Animal Performance in Big-Time Vaudeville

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ANIMAL PERFORMANCE IN BIG-TIME VAUDEVILLE

by

CATHERINE YOUNG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York, 2016
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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

ANIMAL PERFORMANCE IN BIG-TIME VAUDEVILLE

by

Catherine Young

Adviser: David Savran

Animal vaudevillians have been neglected by academic accounts of vaudeville. Drawing on the rapidly proliferating and highly interdisciplinary field of animal studies, this dissertation combines archival research and cultural theory to fill an important gap in our understanding of how animal bodies and images circulated during the vaudeville era. Taking up Nicole Shukin’s notion of animal capital as both animal sign and substance circulating in cultures of capital, I argue that vaudeville animal acts theatricalized animal capital for US citizen-consumers and often circulated animalized capital via racist ideologies and performance modes.

Theatre bookers balanced their reliance on animal acts with fears of diminishing vaudeville’s ambitions for refinement and this tension is clear in the marketing materials for the animal acts. Vaudeville’s animal acts both destabilized and reified important categories of child/adult and lowbrow/middlebrow. Contemporary ethical debates about animal welfare resonate with critiques from animal activists who wanted performing animals removed from vaudeville. These acts influenced and were influenced by circus, melodrama, and even newly forming fields of scientific inquiry. Primate and canine acts mobilized associations with evolution and coevolution, theatricalizing the mysteries of human origins.

Animal vaudevillians were much more than diverting novelties shoved at the end of shows for audience members who chose to stay in their seats. Animal vaudevillians’ fur, feathers, and anthropomorphic antics created discourses of animality that mediated audience members’ own humanity and embodied a simultaneous ambivalence and nostalgia for nature in the increasingly urban and industrial United States.
Acknowledgements

I’ve daydreamed about the pleasure of filling this page space for years. Adequately thanking the people who have supported my research and labor is a precious delight I do not take lightly.

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More than once this process seemed insurmountable. But, guess what, I finally surmounted. I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my parents, Mary Anne Confer Young and Patrick Joseph Young. With much sorrow, however, I must dedicate it to their memories.
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Images labeled KAC appear courtesy of the Keith/Albee Collection, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa.
Archives

Michael Shea Papers, Butler Library Special Collections, Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY
Keith/Albee Collection, University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections, Iowa City, Iowa
Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Billy Rose Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, New York
Chapter 1: Theatricalizing Animal Capital in Big-Time Vaudeville

A black bear named Bedelia teeters on a tricycle. Baboons balance on bicycles. Romping poodles drive chariots and sulky carts as they loop around a temporary circus ring framed by an ornate proscenium arch. A mock fight between fox terriers and baboons follows various tightrope tricks. An anteater from Brazil does nothing; its physical peculiarities render stunt work unnecessary. Its very existence entertains. These were some of the offerings of Apdale’s Zoological Circus, a top-of-the-line animal act that worked in big-time US vaudeville for over a decade, including a stint at the illustrious Palace Theatre in New York City. The act was sometimes billed simply as “Apdale’s Animals,” and theatre managers described it as “a very superior children’s act”\(^1\) and were impressed James Apdale did not brandish a whip on stage and, yet, the highly trained mammals seemed to perform “without the least urging.”\(^2\) Enthusiasm for Bedelia the black bear changed, however, when she sauntered into the glittering afternoon sun of Coney Island on Sunday, 23 June 1912. At about 4:00pm, Bedelia escaped her restraints, walked out the stage entrance of the New Brighton Theatre, and began meandering through the alarmed crowd. She looked “forbiddingly ferocious” and “uttered strange, gruff noises.”\(^3\) Mothers in street clothes reportedly raced into the Atlantic Ocean with their children. A police officer nearly shot Bedelia with his revolver before being dissuaded by Mr. Apdale. When a bribe of bon-bons failed to lure the bear back, the officer lassoed her and, as the *New York Times* characterized it, five minutes later Bedelia was on the New Brighton’s stage “docilely going through her tricks.”\(^4\)

\(^{1}\) Philadelphia, January 17, 1910, Keith/Albee Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa, 11, 106. Henceforth “KAC.”
\(^{2}\) Boston, July 8, 1912, KAC, 14, 219.
\(^{4}\) ibid.
Within the familiar frame of the theatrical space, order was reestablished and Bedelia’s body was restored to being a source of pleasure rather than panic.

