Human Exhibition in Early American History

The commercialized exhibition of human bodies is inundated in nineteenth-century American entertainment culture, however, travelling showmen began exhibiting "living curiosities" as early as 1738.[1] According to Robert Bogdan's *Freak Show*, human exhibits or "freaks" were relatively common in eighteenth-century America. The first example of a human exhibition in America comes from colonial North Carolina where a newspaper advertised the exhibition of a woman from Guinea who was "about four feet tall, in every part like a woman excepting her head which nearly resembles the ape."[2] The practice of exhibiting "freaks" grew from an earlier English tradition which typically consisted of a manager and a performer who would travel around to fairs or taverns, charging a fee for people to come to look upon the "freak." The performers themselves typically had something different about them, such as missing limbs, dwarfism, or some other physical abnormalities that made them different, or 'other,' than their typical Anglo-Saxon audience.

Though these early exhibitions included many of the same elements of the later human exhibitions in museums and circuses, they were much different in scale as there was not a large commercial entertainment industry to facilitate large audiences until the mid-nineteenth century. As populations in cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Boston grew, institutions like theaters and museums were built as permanent houses of public entertainment. These new entertainment centers became important social spaces for contemporary Americans, and after

[1] Bogdan 26. The phrase 'living curiosities' comes from the early-eighteenth century tradition of traveling exhibitions as exhibitors would create signs that said "to the curious." The phrase was later changed to 'living curiosities' to emphasize that the show included animals or people. "Living curiosities" would later become the preferred phrase for advertising freakshows throughout the nineteenth century.
[2] Bogdan 25

theaters and museums began to specifically cater to their patron's disparate social class, middle-class institutions offered the "freakshow" a permanent residence for entertaining audiences.

Theater was the most popular form of mass entertainment in the early nineteenth century. The early Euro-American theater was largely derivative of English theater culture. Typically, these playhouses would perform the works of William Shakespeare. Theater historian Lawrence Levine's work, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, suggests that there was not a variety of unique popular entertainments in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but rather a consistent dedication to performing Shakespeare's work.[3] To get a sense of just how popular Shakespeare was at this point, Levine explains that it was common for contemporary Euro-Americans to be able to recite entire Shakespearean plays, *from memory*. For Levine, "Shakespeare *was* popular entertainment in the nineteenth century."[4] However, more important than the proliferation of Shakespearean drama is the fact that the American populace was beginning to develop a shared public entertainment culture in larger city centers.

According to Levine, as the American working class grew, theaters became contentious spaces where social issues began to cause class conflict the public space of the local theater. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, people from all classes went to the same local theaters to enjoy a play, though they were segregated by seating area.[5] As far as the experience at the theater went, Levine states, "to envision nineteenth-century theater audiences

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[3] Lawrence Levine, "William Shakespeare in America," in *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 11-82.
[4] Levine, 21.
[5] Similar to a theatrical performance in 2019, tickets to a theater were different depending on where the seat was. However, tickets to a play in the early-nineteenth century were still affordable for pretty much everyone. This inevitably led to class segregation among a three tiered seating system, including seats in the boxes, the pit, and the gallery. The rich sat in the box seats, the middle-class sat in the pit (in front of the stage), and the poor sat in the gallery (balcony seating). Levine, 24.

correctly, one might do well to visit a contemporary sporting event."[6] Much like a modern football game, the theater experience in the nineteenth century was deeply interactive. Antebellum theater audiences would constantly cheer for parts of a play they liked, they would force actors to repeat lines, they would boo or hiss at parts they disliked, and they would even go as far as throwing food at an actor that they thought was doing a bad job.[7] However, as America industrialized, the working-class grew and the public space of a local theater began to be populated by various groups of people that held vastly different values. Over time, some of the social class issues between rich and working-class audience members led to class conflict and violence at the local playhouse.

