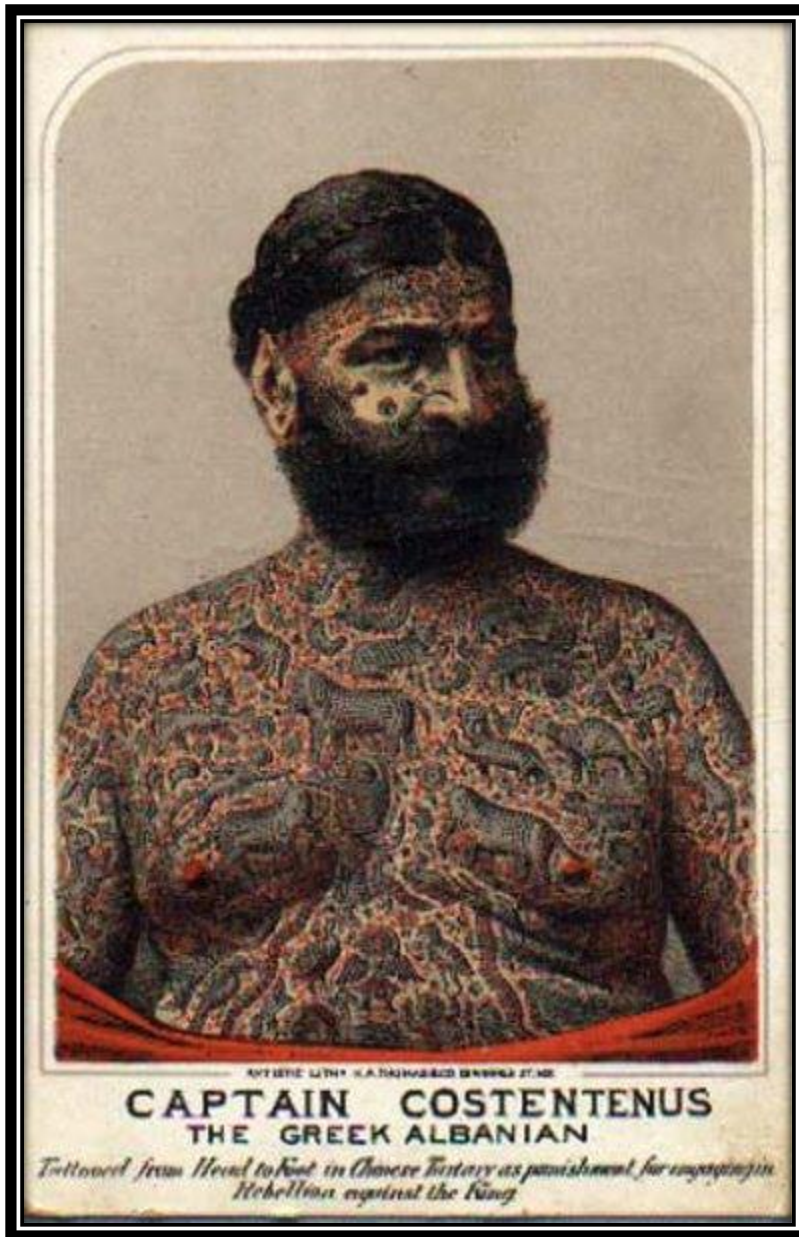


Captain Constantine – The Greek Nobleman



By 1876, twenty-two years after James O’Connell’s death, another man by the name of Georgius Costentenus had taken the reigns as America’s most famous tattooed man. Costentenus also performed in New York as a part of Barnum’s American Museum, and the new tattooed man continued the tradition of telling audiences that he was captured and tortured at the hands of foreign ‘savages.’ Further, due to the proliferation of American railroads, and

Barnum's investment in a traveling circus, Costentenus performed around the country spreading his story of 'captivity' and 'torture.'¹ Through an analysis of Costentenus's career, and how he was perceived by American audiences, one can begin to understand how the tattooed sideshow reflected trends in American society, how contemporary Americans viewed foreign cultures, and how the sideshow further created links between tattooing and 'savagery.'