This dissertation examines animal representation and performances by nonhuman animals\(^5\) in big-time US vaudeville, an urban variety entertainment mainly known for ethnic and slapstick comedy sketches, popular song and dance, comic monologues, blackface routines, and condensed plays. In US popular performance, vaudeville served as a bridge between nineteenth-century minstrelsy and melodrama, and twentieth century Broadway and film. Animal vaudevillians’ fur, feathers, and anthropomorphic antics created “discourses of animality”\(^6\) that mediated audience members’ own humanity and embodied a simultaneous ambivalence and nostalgia for nature in the increasingly urban and industrial United States. Though the acts were associated with frivolity and childish entertainment, the performances were never free of ideologies. Certain equestrian acts derived from the circus often promoted aristocratic ideals of class hierarchy and feminine beauty, while primate performances depended on eugenic thought and social Darwinism for their humor and cultural salience. In addition to playing out mysteries and anxieties about animal ontologies, their very presence instructed audiences on the limits of that which was called “human” in an era preoccupied with definitions of humanity, femininity, and racial specificity. Just as vaudeville’s blackface acts, Chinese stereotypes, Hebrew parodies,

\(^5\) I use the problematic terms “animals” and “humans” and largely discuss them as discreet groups because it is in keeping with the patterns of thought that were in play during the vaudeville era. Animal studies scholars have parsed the challenges of terminology and I am following Lourdes Orozco’s following Cary Wolfe: “In agreement with Cary Wolfe’s terminological explanation in his book Animal Rites (2003), I have used the terms ‘animal’ and ‘human’ instead of the commonly used terms ‘non-human animal’ and ‘human animal’ throughout the book. As Wolfe explains, “the term “animal” should always be taken to mean the more technically accurate, but stylistically infelicitous, term ‘non-human animal.’” (p.209).” Lourdes Orozco, *Theatre and Animals* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 7-8. Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003),

and German dialect comics helped to define American whiteness, so vaudeville’s spectacles of animal capital participated in defining twentieth-century modern, urban humanity for vaudeville’s human performers and audiences.

At the height of their popularity, performing animals appeared in over half of all big-time vaudeville bills. It is very clear that vaudeville’s formula for success in the early twentieth century depended on the spectacle of animal bodies. As the *New York Times* observed in 1903, “One of the features which vaudeville managers have come to rely upon… is the act in which trained animals figure…in which man’s power over dumb brutes is illustrated.”7 Animal vaudevillians served three primary economic functions: they were booked to draw children to matinee performances, to create crucial word-of-mouth interest in the bill’s weekly line-up, and to hold audiences at the end of a bill to prevent early exiting. Lourdes Orozco identifies four key areas of inquiry that the theatrical context brings “to questions of human-animal subjectivity; ethics, risk, labor and economics; and representation.”8 In this study, each category of inquiry is addressed and I trace how vaudeville’s multivalent forms of animal representation theatricalized changing human-animal relationships during an era of animals’ increasing imbrication within modern corporate capitalism. Placing animal vaudevillians downstage center, rather than hidden in the wings of theatre history, illuminates how popular culture participated in mediating human-animal relationships during the vaudeville era, a period of national transformation when the United States became an empire, federally institutionalized racial segregation and immigration limits, founded the national parks system, entered World War I, established and repealed Prohibition, and passed women’s suffrage.