One of the most famous instances of violence in the antebellum American theater is the Astor Place Riot. During the theatrical season of 1849, the Astor Place theater became the battleground in a fight about social class which was effectively projected upon two actors named William McReady and Edwin Forrest. McReady was an Englishman who was well known for his "his aristocratic demeanor, and his identification with the wealthy gentry," making him a perfect representative of the leisure class.[8] On the other hand, Forrest was known among New Yorkers for his "militant love of his country, his outspoken belief in its citizenry, and his frequent articulation of the possibilities of self-improvement and social mobility" making him a favorite among working-class New Yorkers.[9] On May 7th of 1849, both actors performed *Macbeth* at different theaters. Forrest's performance received great praise and cheers from the audience while performing at the Broadway Theatre, whereas McCready was never allowed to perform after the audience silenced the actor with "boos and cries of 'Three groans for the

[6] Levine 26
[7] Levine, 26.
[8] Levine 63
[9] Ibid

codfish aristocracy," as well as an onslaught of "eggs, apples, potatoes, lemons, and…chairs."[10] After this performance, McCready wanted to leave the country but was talked out of it by some of the New York elite, including Herman Melville.[11]

On May 10, 1849, McCready returned to the Astor Place Theater to perform *Macbeth*, however, his return incited a strong reaction from the city's working class. Approximately ten thousand people showed up outside the theater to protest, including eighteen hundred who attended the show, shouting phrases like "Burn the damned den of the aristocracy!"[12] After the show, the crowd was ordered to disperse and subsequently began throwing stones into the theater and at soldiers who arrived to restore order. After the crowd refused to disperse and continued throwing stones, the soldiers fired into the crowd. At least twenty-two people were killed and over one hundred and fifty were wounded.[13] Eighty-six people were arrested. Five days later, a jury found that "circumstances existing at the time justified the authorities in giving the order to fire upon the mob."[14]

Though the Astor Place Riot was, on the surface, a fight about two actors, the class issues that triggered the riot did not go unnoticed by journalists from multiple American cities who were reporting on the event. The riot had caused "nothing short of a controversy and collision between those who have been styled the 'exclusives,' or 'upper ten,' and the great popular masses," wrote the *New York Herald*.[15] "It leaves behind a feeling to which this community has hitherto been a stranger – an opposition of classes – the rich and poor…a feeling that there is

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[10] Levine, 64
[11] Ibid 64
[12] Levine 64
[13] Levine 65
[14] "Tragedy at the Opera House." *New York Herald*, May 15, 1849.
[15] *New York Herald,* May 12, 1849.

now in our country, in New York City, what every good patriot hitherto has considered it his duty to deny – *a high and low class*," claimed the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*.[16]

Because of the growing class divisions during the 1840s, as exemplified by the Astor Place Riot, theater managers began to cater their shows to different classes of people. High-class theaters began to institute strict rules that turned the theater into a more voyeuristic, educational experience, whereas low-class theaters continued to allow audiences to interact with the show. According to Levine, the 1840s was a period where American theater managers essentially decided what was high class and what was low class.[17] High-class theater managers continued to put on Shakespearean melodramas, Italian operas, and symphonies. Low-class theater managers began to explore new kinds of shows, such as vaudeville, blackface minstrels, dime museums, and burlesque. Essentially, these were variety shows that offered the audience a wide range of entertainments, including comedy segments, songs, dances, and freak shows, alongside traditional dramatic plays. In creating these new kinds of shows, entrepreneurs were breaking away from the theater's reliance on British culture and began creating content that was distinctly American.

Museums were also affected by the phenomenon of cultural stratification during the mid-nineteenth century. Like the theater, the museum was established in the mid-eighteenth century. Charles William Peale opened America's first museums as an institution for classifying various 'curiosities.'[18] According to cultural historian Neil Harris, "American museums were not, in the antebellum period, segregated temples of the fine arts, but repositories of information…Paintings

[16] *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, May 16, 1849.
[17] Lawrence Levine, "Order, Hierarchy, and Culture," in *Highbrow Lowbrow*.
[18] Levine 147

and sculpture stood alongside mummies, mastodon bones and stuffed animals."[19] Levine argues that once society began to separate high art from low, museums, like theater, changed their social function. Instead of just providing odd curiosities, some museum owners began to shape their exhibits with the intention of cultivating an educated public. In emphasizing museums as a more educational space, museum curators dropped many of the more eccentric exhibits, such as freak shows, wax figures, and stuffed animals, in favor of paintings, historical artifacts, and classical sculptures.