Georgius Costentenus, also known as Captain Constantine, was a Greek immigrant to the United States who was the most successful "tattooed man" sideshow in American entertainment

¹ *The Grange Advance* (Red Wing, Minn.), "Mr. P. T. Barnum's New and Only Greatest Show on Earth." July 11, 1877. p. 1; also *The State Journal* (Jefferson City, MO) "Barnum's Big Show," Sept. 21, 1877. p. 7; *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling W. VA.), September 12, 1878.

history.² Costentenus' first exhibition was a part of the Vienna World Exposition in 1873.³ Costentenus' was included in the exposition as an example of Eastern 'curiosities,' because he had been drawing the attention of audiences, especially scholars, who were interested in Eastern art and Ethnography.⁴ Costentenus was, at the time, the most elaborately tattooed man in the world, with his body containing 388 unique, Eastern designs that covered every part of his body except for the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet.⁵ After the exhibition, Costentenus began working for P.T. Barnum and his traveling circus, obtaining a salary of one hundred dollars a day.⁶ Costentenus spent years traveling with Barnum's, as well as Dan Rice's, circus, taking the stage to tell a fantastic story of captivity and torture at the hands of 'savages' in Chinese Tartary.⁷ Like O'Connell, Costentenus' show blurred the lines between fact and fiction because deception was a major tool of the entertainment industry during the nineteenth century, however his tattooed sideshow was well documented and gives insight into how the 'tattooed by savages' narrative had changed in the years between O'Connell and Costentenus, and how these changes reflect changes in society at large.

First and foremost, the number of tattoos that Costentenus had marked a huge shift in the tattooed sideshow toward men with extensive tattoos. In the years of James O'Connell's show, the Irishman did not have much competition for the title of tattooed man as tattooing was not yet common in American culture, so, a few tattoos on his arms, hands, chest, legs, and abdomen

² Bogdan p. 243

³ Ibid

⁴ "Tattooed Man from Burmah." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*; Trubner & Co., London, England; 1872. p.288-292

⁵ Ibid

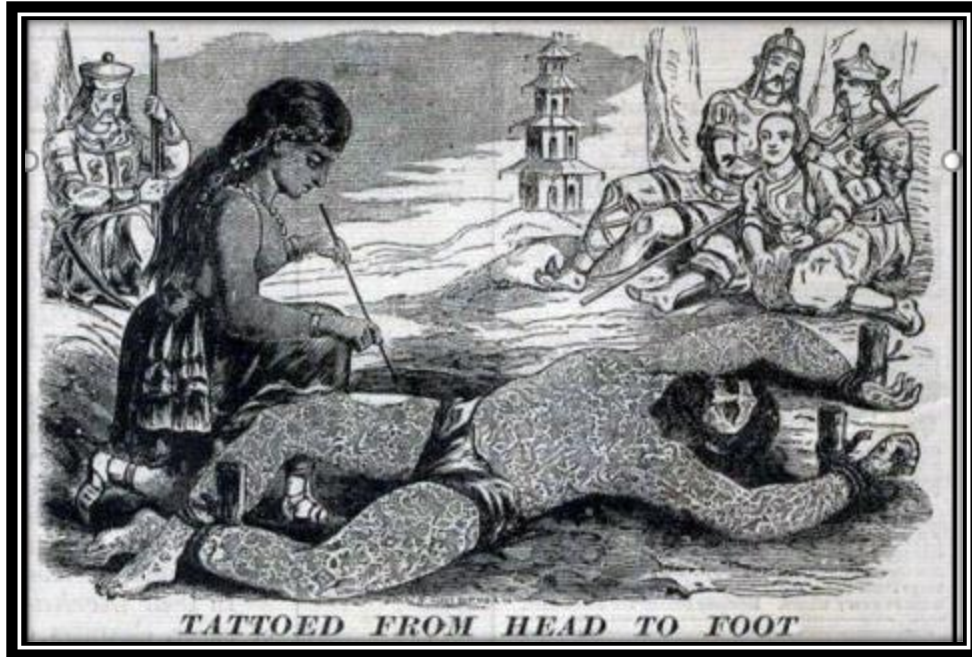
⁶ Parry, Albert. *Tattoo: Secrets of a Strange Art*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006. p. 61

⁷ Dan Rice was another famous showman during the nineteenth century. He is not remembered as well as Barnum, but his influence on the American circus was arguably as great as Barnum's. For more on Dan Rice, See BOOKS

were enough to make him a spectacle. However, when Costentenus arrived in America, tattooing had become more popular among the working class. Sailors were particularly accustomed to tattooing as suggested by an 1859 newspaper article, “From the African Squadron,” in which the author states that “It is estimated that, at least, four thousand persons in the United States Navy, annually, are tattooed.”⁸ Further, in an 1860 article entitled “Tattooing,” the author states, “We maintain that tattooing is much in vogue in our communities.”⁹ Both articles, also, overtly suggest that tattooing was a form of “atavism,” and that the practice was “senseless,” which suggests that, although tattooing was becoming more popular, it was frowned upon by many in contemporary American society. Nevertheless, during the mid-nineteenth century, more Americans were getting tattooed. Thus, when Costentenus began touring with Barnum’s circus it was no longer acceptable for a showman to have only a few tattoos. The tattooed man needed to be a dramatic example of the practice, one that shocked audiences and really highlighted a juxtaposition between Americans and the foreign culture that ‘forcibly’ tattooed the performer.