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The story of Bedelia the bear’s foray into freedom, quick containment, and restoration to the stage, embodies the many threads of tension that bound humans and animals at the turn of the twentieth century. Americans celebrated modern urbanism and technological advancements such as automobiles and airplanes even as national cultural discourses expressed profound anxieties over the mechanization of organic life, urbanites’ increasing alienation from natural landscapes, and acute species extinction due to shrinking habitats and aggressive hunting. The mounting contradictions of modern urban life fostered at least three ambivalent attitudes toward animal vaudevillians. First, theatre managers and audiences were caught between thinking of performing animals as regimented mechanical bodies and corporal emissaries from a pre-industrial realm of early evolution or unspoiled nature. Second, animal vaudevillians could be seen as either tacky diversions only suitable for children, or as respectable fun that effectively displayed the talent of both human trainers and animal performers. Finally, the acts’ usual placement at the beginning or end of a playbill meant animal vaudevillians were economically and symbolically important but their status was marginalized within vaudeville’s hierarchy of acts.

As animal bodies became more imbricated within modern capitalism, performing animals brought salient forms of symbolic capital to the vaudeville stage because they embodied the contradictions of the era. Demographic shifts from rural to urban environments had radically altered many Americans’ relationships with various species. During the nineteenth century,

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9 One emblematic crisis of habitat loss and species extinction in the United States is that of the American bison. Despite the intentional removal of bison as a strategy to weaken Plains Indians and build railroads, it is estimated that in 1870 bison still numbered in the several millions. However, by 1883, due to a fervent “hide rush” throughout the 1870s, numbers dwindled to 100 wild bison. Dale F. Lott describes the results of this decade of destruction: “The American bison was commercially, and almost biologically, extinct.” Dale F. Lott, American Bison: A Natural History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 179. From the 1880s onward, efforts to save the bison showed how clearly the animals were tied to Americans’ self-concept of the nation. Preservation efforts eventually resulted in the establishment of the National Bison Range in 1908.
livestock such as pigs and chickens were slowly legislated out of cities because of increased population density and fear of contagion. For many, the practical intimacy of living closely with the farm animals they depended on for labor and food was replaced with the urban experience of animals as hired transportation; vermin in the home, streets, and sewers; entertainment; or pets. Meat increasingly became a commodity eaten by consumers who had no knowledge of the animal it once was and little concern for the labor required to transform livestock into meat.\textsuperscript{10} Nicole Shukin characterizes the turn of the twentieth century as a formative era for the rendering of “animal capital” in which animal bodies and animal representation became essential to the mechanisms of modern, industrial economic capital.\textsuperscript{11} Shukin maps how, at an unprecedented scale, slaughterhouses rendered animal bodies into industrial products and consumer goods while mass-produced advertising depended on the proliferation of animals images. Not only this, but the mechanized disassembly of animal bodies in the stockyards of Chicago inspired Henry Ford’s factory assembly of automobiles, while the rendered cartilage and bones of livestock became the gelatin that was necessary for the creation and distribution of film stock. In Shukin’s

\textsuperscript{10} Technological innovations such as the 1882 invention of the refrigerated railroad car made it possible to process industrial meat on an unprecedented scale. See the website of the Chicago Historical Society’s exhibit “Slaughterhouse to the World.” Last visited May 19, 2014, http://www.chicagohs.org/history/stock.html.

When Upton Sinclair’s \textit{The Jungle} was published as a novel in 1906, it spurred a national discussion about health and safety in meat consumption. However, it did not provoke a sustained debate about the ethics of meat eating and industrial animal processing as a cultural practice. In his discussions of germ anxieties during the Progressive Era, Aaron Bobrow-Strain notes that the public did not respond to Sinclair’s socialist call for economic justice. “Instead, the country fixated on germs and the frightening immigrants who appeared to spread them into the nation’s food.” Aaron Bobrow-Strain, \textit{White Bread: A Social History of the Store-Bought Loaf} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 18. The consumer-oriented response spurred President Theodore Roosevelt’s successful push for the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act. Many writers cite Sinclair’s famous observation “I aimed for the people’s heart, and by accident, hit it in the stomach.” Eric Schlosser, forward to \textit{The Jungle} by Upton Sinclair (New York: Penguin, 2006), x-xi.