Essentially, as popular culture began to separate from so-called high culture, theater and museum owners became gatekeepers for what was considered high art. As the more eccentric curiosities and shows left the high-class museum and theater, a market opened up for showmen to exhibit the very things that were leaving the bourgeois establishments. It is within this cultural context that we find the rise of one of the most famous entertainers of the nineteenth century, Phineas Taylor Barnum, and the popularization of exhibiting human bodies as subjects for entertainment. With the proliferation of middle-class entertainment, showmen specifically framed their shows to appeal to common, working Americans. In doing so, they created entertainments that played on their audience's distinct sensibilities. At this time, 'martial masculinity' was becoming common among the working class who yearned to exert power over 'others' as they could not exert power in their professional lives.[20] Thus, showmen began to exhibit exotic 'other' human beings to implicitly suggest the audience's superiority over 'other' groups. As such, these new platforms embraced the freakshow and made the exhibition of physically deformed people and foreign peoples a major facet of their entertainment.

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[19] Neil Harris, *Humbug* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 78.
[20] Greenberg, 12.

James O'Connell: The Tattooed Man

In 1837, James O'Connell took the stage for the first time, performing in a drama at the Franklin Theater based on his experiences in captivity among the people of Pohnpei.[21] O'Connell was an Irish sailor who arrived in Micronesia in the early 1820s, who then lived among the indigenous population for over eleven years.[22] During his time in Pohnpei, O'Connell was tattooed, and he eventually made his way off the island and came to New York. These are the only absolute facts that we can trust regarding O'Connell's adventure story, as the only documentation of his experiences, entitled *A Residence of Eleven Years in New Holland and the Caroline Islands,* published in 1836, were written by O'Connell himself. However, O'Connell's performance, his book, and the way his show was advertised over the course of his career

[21] Pohnpei one of the four states included in the Federated States of Micronesia, an independent republic that is now an "associated state" connected to the United States.
[22] Anthropologist, Saul Riesenberg, has suggested that O'Connell was actually a petty criminal who had been sent to Australia on one of England's convict ships. Riesenberg has suggested that he made his way to Pohnpei after escaping from the convict colony. Found in: Saul Riesenberg, "The Tattooed Irishman," *Smithsonian Journal of History*, no. 3 (1968): 1-17.

provide insight into how his tattooed body was used to create a narrative about life among ‘uncivilized savages.’

First, O’Connell’s narrative offers insight regarding how the ex-sailor characterized his time in Pohnpei for a literary audience. According to O’Connell’s *Residence*, he and his crew were on their way to Japan, by way of the South Pacific, when they were shipwrecked on the island of Pohnpei in the year 1826.[23] Upon landing in Pohnpei, O’Connell and his surviving shipmates were taken captive. According to O’Connell, his shipmates had “feared the Indians were cannibals,” (they weren’t) but O’Connell himself had enough experience with cultures in the surrounding islands that he could tell that “they intended us no harm.”[24] Two things are striking about O’Connell’s language in this early interaction with the Pohnpeians; one, O’Connell calls them “Indians,” and, two, he insinuates that they were “cannibals.” The fact that O’Connell used the vernacular typically associated with Native Americans is quite telling as the performer was obviously associating the Pohnpeians with America’s indigenous populations. In calling the Pohnpeians Indian, O’Connell implicitly suggested a commonality between the foreign island culture of Pohnpei and Native Americans who held a special place in the Euro-American imagination as an enemy.

Further, O’Connell suggests that the Pohnpeians were cannibals, despite the fact that he knew at the time of writing his narrative that they were not. The act of cannibalism is arguably the most taboo act one can commit in Euro-American culture, so the writer’s implication of cannibalism was likely meant to shock his audience. Within a multitude of travel literature,

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[23] James O’Connell. *A Residence of Eleven Years in New Holland and the Caroline Islands* (Boston: B.B. Mussey, 1836), 102.