⁸ “From the African Squadron.” *New York Times* (New York City, NY); Mar 9, 1859. p. 2

⁹ “Tattooing.” *The Press Tribune* (Chicago, IL) Oct. 22, 1860.



Like O'Connell, Costentenus also published a booklet that outlined his fantasy, thereby providing readers with a literary version of what he would tell audiences during his performance. According to his memoir, entitled *The Life and Adventures of Capt. Costentenus*, published in 1881, the showman was a Greek nobleman, born to a Christian family living in Turkish Albania. As a child, Costentenus' family was killed by Turkish pagans who subsequently adopted the young Greek and forced him to live in one of the Turk's harems.¹⁰ As his story goes, at twelve years old Costentenus was taken in by pirates, survived a shipwreck, and found himself in Persia where he was taken captive to once more live as a part of a harem. Later, Costentenus travels to China to work in copper mines. In China, Costentenus organizes a labor uprising against the ruling Khan, which is quickly squashed and he, along with his co-conspirators, was caught. As punishment for his rebellion, Costentenus was given the choice of being "starved to death, stung

¹⁰ Konstantinus, Georg. *The True Life and Adventures of Captain Costentenus, the Tattooed Greek Prince*. New York Popular Publishing Co, New York. 1881.

to death by wasps, killed by tigers, cut to pieces...impaled on spears, burned to death, or tattooed,” with the promise that if he survived the tattooing he would be set free.¹¹ Costentenus and his co-conspirators chose the tattooing, and he was the only one to survive.

In true circus sideshow form, Costentenus’s story is full of exaggerations and outright lies. In an interview in 1884, published in the *Evening Star*, one of Costentenus’ co-workers, a “tattooed lady” named Mary Baum, was asked if Costentenus was truly “tattooed by savages,” to which she replied, “That is a story invented to make him more interesting.”¹² It is well established by scholars who study the circus and tattooing that tattooed sideshow women and men were lying about how, and where they obtained their tattoos.¹³ However, Costentenus’ narrative signifies numerous progressions within popular entertainment culture, as well as in American culture at large. For example, the location of the ‘savages’ who performed the tattooing shifted from the South Seas to ‘The Orient,’ which signifies a progression in the interests of the American public regarding what area of the world they deemed exotic. The ‘victim’ of the tattooing also changed in significant ways as O’Connell was an innocent shipwrecked voyager, tattooed by ‘savages’ so that he would fit in, whereas Costentenus was an ex-pirate, criminal, who had received his tattoos as punishment for alleged crimes. In both cases, the tattoo was a symbol of foreignness and the dangers that await if one leaves the safe confines of ‘civilized’ Western society.

The changes and continuities in the tattooed man sideshow, from O’Connell to Costentenus, presents an example of how contemporary society was dealing with the dichotomous symbol of the tattoo; on the one hand, it was a new fashion trend in some circles,

¹¹ Ibid p. 19

¹² "The Tattooed Lady." *Evening Star (Washington D.C.)*, October 11, 1884.

¹³ See Bogdan, Gilbert, DeMello, Mifflin, and Nickel.

and on the other it was a symbol of foreign ‘savagery.’ The shows also give a glimpse into the way contemporary Americans were conceptualizing foreign lands and cultures. Each destination in these stories were places that were coveted by Americans in the hopes that they could exploit the land and people for financial gain. To best understand how these changes fit into the history of the mid-nineteenth century it is imperative to look back at the numerous histories that are represented in the sideshow of Captain Costentenus, The Greek Nobleman.

Manifest Destiny and American Imperialism



In 1845, at the height of James O’Connell’s popularity, the idea that Anglo-Saxon Americans were destined by God to bring American ‘civilization’ to ‘savage’ cultures began to

proliferate in American media sources. This idea best manifests itself in the phrase “Manifest Destiny,” coined by John O’Sullivan in 1845. In an article entitled “Annexation,” published in *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, O’Sullivan expounds his theory for the future of America that includes the consolidation of ‘American’ lands from the Atlantic to the Pacific.¹⁴ The point of O’Sullivan’s article was to argue for the annexation of Texas, but his predictions for how far Americans would take expansionist policies are prescient. For example, O’Sullivan states that it was America’s “manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”¹⁵ The American people would obtain the lands in the Mississippi Valley, California, Oregon, and Washington, within a decade after O’Sullivan’s statement, solidifying American land from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

In the case of manifest destiny, O’Sullivan is of minor importance. O’Sullivan was not a government official making policies that encouraged American expansion. He was not on the frontier engaging in the rape and murder of Native American peoples.¹⁶ The author of the phrase “Manifest Destiny” was simply remarking upon a general feeling among the American populace of racial and cultural superiority, suggesting that such ideas would eventually lead Americans, “armed with the plough and the rifle” to spread across the land, “marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting-houses.”¹⁷ The idea that Americans would ‘civilize’ the many Native American lands and people that laid between themselves and the Pacific Ocean was at the heart of nineteenth-century American expansionist

¹⁴ John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, Volume 17 (New York: 1845), 5-6, 9-10.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ See Dunbar-Ortiz, Greenberg, Brooks add here for books on the frontier.

