



Captivity narratives predate the colonization of the Americas, but, due to the frequency in which they were published in America they are considered a purely American literary genre. Beginning in 1682, with Mary Rowlandson's *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, captivity narratives were written to express the experiences of captivity among "savages" from the 'civilized' captive's perspective. These stories went through various iterations between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, often reflecting the Euro-American anxieties about the dangers of life on the ever expanding frontier. In the vast majority of the narratives, the white captive would tell stories of the "savage devils," and their barbaric customs. One can only guess why these narratives were popular (out of all best sellers from 1680 to 1720 three of the top four were captivity narratives), one would have to suppose that it was the voyeuristic nature of the books that allowed for the reader to learn of life among a foreign people without having to actually experience it. Though these stories were born from actual experiences, many of the narratives were over dramatic exaggerations of what the Euro-Americans realistically experienced. The point of the narratives was to sell copies, so the

authors likely exaggerated their experiences to play to the racist nature of their audience. The more brutal the experience, the better a narrative was likely to sell.



Artists also took advantage of the popularity of captivity narratives as it became popular to create artwork that depicted particularly popular narratives. For example, in this image one can see two scantily clad, Adonis-like Native Americans about to murder a helpless white woman. She is on her knees in a position of weakness, and her dress is falling at the shoulder: thus adding a sexualized component to the painting. The two Amerindians have lust in their eyes, insinuating a barbaric joy in killing. In the right hand corner one can just barely see a man running in the distance, obviously too late to save his woman.

Jane McCrea was killed by a Huron-Wendat warrior during the Revolutionary War, but her story, at that time, was used as a caution against helping the British. McCrea was engaged to a British loyalist, and upon planning to meet up with him she was killed. However, it was her betrothed, Lieutenant General John Burgoyne, who had sent the Amerindian to pick her up. McCrea was memorialized, and used in myriad propaganda against the British, but by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the story of Jane McCrea had been re-appropriated to suggest the savage nature of Native Americans. Enemies of the colonizers had changed and so too must their propaganda. It is impossible to know if O'Connell or Barnum knew of this story, or of the myriad other captivity narratives that were popular at the time, but it is inarguable that the tattooed sideshow, and O'Connell's story of captivity, was playing on the same anxieties about "other" cultures that made captivity narratives such an integral part of American literature.

Although O'Connell's show, and the imagery came with it, appropriated the captivity narrative as a way to entertain an audience, what is different is that the depictions in O'Connell's show lived thousands of miles away. In America, the Euro-American colonizers were actually getting taken by Native Americans who were trying to protect their land. Though Native Americans posed a real threat to some Euro-Americans, especially on the frontier, the threat was highly exaggerated to validate the genocide of Amerindians at the hands of the colonizers. However, in O'Connell's tale, though he likely was taken captive in the same fashion as many of the captives in captivity narratives, the sailor had landed on in a foreign land that did not pose a threat to Euro-Americans. However, by bringing his story to the stage, and telling of the dangers that "savage" cultures pose to white "civilized" people in places around the world, O'Connell was unknowingly laying the foundation for imperialist images of native islanders as people in need of civilization.

Tattooing in the News

As his story was exciting and dramatic, O'Connell's fantastic tale quickly made its way into American newspapers. A newspaper article, entitled "Adventures on the South Seas," from the *Boston Galaxy*, published on December 2, 1836, gives an account of O'Connell's tattooing that differed slightly but significantly from the story included in his narrative in 1845. In regard to O'Connell's tattooing the author states, "[after the shipwreck] He was soon made a chief – and then it was necessary to give him *caste* by the process of *tattooing*, which is not a useless proceeding, but is a *history of the various chiefs of the nation*." This account, thus, has O'Connell obtaining the tattoos *after* he had become a chief, and presents the tattooing as a result of his heightened status in the island culture. Instead of the tattooing being a result of torture, the tattoo was a symbol of acceptance. O'Connell's account had obviously changed by the time he was performing in the theater, but this article's depiction of the events shows that O'Connell's story likely changed to be more dramatic. In adding the drama to his show, the sailor also dehumanized the native population.