[24] O’Connell, 113.

cannibalism is often attributed to foreign cultures who were considered uncivilized.[25] Though cannibalism was practiced by certain cultures around the world at one time or another, the suggestion that a non-Western people practiced cannibalism was often a tool to remark upon the 'uncivilized' nature of a foreign culture. O'Connell's use of these terms within his description of his first meeting with the Pohnpeians directly suggests that the writer wanted to establish a clear and inherent difference between himself, his audience, and the people of Pohnpei

O'Connell goes on to explain that because he knew the Pohnpeians meant him no harm, he "was brave and chose to meet the natives while dancing an Irish Jig for their entertainment."[26] According to the story, this delighted the natives so much that they brought O'Connell and his shipmate George Keenan with them to their village, and then proceeded to tattoo the men as a ceremony of assimilation.[27] Although O'Connell suggests that his tattooing was against his will, he states that he accepted his fate "like a martyr."[28] On the other hand, his shipmate Keenan "swore and raved," when receiving his tattoo, which caused the Native women to mimic and mock him later.[29] Though the sailors found the tattooing to be unpleasant, O'Connell states that his captors "continued to treat us with great hospitality and kindness."[30] O'Connell claimed that his tattooing was a sort of marriage ceremony, and, due to his exceptional courage and bravery during the tattooing, the island chief's daughter chose him for marriage. As for his shipmate, Kennan was wedded to a wife of "no rank" because of his "unwillingness to submit to the

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[25] Two of the most famous pieces of travel literature, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, (c. 1300), and *The Journal of Captain Cook's voyage round the world in HMS ENDEAVOUR, 1768-1771* (1771), both claim that people they met on their journeys were cannibals. There are endless examples of this trope in travel literature. For further reading: Cătălin Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
[26] O'Connell, 108.
[27] O'Connell, 109: For further reading regarding tattooing traditions of South Pacific Islanders: Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourses on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774-1880*, (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1980.
[28] O'Connell p. 115
[29] Ibid
[30] Ibid

tattooing."[31] O'Connell's narrative goes on to describe his life among the Pohnpeians, including local customs, war tactics, his marriage, and the birth of his children. According to O'Connell, the two sailors were saved after noticing, and subsequently boarding, an American vessel called the *Spy of Salem*, never to return to the island.[32]

O'Connell's *Residence* details his time among the Pohnpeian people, but aspects of his story clearly suggest that the sailor was worried, if not obsessed, with projecting a sense of masculinity upon his reader. For example, he was brave when the sailors first met the Pohnpeians by dancing instead of cowering, he bore his tattoos without crying out, he was married to an island princess, he claimed that his son could one day become chief of the island, and he claimed to have fought alongside the Pohnpeians against invading peoples. Overall, O'Connell painted himself as the strongest, smartest, most capable person on the island. This aspect of O'Connell's narrative screams of hyperbolic storytelling, but is enlightening regarding how he wanted to project himself to his audience.

Though some of O'Connell's narrative painted the Pohnpeians as one-dimensional, uncivilized savages, *Residence* also provides the reader with some nuanced representation of the native population. For example, O'Connell calls his father-in-law a "practical joker," he tells stories of his marital joys and troubles, he talks about his children's behavior, he discusses his relationships with other members of the group; basically, part of O'Connell's recollection of his time in the Pacific Islands effectively humanized the people that took care of him and George Keenan.[33] In fact, O'Connell never refers to himself as a captive, rather, he paints himself as an outsider who was fully accepted by, and assimilated into, Pohnpeian culture. The sailor's only

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[31] O'Connell, 121.
[32] O'Connell, 232.
[33] O'Connell, 129.

direct reference to a captive status is in one statement where he calls the Pohnpeian Chief "my new friend-or master, or owner – I do not know how exactly he considered himself."[34] This statement infers some complexity regarding the relationship between the shipwrecked sailor and the Island Chief, for O'Connell sees him as a friend but also acknowledges his status as a subject of the Chief. O'Connell further complicates his relationship with the Pohnpeians as he states, "after George and I had become habituated to their customs, and learned to appreciate their character, we resigned ourselves to circumstances, and were content in the absence of almost all hope of escape, to be happy."[35] He goes on to claim, "Some people claiming to be civilized might take a lesson from the humanity of these people to shipwrecked mariners."[36] Most of O'Connell's work clearly paints the sailor as a masculine survivor of captivity among a 'primitive' culture, however, his humanizing language in some places complicates his narrative and presents more complex discussions of a foreign culture.