¹⁷ O’Sullivan

argument. “Manifest Destiny” was not a policy or a new idea, it was a validation for the indefensible rape and murder of millions of people.¹⁸

Although O’Sullivan’s prophetic article specifically discusses expansion in North American lands, the idea of manifest destiny was quickly employed by the press to argue for American expansion into foreign lands that laid outside of the North American continent. For example, a *New York Daily Times* article, published in 1851, states “Manifest destiny and the horizon move together. The national progress is best described as expansion.”¹⁹ The author goes on to argue for the annexation of Hawaii and the Sandwich Islands in the South Pacific, suggesting that Americans would not meet much resistance because missionaries had made the Island peoples a “conquered culture.”²⁰ The author goes on to argue that the people who lived on these islands were dying and since they had been dominated by previous Western colonizers, that it was inevitable that either the U.S. or one of the European powers would move in and reap the benefits of an agricultural colony.²¹ Significantly, these arguments were being made while James O’Connell was still taking the stage and telling a story of captivity and torture among the ‘savages’ in the South Pacific. O’Connell and the American press were tapping into a feeling among the American middle-class that it was their duty to bring civilization to the ‘savage’ island cultures of the South Pacific.

Moreover, some in the American press overtly made the claim that American expansion was a patriotic duty. For example, in a *New York Daily Times* article entitled “The Science of Manifest Destiny,” the author suggests that America needed to expand into Cuba, Hawaii, and

¹⁸ Greenberg

¹⁹ “Annexation in the Pacific.” *New York Daily Times*; Nov 11, 1851. p.2

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

the Sandwich Islands in order to spread American Republicanism.²² For this author, “Every nation, as it passes through the swaddling-bands and other needful restrictions of infancy, calls for wider room, and gets it by the strong arm or cunning policy.” The author goes on to state, “Everywhere beyond our own borders, on this Western hemisphere, do we see the need of the steady, ballasting traits of Anglo-Saxonism. It will never do to argue the practicability of our system beyond the confines of the race until the experiment is abundantly tried.”²³ The author of “The Science of Manifest Destiny” tied patriotism to expansion, but it is quite plain that he saw expansion as a way to exploit some lucrative trade opportunities with Asia. For example, after discussing the reasons why America should colonize Cuba and some of the Islands in the South Pacific, the author states, “Japan must abandon old fashions in our favor, that we may unbar the obscure chambers of her fabulous wealth, and share the contents.”²⁴ Thus, the author was using patriotism to sell the idea of colonizing foreign lands, but there was clearly another goal of using the islands to open trade with Asian countries. This statement is indicative of actual American policy toward Asian countries during the mid-nineteenth century as America signed trade treaties with China and Japan in 1844 and 1854, respectively.²⁵ Asian countries did become major trading partners with America after these treaties were signed, but America’s obsession with Asian goods truly began after the Centennial Exposition in 1876.²⁶

PICTURE OF THE HOME FROM BRODY

²² “The Science of Manifest Destiny.” *New York Daily Times (1851-1857)*; Sep 9, 1852;

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

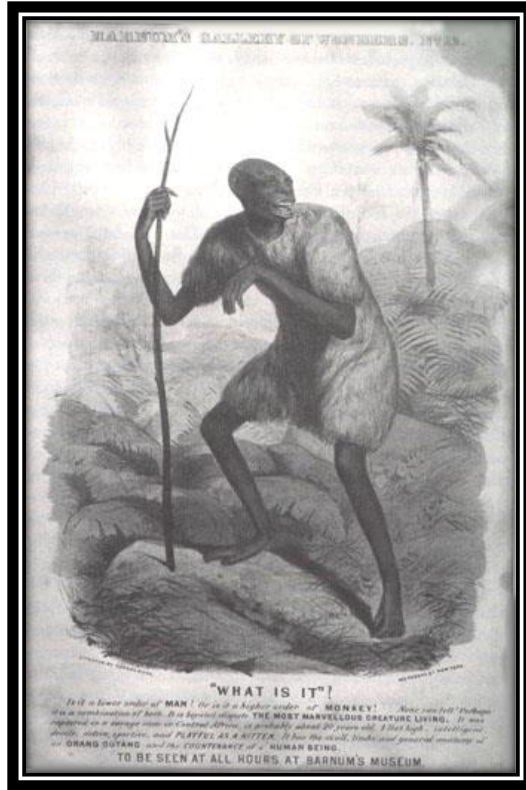
²⁵ In 1844, after the *First Opium War*, China and the U.S. signed the Treaty of Wanghia, opening up Chinese ports to American ships, and ten years later, Commodore Mathew Perry landed in Japan and established a trade relationship with the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Peace and Amity, signed in March of 1854.