\textsuperscript{11} Nicole Shukin, \textit{Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
rubric, the material and symbolic rendering of animal bodies shaped twentieth and twenty-first century cultural production in foundational but often invisible ways. Taking up Shukin’s framework, I argue that big-time vaudeville staged the rendering of animal capital for millions of Americans in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era by incorporating animal acts into its economic structures and aesthetic conventions and by being the first indoor venue to regularly present film. Animal vaudevillians played many roles as both “substance and sign” and this theatricalization of animal capital helped normalize a temporary and contained human-animal relationship based on casual consumerism. Though various animal entertainments were popular during the vaudeville era; including the circus, zoos, Wild West shows, and amusement park attractions; vaudeville’s proscenium arch and atmosphere of class aspiration uniquely framed these acts within a scenario in which animal capital could be evaluated in relation to many audience members’ active efforts to increase their social capital.\(^{12}\)

It was vaudeville’s unique position as aspirationally middle class, family-friendly and inexpensive theatrical entertainment in the heart of the city that provided a singular forum for contemplating a diversity of domestic and wild animal bodies. The main genres of animal performance in vaudeville were athletic/acrobatic feats (including wire walking, somersaults, bipedalism, jumping through hoops, distance leaping, and high diving); musical acts (often dogs or seals playing the bells); theatricalized play (using see-saws, bicycles, rocking horses, roller

\(^{12}\) As Cary Wolfe maintains “the question of framing is not simply a logical or epistemological problem but a social and material one, with consequences. Framing decides what we recognize and what we don’t, what counts and what doesn’t; and it also determines the consequences of falling outside the frame.” Cary Wolfe, *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 6. Shukin situates her argument and terminology within the vocabulary established by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu: “I seek to historicize the specific cultural logics and material logistics that have produced animals as ‘forms of capital’ (in the words of Pierre Bourdieu)…. Animal capital simultaneously notates the semiotic currency of animal signs and the carnal traffic in animal substances.” Shukin, *Animal Capital*, 7.
skates, jump ropes, slides, and other props of childhood), statue posing; dancing; and the modern incarnation of the famed fairground entertainment of “learned animal” routines in which various species seemed to solve arithmetic, identify words, write, and even talk. Large animals from the circus and amusement parks (including big cats, seals, elephants, and horses) were booked during the circus’s off-season in the late fall and winter. Additionally, there were what I call “diegetic animals”—creatures whose presence on stage was justified by performing as pets and athletes in human-acted narrative playlets. Finally, dogs and primates sometimes appeared as characters in all-animal pantomime melodramas with no human trainer on stage. As parodies, these performances depended on a common understanding of the conventions of melodrama. Just as important to their affective impact was the theatrical thrill of seeing animals so thoroughly anthropomorphized that they appeared to have not just the bipedal movements of people, but their same psychological motivations as well.

**Vaudeville Basics**

Big-time vaudeville in the United States began in the 1880s and lasted into the 1920s when early radio and film eroded its cultural dominance. In 1932, New York City’s famed Palace Theatre was renamed the “RKO Palace” and became a film house, symbolically ending the already-dissipated vaudeville era. A typical vaudeville bill could run two and a half hours with anywhere from 8-15 acts, though the largest houses usually had about nine. From 1885 to the early 1900s, many houses operated continuous vaudeville, which meant that from 10:00am to 10:00pm, the shows never stopped. By 1910, most big-time houses operated on the two-a-day schedule.