To be clear, O'Connell's narrative is also deeply problematic regarding how the sailor discussed the native population. O'Connell consistently refers to the native population as savages, but it would be anachronistic to see that as blatant racism: that is simply how European peoples talked about indigenous populations at the time. However, early in the book O'Connell goes on an overtly racist diatribe about the people of New Holland. For example, when discussing the natives of New Holland, who lived in close proximity to Pohnpei, O'Connell states, "The connecting link between apes and men…and, particularly when old, resemble the

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[34] O'Connell, 115.
[35] O'Connell, 186.
[36] O'Connell 109. This statement is notably omitted from a shorter version of O'Connell's story, entitled *The Life and Adventures of James F. O'Connell, The Tattooed Man* (New York: Applegate, 1845). This version of O'Connell's story was only 30 pages, and it was distributed as a part of his sideshow performances. Thus, when O'Connell's narrative was given to a freakshow audience, the humanity of the Pohnpeians was omitted.

monkey more than any other human beings do."[37] Within a few pages of his narrative, O'Connell claims that in New Holland, marriage is established by forceful rape, that the people are drunk, lazy devil worshiping, promiscuous, child murdering, filthy, cannibals.[38] On civilization, the sailor claims, "Never in my life before had I seen such a complete degradation from civilization to the lowest scale of human existence…the probability is, however, that the civilization of the natives of New Holland will…be synonymous with their extinction."[39] Though this language is likely shocking to a reader in the twenty-first century, it would be fair to assume that the O'Connell was establishing an essential difference between 'bad' natives and the native people that he lived among in Pohnpei. He does use some similar descriptions of the Pohnpeians, but he is never so overtly negative about their character. In the early nineteenth century, the idea of 'going native' or accepting the indigenous culture, was severely looked down upon by Western peoples. By creating the fantasy of the drunk, filthy, cannibals of New Holland, O'Connell then moves on to tell about his time in Pohnpei with the more civilized, but not white-man civilized, natives.[40] This effectively allowed O'Connell to keep his whiteness, to forgo charges that he 'went native,' and move on to telling an adventure story of life among indigenous peoples without drawing the ire of his 'civilized' reader.

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[37] O'Connell, 82

[38] O'Connell, 82-85

[39] O'Connell, 87

[40] During the early nineteenth century, philosophers and educated Europeans were heavily influenced by German Romanticism. This philosophy essentially glorified nature and pre-industrial societies. As such, romantic thinkers commonly viewed non-western, indigenous populations as "noble savages," or "nature's gentlemen." Transcendentalist writers, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, were popular during the 1830s, and their work applied the ideas of Romanticism to their literary work. During the 1840s, there was a movement of anti-transcendentalist writers who believed that humans were base and evil. Writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickenson, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne were the major writers of this movement. Melville's Typee (1846) served to paint indigenous cultures as dangerous cannibals. Thus, whether it was his intention or not, O'Connell was engaging with this contemporary discourse regarding the goodness of humans, in which writers were using island natives to represent their prospective points. In Residence, O'Connell presents the reader with both the 'good' noble savages and the 'bad' base savage.

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Where *Residence* represents the Pohnpeian people with at least some complexity, O'Connell's stage performances diminished their culture to simple caricatures. An advertisement for O'Connell's show in 1837 includes a woodblock print of the performer being held down and tattooed by two native women and large lettering that promised the audience that his show would include a shipwreck and performance of an "Irish Jig."[42] O'Connell's show was not only an entertaining adventure story but also a show that allowed his white audience to gaze upon a man who had been marked by a foreign culture. Historian Albert Parry states that the audience "gazing at the tattooed man in the sideshow, relives his own past of untold centuries back. Moreover, he can now imitate the freak…and thus blissfully revert to his own distant, primitive type."[43] Standing on stage and showing off his tattoos, O'Connell gained authority as a

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[41] *Tattooing of O'Connell and Keenan*, c. 1850, Woodblock Print. This image is not the print that was included in the theater bill in 1837. That document is so distorted that it is hard to make out exactly what is happening. However, it is clear that women are holding the men down and tattooing them. This image, though the artist is unknown, was likely distributed during O'Connell's later performances. The theater bill from 1837 can be found in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West,* edited by Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole, and Bronwen Douglas, (London: Rektion Books, 2005) 87.
[42] Tattoo, 87.
[43] Albert Parry, *Tattoo: Secrets of a Strange Art as Practiced by the Native of the United States*, (New York City: Simon and Shuster, 1933) 65.

living example of 'primitive' culture who was then able to tell of his experience to his audience with a sense of authority. In doing so, the Tattooed Man became the first American theatrical performance to discuss the 'uncivilized' nature of foreign people in the Pacific Islands.