²⁶ Brody p.38

The Centennial Exposition was held in Philadelphia, in 1876. Throughout the Exposition, visitors from all over could see art, material culture, and scientific discoveries from countries around the world. Americans were drawn to the ‘exotic’ goods from Eastern countries, but, “most Americans understood the Orient as a whole, as an entire entity with cultural parts and pieces that could be assembled, disassembled, and reassembled to form a Western fantasy.”²⁷ After the Centennial Exposition began a “Japan Craze” in which Asian goods became immensely popular among upper-class Americans who wanted to decorate their home to look worldly. In this same year, George Costentenus arrived in America selling the idea that he too brought with him goods from the ‘Orient.’ His goods, however, were stories and tattoos. Thus, by 1876, during America’s Asian obsession, the tattooed man sideshows simply pandered to the American working-class audience by capitalizing on racist sentiments, and a thirst for American expansion.

White Superiority in Popular Entertainment

²⁷ Ibid



Ideas of white superiority over ‘other’ cultures, which is the foundation of manifest destiny, also found their way into American popular culture through P.T. Barnum’s American Museum. By 1860, P.T. Barnum had become a great success in the entertainment business in New York due to his penchant for advertisement and deception.²⁸ Barnum had made a name for himself by filling the American Museum with a mixture of informational exhibits, exotic animals, and “human oddities.”²⁹ The phrase “human oddities” was a euphemism for parading a person onto a stage as if they were a part of a human zoo. One shining example of this practice is Barnum’s “What is it?” exhibit. For this show, Barnum would tell audiences that there was a missing link in human evolution who was caught in Africa.³⁰ He would then pull back a curtain to show a caged black man named William Henry Johnson. Johnson was the child of former slaves and likely had microcephaly; a condition in which the skull does not develop properly, leading to a smaller, misshaped head and mental disabilities.³¹ Thus, Barnum’s audience was presented with a mentally handicapped black man in furry clothes as a representative of unevolved humans. This show illustrates how Barnum and others exploited exceedingly racist content for popular, working-class entertainment.

²⁸ The Art of Deception

²⁹ Bogdan or Nickel

³⁰ James Cook. *The Arts of Deception*, Harvard University Press; Cambridge, Mass; 2001. p.122-124

³¹ Ibid



“What is it?” is the most famous example of the way Barnum exploited racism in America for show, but it was not his first attempt at this endeavor. In 1842, Barnum tried to procure and exhibit a man named Vendovi.³² Vendovi was a native chief in Fiji who had been ‘arrested’ by Charles Wilkes during the United States Exploring Expedition 1838-1842 for the murder of two American sailors, including Wilkes’ nephew Henry, a few years prior.³³ An American schooner had been shipwrecked and the some of the crew had, allegedly, been killed and eaten by Fijian natives. This story was watched closely by Americans and served to support

³² Bogdan p.179

³³ **The daily Madisonian., December 16, 1841, Image 2**
About [The daily Madisonian. \(Washington City \[i.e., Washington, D.C.\] 1841-1845](#)

a common characterization of Fijian people as cannibals.³⁴ Vendovi died upon arrival to New York, likely due to tuberculosis, so he was never actually exhibited by Barnum. However, in 1872 Barnum's attempt to provide his audience with live examples of Fiji "cannibals" came to fruition.³⁵ Barnum successfully obtained four Fijian people from Na Viti Levu, one of the islands in Fiji, who he exhibited as the "Fijian Cannibals" in his traveling circus.³⁶ Like the "What is it?" exhibit, Barnum's presentation of the Fijians was clearly intended to highlight the 'primitiveness' of this foreign culture, and, thus, the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. Unfortunately, shows like the "Feejee Cannibals" and "What is it?" became a popular type of show in popular entertainment formats throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Barnum's choice to present foreign bodies as 'human oddities' encouraged his audience to note the 'uncivilized' characteristics of the people on stage, yet these shows were simply an evolution of James O'Connell's tattooed man sideshow. With O'Connell's show, the character on stage was a white man that bore marks of the 'savage' practices of Natives in the South Seas. With the "What is it?" and "Feejee Cannibals" exhibits, the showman effectively took out the middleman and presented his audience with living examples of 'savage' cultures.