The article also exhibits early hints of imperialist representations as the author describes O'Connell's experience. For example, after a discussion of what a sailor could trade with the Pohnpeians and what goods could be procured from them, the author states "The natives are very kind if well used – but will steal iron from vessels which visit them – and their revenge for the punishment of this theft has generated the idea that they are very savage." This statement presents the heart of the problem regarding imperialist nations and their understanding of the people they colonize. Clearly, the author sees the island cultures as something to be "used" in order to get useful resources from the islands. Also, "their revenge for the punishment of this theft" insinuates that when the sailors went to the islands, and the natives stole some of the iron

from their boats, the sailors would “punish” the natives. One can assume this punishment meant physical violence. Punishment insinuates that someone committed a crime and, thus, brought on recourse. Revenge implies that someone is getting back at someone else for an injustice. Thus, the author’s statement that the “revenge for the punishment” implies that the civilized sailors would punish injustice, as is the civilized thing to do, and the Pohnpeians would exact revenge because of the punishment. The statement that “this...has generated the idea that they are very savage” implies that the Americans see themselves as superior because they have rules and customs that the island natives did not understand, and the Pohnpeians reaction to the civilized punishment shows that the natives are savages. This kind of thinking, that another culture is primitive and savage because they do not understand Western customs is arguably at the forefront of all validations for imperialism.

Soon after O’Connell had begun performing in theaters in New York, American media began to dehumanize people that tattooed by considering the tattoo as evidence of one’s “savagery.” For example, in an article entitled “A Dandy Chastised,” published in 1834, the author discusses Native Americans affinity for tattooing and then states, “The Indians on our Western border are wont to assume the character of the bear, the panther, or some ‘other interesting beast of prey,’ and place their ambition in enacting the look and conduct of such beast.”⁷ The point of the author is right in the title: to chastise a “dandy.” A dandy is a colloquial term used in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to deride a man who used refined language and was well dressed. The typical man who was considered a dandy during this time period was from the middle-class and had made enough money to begin dressing well and attempting to carry themselves in a more sophisticated manner. Acting in such a way drew the ire from so

⁷ “The Dandy Chastised.” *Southern Literary Messenger* 1, no. 3, (Nov 1834): 96

called 'old money' aristocrats, and from the working class. This article makes the argument that "Among the follies and vices of mankind, there is nothing more remarkable or ridiculous than the continual effort, among all people – savage, civilized, and pseudo-civilized – to increase or impart beauty and comeliness to their forms and features."(IBID) The author uses the example of the "savages" tattooing their bodies with "beasts of prey," to note the way that "savages" attempt to beautify their bodies. At the end of the article, the author includes a poem, near the end of which includes the lines "Go! Thou vile satire on the human race; Go! *On all fours*, and seek thy proper place." This article's use of Native American tattooing as evidence of their savagery clearly shows the link between the idea of an 'uncivilized' person and the act of tattooing. The author further dehumanizes Native Americans by saying that they tattooed in order to be more animal like. In regards to the dandy, the author insinuates that caring so much what you look like, a main characteristic of a dandy, makes you no better than the 'savages.' It is among the animals, and thus the 'savages', where the dandy finds his "proper place."

Inherent in all of these histories, from tattooed sideshows to dandies, is a sense that there was something much larger going on in the male psyche during the early nineteenth century. Each of these histories speaks volumes about how Americans perceived conceptualized ideas of manliness. Greenberg's work argues that the concept of manliness changes in the early-nineteenth century due, in part, to industrialization and the creation of the working class. For Greenberg, in the eighteenth century a man was considered manly if he was educated, refined, temperate, well spoken, and well mannered. However, these characteristics were not easily achievable by the burgeoning working class. Due to this fact, the working class began conceive of manliness as characterized by strength, toughness, and the ability to dominate. As this new concept of manliness was affecting society at large, one could presume that it had an effect on

working-class entertainment forms such as sideshows, literature, and media. If one looks at these cultural forms, it is quite clear that, though ideas of racial superiority were at the forefront of depictions of island cultures, ideas of manliness were also quite prevalent.