In 1976, Micronesian anthropologist Saul Riesenberg published a detailed exposition on the accuracy of O'Connell's narrative, ultimately coming to the conclusion that he was a pathological liar, and most likely an ex-convict. However, more recent scholars, Juniper Ellis and Lars Krutak, Annie Werner, all come to the conclusion that while O'Connell's personal adventures were likely exaggerated, his depiction of Pohnpeian customs is basically accurate.[44] Thus, O'Connell's written work and the early years of his performances offer insight into the showman's seminal representations of Pohnpeian people and customs. Though O'Connell likely exaggerated his own experiences, he was delivering relatively accurate information about Pohnpeian culture to his audience.

James O'Connell, "The Tattooed Man," was performed as a stand-alone theatrical performance in 1837, but by 1840 his spectacle had been turned into a sideshow for other, larger productions.[45] In August of 1840, The *New York Herald* published an advertisement for the Chatham Theater's production of the play *The Muleteer of Palermo* which included an

[44] *Documentary on One*. "The Tattooed Irishman." Produced by Joe Kearny and Liam O'Brien. RTE Radio 1, Nov. 11, 2017. This information comes from a radio documentary by an Irish radio station RTE Radio 1. The documentary is about James O'Connell and the three scholars mentioned all agree during interviews within the documentary that O'Connell's depiction of tattooing and culture in his book were relatively accurate. Lars Krutak is an anthropologist that studies and has written multiple books about tattooing traditions of non-western cultures. Annie Werner is an Australian historian whose work on O'Connell entitled, "*'Savage Printers': Beachcoming, Tattoos, and Liminality in James O'Connell's* Residence," was published in *Something Rich and Strange* (Melbourne: Wakefield Press, 2009). Juniper Ellis is an English professor that studies literature. *Her book Tattooing the World: Pacific Designs in Print and Skin* (2008), investigates how pacific tattooing traditions have been represented in western culture.

[45] Sideshows were performances that would come on to entertain crowds during the breaks intermission of a larger theatrical play. Sometimes these were jugglers, acrobats, or magicians, other venues used freakshows as their sideshow performances.

advertisement for O'Connell's sideshow. The ad states, "O'Connell, the tattooed man, will appear in one of his peculiar parts."[46] Notably, there is no description of his show, simply a statement that he is tattooed and will appear. As a sideshow, one could assume that he simply danced a jig, showed off his tattoos, and told a short story of captivity among foreign peoples.

In 1841, O'Connell was performing at a failing museum called the Scudder's American Museum on the corner of Broadway and Ann Street in New York City. That year, P.T. Barnum bought the museum and immediately got to work trying to make the museum profitable. Barnum has been credited with bringing acts like the 'freakshow' into the mainstream of American popular entertainment because of his unique penchant for advertisement. An example of his advertising style can be found in his promotion of James O'Connell's show in November of 1842, which states, "Mr. O'Connell, The Tattooed Man, will appear in his celebrated dances, and give a historical account of his sufferings for eleven years, while a prisoner in the hands of barbarous savages."[47] Unlike the earlier advertisement, this statement highlights O'Connell's captivity, and dramatizes his time among the "barbarous savages."[48] An ad for O'Connell's show at the Amphitheater in New York less than a week later mimics Barnum's dramatization as it states, "O'Connell…is to appear and exhibit the extraordinary dance that once saved his life while in captivity amongst the savages."[49] This new marketing strategy emphatically highlighted the literary tropes of adventure stories by painting O'Connell as a masculine survivor of 'savage' captivity.[50] It also emphasizes an educational aspect of the show as O'Connell was going to give

[46] *New York Herald*, August 24, 1840.
[47] *New York Herald*, November 22, 1842.
[48] Ibid
[49] *New York Herald*, November 28, 1842.
[50] O'Connell's story is most relatable to the captivity narrative tradition in American literature. The first captivity narrative in America, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, was published in 1682, and told the story of an English colonist who was taken captive by Native Americans during King Philip's War. Following Rowlandson's seminal work, thousands of European colonizers published narratives following their

a "historical account," thereby insinuating that his show was going to include informative information about the foreign cultures he lived among.