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model, having an afternoon and evening show. As with the US railroad circus and the formation of the Syndicate in the legitimate theatre, vaudeville was aggressively consolidated into a modern corporate structure in the decades leading up to and following the turn of the twentieth century.\(^{14}\) Popular entertainment was in step with other consolidations of capital such as the beef, steel, and railroad trusts during what Alan Trachtenberg has identified as the Gilded Age’s “incorporation of America.”\(^{15}\) The regimentation and corporatization of variety theatre was achieved by businessmen such as Martin Beck of the West Coast’s Orpheum circuit, F.F. Proctor and Percy Williams in New York, and, especially, by Benjamin Franklin Keith and his general manager Edward Franklin Albee on the east coast. Keith and Albee’s original “quadruple circuit” in Boston, Providence, Philadelphia, and New York City, firmly established by 1900, provided the foundation for what scholars have described as “the vaudeville machine” and a corporate “octopus” that spread west to the edge of Chicago and as far south as Washington, D.C. and Cincinnati.\(^{16}\) Keith and Albee’s creation of the Association of Vaudeville Managers of the


\(^{16}\) See “The Vaudeville Machine” in Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, 151-169. Also see “The Keith-Albee Octopus and the Return of the White Rats” in Snyder, Voice of the City, 64-81. With his octopus metaphor, Snyder takes up a potent animal image of the Progressive Era. Political
United States (AVM) in 1900 and the United Booking Office of America (UBO) in 1906 were pivotal to the corporatization of vaudeville. The UBO cemented Keith and Albee’s powerbroker status, as it forced other theatre owners to book acts through the agency and it required vaudeville artists to pay agent and booking fees that “amounted to performers’ paying for the right to work.”

In May 1918 the Federal Trade Commission filed an anti-trust complaint against “The Vaudeville Managers’ Protective Association, the National Vaudeville Artists Inc., United Booking Offices, et al.” on the charges of “restraint of trade and creating a monopoly of the vaudeville theatre.” Unlike the Supreme Court’s 1911 landmark ruling against Standard Oil’s industry monopoly, the FTC’s vaudeville case was “dismissed in its entirety, March 25, 1920.” Vaudeville’s anti-union policies and capitalist structures of consolidation remained in place as owners endeavored to entertain as many people as possible while becoming as wealthy as possible.

The simultaneous allure and hesitation that characterized vaudeville managers’ and some audience members’ attitudes toward animal acts was endemic to Keith’s efforts to offer

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17 Snyder, *Voice of the City*, 69.
19 Ibid.
But who counted as “everyone”? Situated in centrally located commercial shopping districts and transportation hubs, big-time vaudeville attracted audiences of European-American white-collar clerks and businessmen, some working-class men, women out for the afternoon, mothers looking for a break, and plenty of school children and teenagers. Recent immigrants often patronized less expensive neighborhood theatres with performances in their native languages. Though African American performers were regularly booked on the Keith-Albee circuit, African American patrons were usually segregated to the back portion of the balcony and managers were hostile toward a strong presence of African Americans in the audience. Theatre bookers and managers paid attention to gender, class, and age when they strived to construct an ideally balanced bill of low and high humor that incorporated music, singing, talking, dancing, and novel spectacle. They hoped to accommodate the entertainment demands of the rowdy men and teenagers in the upper gallery, as well as the aspirational customers in the more expensive orchestra seats. By and large, animal acts lacked the cynical edge, innuendo, and violent slapstick found in many vaudeville routines. Many animal turns were presumed to appeal to children foremost, women secondarily, and men hardly at all. M. Alison Kibler documents managers’ habits of describing women in the audience as having “childlike preferences” and “being particularly impressionable and fearful.” For instance, one