The shifting concept of manliness discussed by Greenberg is quite plain in the stories of both John Rutherford and James O'Connell. For instance, the part of Rutherford's journal that discusses his tattooing, the author states "While I was undergoing the operation, although the pain was most acute, I never either moved or uttered a sound; but my comrades moaned dreadfully."(R. 135) A similar sentiment can be gleaned from the section of O'Connell's journal where the author discusses his feelings during the tattoo process: "so I summoned all my fortitude, set my teeth, and bore it like a martyr."(O 13) Like Rutherford, O'Connell also juxtaposes his strong, manly reaction to the tattooing with the weak, unmanly reaction of his comrade: "George soon let me hear from him. He swore and raved without any attention to rule; the way he did it was profane...He wished all sorts of bloody murder to light on his tormentors."(O 13) Thus, one can see a common theme in these two tattooed performer's tales of captivity and tattooing. In both situations they were strong and accepted their tattooing with grace, while their shipmates were weak and cried out when they were tattooed. With this kind of rhetoric, the sailors were able to both suggest the inhumanness of the island cultures, but also assert their manhood as the torture did not break them. They were tough. They were survivors.

In the case of captivity narratives, artists and author's played on white ideas of strength to better suggest the dangers that Native Americans posed. In many of the narratives the subjects were women or children; perceived to be the weaker segments of society that the white men were supposed to protect. By using women and children as the subject, the authors and artists were projecting the idea that the white men had failed to assert themselves, and they were not strong

enough to save the weakest among them. In much of the art created during early nineteenth century that depicts captivity, Native Americans were depicted as muscular, strong men who had taken some poor, pale white woman. The implication of strength, thus, rests with the Native Americans, not with white men. This was likely part of the draw for these stories, as it could insight feelings of hate and of the need to protect white women by killing Native Americans.

Overt sexual domination, as a characteristic of manliness, was also a part of these histories. In Rutherford's account, he was accepted by the Maori, and eventually was given a chief's daughter to marry. In O'Connell's account, he was also given an "Island Princess" to marry. In both accounts they were allowed sexual relationships with kin to the leadership of their Native counterparts because they had proven that they were tough. This idea of sexual domination over the "savages" in the tattooed narratives, is quite juxtaposed in the captivity narratives of white women. In these narratives, like toughness, the roles are reversed and the artwork suggests that the Native Americans were going to sexually dominate the white women. In the painting of Jane McCrea, the woman's dress is torn, almost falling off, and she is in a sexually suggestive position on her knees. With the tattoo narratives, sexuality was used as a sort of prize for their manliness. In the captivity narratives, sexuality was used to suggest danger to white women and a need to eradicate Native Americans. However, both types of stories were playing on the same sentiments of manliness that had been developing in the post-industrialization West.

Conclusion

The depictions and assumptions of Island people as savages in need of civilization stems from Western culture's colonial disposition when interacting with peoples and cultures that they did not understand. Those with the power to travel, the voyagers, visited islands of people they

had no interest in learning about, but, rather, who they saw as simply inhabiting land that they could exploit to make money. As the voyagers held the power to travel and explore, they also held the power to shape the discourse about Island people and culture. When this power turned into words in the form of journals, the ideas of island people as savages was thus disseminated into Western society at large. As these men saw the native populations from a colonial perspective, the traditions and cultures of South Sea Islanders was perceived of as savage, in need of destruction to make way for civilization. One particular example of this was tattooing. Tattooing was seen as an example of island people's barbarism, and the symbols that meant so much to the island cultures was subsequently taken back to the West as an example of native savagery. This may have been harmless, but this happened at a time when the commodification of theatrical performance and spectacle was beginning to take hold in the West, especially in England and America. Once the tattoo was introduced to a growing new class of people hungry for popular entertainment forms, the island culture's symbols of rank, religion, and military prowess were turned into symbols of torture and savage barbarism. What one can see in the early tattooed sideshows is, thus, a growing sentiment in America that island people are brutal and in need for civilization. This idea would continuously be used by pro-imperialist Americans throughout the nineteenth century.