The fact that the advertisements for O'Connell's shows, and presumably O'Connell's performances, emphasized captivity, danger, and barbarism when the showman's written work did not, suggests that his story was exaggerated to be more entertaining for a live audience. In a sense, his story was taken from him and retooled by show managers to appeal to a wider audience. It is also telling that the changes in his story were directly related to the barbarism and captivity aspects of his story, rather than the more nuanced discussions of culture that are present throughout *Residence*.

The escalation of xenophobic rhetoric in O'Connell's show is further exemplified by an advertisement for his performance in Louisiana in September of 1852. O'Connell had traveled to New Orleans as a part of the Star Spangled Circus, and upon their arrival, a local newspaper wrote an article depicting O'Connell's captivity story. The article states: "He found the Island inhabited by a set of heathen Indians, and 'salvage [*sic*] men,' unacquainted with the common decencies and amenities of civilized life, and as apt to gobble him up without basting or roasting, as they would a lizard or snail."[51] The article goes on to suggest that to escape being eaten by the "cannibal islanders," O'Connell "devised a plan to cheat the barbarians."[52] After seeing the "inhuman antics of the savages waiting to receive him," O'Connell decided to dance a jig to save his own life.[53] According to this article, the natives loved the dance so much that they accepted

own captivity. The genre of captivity narrative can be found throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries in American popular culture. For further reading about captivity, see: James Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). For further reading regarding captivity narratives, see: June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

[51] *Daily Crescent* (New Orleans), September 13, 1852.

[52] Ibid

[53] Ibid

the shipwrecked O'Connell, but "His companions, as a matter of course, were eaten."[54] According to this version, O'Connell was subsequently married to "the King's favorite daughter," but not before they "made O'Connell 'one of em' by 'tattooing' him after the style of the 'salvages' [*sic*]… [which] made the sailor look "very much like the zebra." O'Connell escaped after living with "these 'people'" for so long that their lifestyle became unbearable, and visions of his "quiet cottage beyond the billowy deep" became so strong that he chose to leave the island. Apparently, O'Connell escaped after he found a "white settlement" on the island and returned to America to perform in the circus.

This incredibly xenophobic, overly-dramatized version of O'Connell's story perfectly exemplifies how his narrative was appropriated and subsequently used as evidence of the uncivilized and barbaric practices of foreign island cultures. When O'Connell first came to the New York stage in the late 1830s, he was a tattooed white man who was going to dance and tell of his adventures on the South Seas. By the 1850s, his show had become a full-on spectacle, complete with a white protagonist who survived captivity by outsmarting the "savage cannibals," but not before sexually dominating the "King's favorite daughter." Further, the author's suggestion that the "heathen Indians" were "unacquainted…with civilized life" establishes that the author was remarking upon the lack of civilization of the Pohnpeians, while also establishing O'Connell as a masculine protagonist. Clearly, by the early-1850s, O'Connell's show had gone from showing his tattoos off and telling of the manners and customs of foreign people, to outright xenophobic explorations of the white man's interaction with so-called uncivilized

[54] Ibid

peoples. As such, the sailor's real-life adventures, although likely hyperbolic, had taken a back seat to a message of white superiority over uncivilized, heathen cannibals.

James O'Connell died in 1854 while he was traveling the country with Dan Rice's circus. Prior to that, O'Connell enjoyed an eighteen-year career and performed for millions. Though the showman had a penchant for exaggeration, his performance offers insight to a different path performers could have taken within popular entertainment. When O'Connell arrived, he wrote a book about his travels, he performed reenactments of his time in Pohnpei, and he taught his white audience various aspects of a foreign culture. By the time he died, his performance was one that played on American's imagination of the exotic, uncivilized cultures of the outside world. The subjects of O'Connell's adventure story no longer presented any nuance; they were simply uncivilized cannibals. As such, O'Connell's career serves as a microcosm of human exhibition in the nineteenth century, for by the late nineteenth-century American entertainment culture became inundated with using non-white bodies as caricatures of foreignness that suggested a superiority of Western culture. These shows would go on to become a major part of the American entertainment industry for generations.