Racism in Scholarship

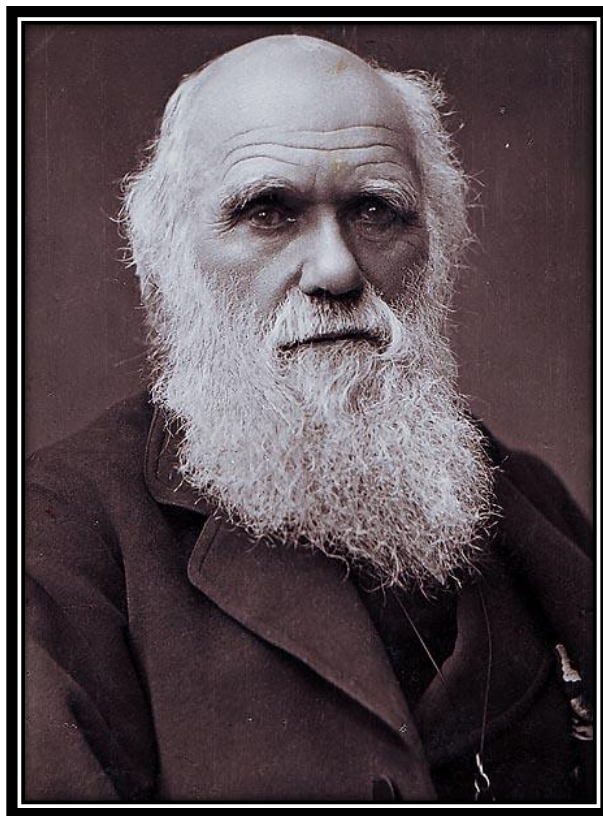
Using foreign bodies as evidence of racial superiority was becoming exceedingly popular in public entertainment in the mid-nineteenth century, but it was also prevalent in academic circles. For preceding generations, white people often referred to foreign 'other' cultures as

³⁴ **The Polynesian., November 07, 1840, Image 1**
About [The Polynesian. \(Honolulu \(Oahu\), Hawaii\) 1840-1841](#)

³⁵ **The Wheeling daily register., May 30, 1872, Image 4**
About [The Wheeling daily register. \(Wheeling, W. Va.\) 1864-1878](#)

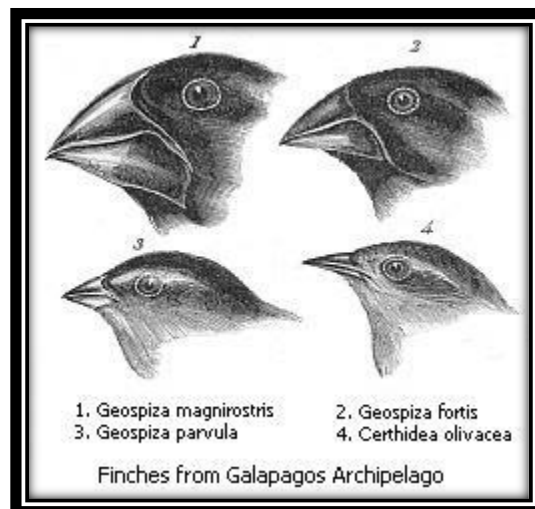
³⁶ Bogdan 180

‘uncivilized’ or ‘savage,’ insinuating that they had not come as far as Anglo-Saxons regarding their *civilization*. These ‘savages’ did not build schools, write books, traverse the world’s oceans, have formal marriage ceremonies, believe in Jesus, or engage in many other arbitrary qualifiers that fit in to what contemporary Western people would consider ‘civilized.’ According to Said, the early-nineteenth century is marked by attempts by Western society to highlight the ‘otherness’ of foreign cultures based on biology.³⁷ Scholars and entertainers alike engaged in discussions and exhibits that connected ‘other’ cultures to backwardness and degeneracy. Some of the strongest examples of this are found in the works of the famous naturalist Charles Darwin and criminologist Cesare Lombroso.



³⁷ Said p. 206-207

Charles Darwin staked his claim to fame with his revolutionary theory of evolution found in the 1859 publication *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin's work was the first academic work to theorize that plants and animals evolve over time through processes of natural selection, and adaptation to their environment. In Darwin's work, the author claims that the animals who were best fit to survive in their environment would be the most likely to survive and, thus, procreate, passing their genes on to future generations of animal species. Though Darwin does not necessarily discuss humans in this seminal work, he does insinuate that the theory also applies to humans as his concluding remarks include the statement, "In the future I see open fields for far more important research...Much light will be thrown on the origin of Man and his history."³⁸ Though he may not have said it outright, it is likely that many readers understood Darwin's controversial claim, for a mere three months after Darwin published his theory of evolution, Barnum began his "What is it?" exhibit, telling crowds that he had found the missing link in evolution. The explicit idea that humans also evolved from "lower" beings would be the topic of Darwin's *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, published in 1871.