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22 McLean, American Vaudeville as Ritual, 41.
23 Kibler, Rank Ladies, 34-36. Cities with sizable Black populations had vaudeville theatres in African American neighborhoods, such as the Lincoln and Lafayette Theatres in Harlem.
24 Kibler, Rank Ladies, 23-54.
25 Ibid, 47.
report noted that Batty’s Bears got “a big laugh from women and children.” Male teenagers and adults were characterized as bored by such routines. Again, Kibler cites a report that Kreisel’s animal act was “not of sufficient importance to interest the male patrons.” Of course, such reports reveal more about the managers’ predilections in interpretation rather than offering unbiased descriptions of vaudeville’s heterogeneous audience. Were female and male audience members enacting social scripts that predetermined who would enjoy certain types of performances? Did the manager only report what he had anticipated seeing? Kibler demonstrates just how much negotiation and planning went into creating the “balanced bill” of vaudeville and how the concept of “balance” was predicated on an overlapping association of women with an emerging feminized, middle-class culture, while male adults and teens (often workers such as newspaper boys) remained lumped with working class entertainment preferences. Animal vaudevillians were an important part of the gender and class negotiations in big-time vaudeville’s theatricalization of a society in flux.

**Historiography**

Several works treat big-time US vaudeville with sustained academic analysis, including close examinations of its influence on national identity formation and popular leisure habits, the aggressive business and marketing practices of the circuit owners, class and gender dynamics on stage and in the audience, and vaudeville’s relationship with Progressive Era reforms. In these texts, animal acts are generally mentioned in passing as examples of how the demand for novelty permeated vaudeville and how theatre bookers balanced such “lowbrow” acts with “highbrow”

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26 ibid.
27 ibid.
turns from legitimate stage actors or European opera singers. In this way, scholars have replicated vaudeville’s privileging of language-based acts.28

Contemporary performance scholars have considered some of the philosophical implications of animals as material beings and metaphors on stage. Una Chaudhuri identifies literary drama’s different “mimetic strategies” in which sometimes “animals are, above all, themselves, not us, not metaphors” while, more commonly, “the human descent into primitive emotionality is figured as animality.”29 Nicholas Ridout argues “the animal on stage forces a politicization of the face-to-face encounter in the recognition of the histories and politics of labor and its exploitation upon which the theatre operates.”30 Although Ridout's work is directly relevant to the economic and labor concerns provoked by the spectacle of animals in vaudeville, the unease and sense of uncanny disruption that Ridout ascribes to seeing animals on stage is based on his consideration of contemporary highbrow theatre and does not correlate with the familiarity and pleasure that many vaudeville audiences associated with animal acts.

28 For example, in his analysis of the sexual allure of performances by female athletes, Andrew Erdman discusses the performer “Odiva, the ‘Living Mermaid’” arguing that performing “in a tight, formfitting bathing suit” embellished her displays of “underwater feats of strength and agility.” Erdman, Blue Vaudeville, 92. According to the manager of Keith’s Theatre in Boston, however, the success of Odiva’s act largely depended on the compelling spectacle of sea lions: “This act has been improved greatly since its first appearance here. The addition of the trained sea lions and the new and imposing scene make it one of the most novel water sets in vaudeville. The swimming and diving of the performing seals [sic] made a big hit. Held the audience seated all through, and closed to a big hand.” Boston, August 9, 1915, KAC, 19, 6.
29 Una Chaudhuri, “Animal Geographies: Zooësis and the Space of Modern Drama,” Modern Drama, 46:4 (Winter 2003), 660, 655, and 654. Chaudhuri coined the term zooësis to refer to “the myriad performance and semiotic elements involved in and around the vast field of cultural animal practices.” Zooësis is “the discourse of animality in human life.” By “cultural animal practices” Chaudhuri is referring to all symbolic and imaginative representations of animals (as in myths, literature, and the visual arts), as well as representations of actual animals (as in the circus, vaudeville, and many plays). Not only these, but in zooësis Chaudhuri also includes “such ubiquitous or isolated social practices as pet-keeping, cockfighting, dog shows, equestrian displays” and more. See p. 647.
30 Nicholas Ridout, Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29.
The only academic study of vaudeville to thoroughly consider the symbolic meanings of animal vaudevillians is Albert F. McLean’s 1965 book *American Vaudeville as Ritual*. Reading the acts alongside the opinions of turn-of-the-century evolutionary psychologists and social Darwinists, McLean examines how animal acts functioned within a “modern totemism” for the transplanted residents of US cities. He interprets animal and magic acts as expressing “fundamental attitudes towards science,” and connects animal vaudevillians to “the Darwinian controversy to reevaluate the relationship between man and other members of the animal kingdom.” Within this totemic logic, performing animals inevitably represented more than their species. For instance, the prodigious bodies of captured elephants readily created “a symbol of an expanding nation.” In many ways McLean anticipated the Birmingham School’s understanding of popular culture as a process of exchange that produces multiple sites of struggle for meaning. For nearly fifty years little has been written about animals in vaudeville but the field of inquiry known as animal studies offers the opportunity to return to this neglected topic with new tools of analysis.