³⁸ Origins of Species p. 527

In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin takes his theory of evolution further by applying the theory of natural selection to the history of humanity. Darwin's entire work is a discussion of how humans evolved over thousands of years, specifically supporting his arguments by comparing "civilized" Westerners to "savages" of the American West, Africa, and the South Pacific. Throughout this work, Darwin bases his theory on the idea that the "savages" were more representative of primitive man, and "civilized" Westerners were evidence of an evolved state of humanity.³⁹ Darwin's opinion on the relationship between the "civilized" and the "savages" is apparent as he states, "All that we know about savages...show that from the remotest of times successful tribes have supplanted other tribes...and they succeed mainly...through their arts, which are the products of the intellect. It is, therefore, highly probable that with mankind the intellectual facilities have been mainly and gradually perfected through natural selection."⁴⁰ This statement is indicative of Darwin's overall argument, suggesting that the Anglo-Saxon Westerner was more evolved than the "savages" found around the world because the former were smarter than the latter.

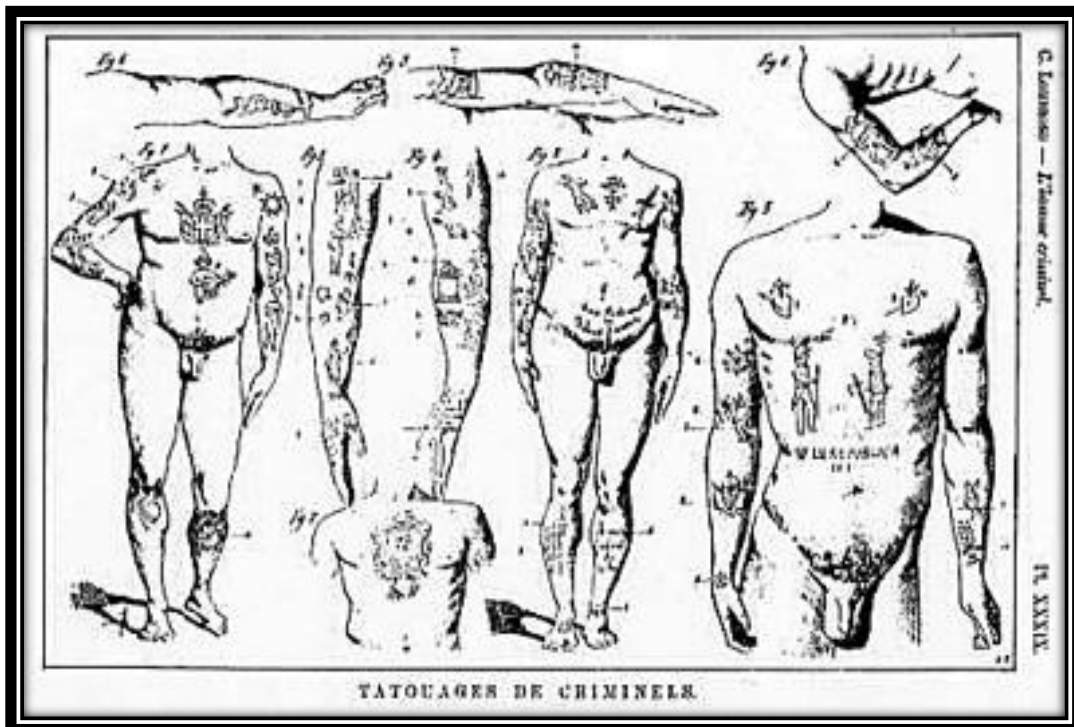
Throughout *The Descent of Man*, Darwin discusses many cultural practices of people he deems as "savage" in order to support his contention that they were unevolved. Many of the "savage" practices Darwin uses as examples of primitiveness are simply indicative of cultural differences, but he places particular importance on his theory on the act of body modification. This blanket term, "body modification" refers to the acts of "modifying the shape of the head, ornamenting the hair...tattooing, perforating the nose, lips, or ears, removing, or filling the teeth &c.," which Darwin suggests, "have long prevailed, in the most distant quarters of the world."⁴¹

³⁹ Footnote about Galton publishing these ideas first.

⁴⁰ Descent of man p. 128

⁴¹ DOM 577

For Darwin, “It is extremely improbable that these practices, followed by so many distinct nations, should be due to tradition from any common source. They indicate the close similarity of the mind of man, to whatever race he may belong.” Thus, Darwin’s theory projected the idea that body ornamentation, including tattooing, was not just an act of “uncivilized” people; it was an act that was innate in humanity much the way as smiling is. By arguing that tattooing was an innate act, Darwin essentially stripped agency from the cultures that tattooed and regarded the tattoo as a signifier that a culture was unevolved, or primitive.