**Animal Studies**

According to Cary Wolfe, a leading figure in animal studies within the US, the field possesses a “daunting interdisciplinarity that is inseparable from its very genesis.” Participants in animal studies approach it from commitments to political advocacy, contemporary critical theory, sociology, art history, and ethology, to name a few. Animal studies is characterized by

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32 ibid, 142.
33 ibid, 143.
such diffuseness because it “studies both a material entity (nonhuman beings) and a discourse of species difference.” Encompassing the lives of animals and discursive cultural practices has created what Chaudhuri describes as a “fundamental ideological split – between political advocacy and postmodern cultural studies, between activism and ideological analysis.” But must this be a split in the field? Nicole Shukin refuses the division and deconstructs the false premises on which it is founded. In order to privilege animal lives and representation in her work on animal capital, Shukin “simultaneously notates the semiotic currency of animal signs and the carnal traffic in animal substances” in order to map “a tangle of biopolitical relations within which the economic and symbolic capital of animal life can no longer be sorted into binary distinction” because “animal memes and animal matter are mutually overdetermined as forms of capital.” As previously noted, Shukin identifies the early twentieth century as a crucial timeframe in human-animal relations within the US. In his foundational essay “Why Look at Animals?” John Berger describes the nineteenth century as the time period that “saw the beginning of a process… being completed by 20th century corporate capitalism, by which every tradition which has previously mediated between man and nature was broken.” Human-animal relationships in the industrialized West had been disrupted and reoriented throughout modernity, but the unprecedented acceleration of this rupture at the turn of the twentieth century had resounding cultural influence. In Electric Animal, Akira Mizuta Lippit claims that “Modernity can be defined by the disappearance of wildlife from humanity’s habitat and by the reappearance of the same in humanity’s reflections on itself…. During this period, the status of the animal

36 Wolfe, “‘Human, All Too Human,’” 567.
38 Shukin, Animal Capital, 7.
itself began to change—at the very point that animals began to vanish from the empirical world.”

Shukin argues against Lippit’s focus on the specter of the vanishing animal within cultural representation by illustrating how twentieth-century human subjectivity and patterns of commerce depended not on Lippit’s continually vanishing animal but on the violent absorption of livestock into the mechanics of the marketplace.

The social forces described by Berger, Lippit, and Shukin generated new axes of argument in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century debates about human attitudes and obligations towards animals. The same era that witnessed horses rapidly disappearing from city streets as they were replaced by electric trollies and automobiles also saw the massive mechanization of livestock slaughter and intense consumer demand for animal goods, including bison hides, seal skin, and exotic bird feathers for fashionable hats. Relentless bird hunting provoked President Roosevelt’s foundation of the first Federal Bird Reservation in 1903, while concerned citizens incorporated the National Audubon Society in 1905. The same year Ford Motor Company introduced the Model T to middle-class consumers, 1908, the National Bison Range was established to try to bring bison back from the brink of extinction. These public and private reactions point to the sense of crisis many Americans felt about species viability, animal habitats, and the individual citizen-consumer’s responsibilities for these larger patterns of consumption and disappearance. Within this social context, the performing animals in vaudeville were, according to Albert F. McLean Jr., “denaturalized into symbolic projections of human desires and anxieties.”