The connection of tattooing and atavism was later picked up by social scientist Cesare Lombroso in his work *L'uomo Delinquente*, published in 1876. Lombroso was an Italian scholar who is often credited as the founder of criminology. In his study of criminals, Lombroso relied on a multitude of contemporary scientific theories, such as Darwinism and biological

determinism, through which he offers his seminal analysis of criminals.⁴² Throughout his work Lombroso explicitly argues that criminality is a biological feature of men and women who share traits with “savages,” and children. Lombroso suggests the “Otherness” of criminals as he states, “Criminals speak differently because they feel differently; they speak like savages, because they are savages, living amidst the very flower of European civilization.”⁴³ For Lombroso, crime was an act that was uncivilized, and, thus, if one were to live in “civilized” society and commit a crime, then they must have some deep similarity to unevolved “savages.”

Like Darwin, Lombroso connects tattooing to “savages,” but then he goes further by making a leap to criminality. Lombroso states, “One of the most singular characteristics of primitive men...is the frequency with which they undergo tattooing.”⁴⁴ The author goes on to argue that the “morally insane,” (read criminal) were more likely to tattoo themselves.⁴⁵ Lombroso’s connection between tattooing and criminality is, therefore, based on the idea that tattooing was evidence of an unevolved mind. Where the earlier assessment of tattooing by mariners like James Cook noted tattooing as an act done by “uncivilized” people, Lombroso argues that tattooing is a practice of *unevolved* people. Lombroso’s *Criminal Man* was widely accepted by contemporary scholars, but it has since been rejected by the academic community for obvious reasons. However, *Criminal Man* still stands as one of the best examples of scholars using the act of tattooing as a tool to support their belief in the superiority of the white race.

Lombroso and Darwin were by far the first people to make the connection with tattooing and perceived “savagery,” but they are important figures in that they brought the idea into

⁴² Lombroso, Cesare. *Criminal Man*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. p. 7

⁴³ Ibid p. 78

⁴⁴ Ibid p. 58

⁴⁵ Ibid p. 215

academic work. Where mid-nineteenth century Americans could read newspaper articles, or travel journals about tattooing among natives in the South Pacific or the American West, and look upon the act with a sense of racial superiority, now they could find the same idea in books that were being presented as some of the best scientific works of the era. These were not sideshow men telling stories of torture and captivity, these were academics, making major breakthroughs in their fields, arguing that the tattoo was evidence of ‘savagery.’ Thus, these men represent a progression in the history of tattooing, by bridging the gap between popular entertainment and spectacle for working-class audiences, to famous academic works that were widely read by educated, leisure-class audiences.

Conclusion

Like James O’Connell, George Costentenus began performing in Barnum’s spectacle as the Tattooed Man with a story of capture, torture, and survival. However, the many changes in American society at large clearly shaped Costentenus’ show into something quite different from O’Connell’s. Costentenus came into American popular culture at a time when ideas of manifest destiny and white superiority had primed Americans to conceive of foreign cultures as people in need of American ‘civilization.’ Advancements in academia had served to seemingly, validate these ideas. Popular culture, like Barnum’s Museum and Circus, played to these growing sentiments by presenting foreign bodies as living “oddities” which supported the ideas created by contemporary scientists. Cesare Lombroso had made a clear connection between tattooing and criminality. And Americans had developed an obsession with the ‘Orient.’ Thus, when George Costentenus began performing, he was a man who had been used as a sex slave in the “Orient,” who had become a pirate (criminal), who had started a worker’s rebellion in China, and survived his torturous punishment at the hands of ‘Oriental’ ‘savages.’ The Asian people were

sexualized and reduced to racist caricatures in Costentenus' story. In his memoirs, the tattooed man insinuates that he was used as a sex slave as a boy, he consistently refers to the Chinese as savages, and his story serves to create a fantasy of a foreign, backward civilization. However, Costentenus' show still presents an evolution from the earlier stories of tattooed men living in nature among 'primitive' Island cultures. In pictures used in O'Connell's story are of a man, on a beach, being forcibly tattooed by naked women. This imagery comes from a period where Americans were traveling to islands in the South Pacific in hopes of conquering the islands and creating colonies. Thus, the depiction of the people, and their customs are that of 'primitive savages.' The tattoo is, therefore, a permanent mark of barbarity. With Costentenus, the imagery used shows the man being tattooed by clothed women, surrounded by Asian architecture. The tattooing in this story is a well-deserved punishment from a more 'civilized' people. The tattoo is still a mark of 'savage' foreign customs, but the imagery and depictions of the different cultures clearly form to American perceptions of the East as a middle-ground between the 'primitive' island cultures and the 'civilized' Western cultures. Changing the message of images depicting foreign people to fit a narrative would become immensely common in America near the end of the nineteenth century. However, early examples of this practice can be seen in sideshow 'freaks' and their stories of captivity and torture.