Vaudeville audiences were offered casual, temporary access to animal

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bodies with little cost or effort due to the highly efficient corporatized structure of big-time vaudeville.

**Natural Mechanical Animal**

Vaudeville audiences were ensnared in nostalgia for the “natural animal” while also desiring a perfectly mechanical being that/who could execute physical feats with accurate industrial speed. While an expectation of quickly responding animal performers is not historically unique to vaudeville, managers’ and audiences’ expectations were now pre-scripted by social preoccupations with regimentation and speed due to industrialization. The subjugation of organic life to mechanical processes was a reigning obsession during the vaudeville era. This was evident in various cultural outlets, from Upton Sinclair’s 1905 description of a Lithuanian immigrant on his first day in a Chicago slaughterhouse (when Jurgis becomes “a cog in this marvelous machine”)\(^42\) to a slew of American Expressionist plays of the 1920s in which characters beholden to industrial capitalism were essentially what David Savran terms “Fordized human subjects.”\(^43\) Vaudeville novelty acts included spectacles of merging organic and mechanical forms. Sometimes they kept a human actor/mechanical object dialectic intact, as with the many bicycling displays on offer. A more obscure example that no less points to a

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\(^42\) Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 35. *The Jungle* was originally published serially in the socialist newspaper *Appeal to Reason* in 1905 and then as a novel in 1906. Michael Lindblad argues that Sinclair’s portrayal of Jurgis’s “animalized body” via his “brute strength” and “explosions of passion” participate in a larger project to associate working-class laborers and immigrants with a type of animality that served to distance middle-class reformers from the very people they purported to support. Lindblad, *Birth of a Jungle*, 108-118.

\(^43\) David Savran, *Highbrow, Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 158. In his consideration of American Expressionist plays that deploy jazz music, Savran lists the following examples: “[John Howard] Lawson’s *Processional, Loud Speaker* (1927), and *The International* (1928), Elmer Rice’s *The Adding Machine* and *The Subway* (1929), John Dos Passos’s *The Garbage Man* (1923), and Francis Faragoh’s *Pinwheel* (1927).” Savran,140. Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* (1922) and Sophie Treadwell’s *Machinal* (1928) also consider the mechanization of modern urban working life.
cultural preoccupation with the mechanical is an act called “Bimm Bomm Brrr: The Beautiful Electric Revolving Musical Novelty,” which featured a large pyramid of ten rotating wheels played by a troupe of three clowns. The question of where life ended and machine began can be seen in such acts as “Automoto / The Mechanical Doll” (“It walks, It Talks, and Shakes Hands. Is it Man or Machine?”). Two decades before the Czech writer Karel Čapek coined the term “robot” in his play R.U.R., vaudeville audiences were invited to look deep within Automoto. Where a living body would harbor the viscera of life, The Mechanical Doll possessed “a cleverly constructed arrangement of wheels and wires with a mirror attachment” so arranged that spectators believed they were observing Automoto’s “interior mechanism.” These performances seemed to celebrate the ambiguity of mechanical life rather than critique industrial machines’ dehumanizing potential.

Even as big-time vaudeville marketed animal vaudevillians by celebrating their physical traits and species-specific attributes, the performing creatures were also expected to execute their skills with automated mechanical precision. Managers complained about slow animals. In one case the manager of Keith’s Union Square theatre observed that, though the canine performer in DeCamo & Dog was “evidently well trained,” it “was a rather slow working act.” He concluded: “the act will hardly ever amount to much unless he works quicker.” Of another dog and monkey act, a manager complained that the trainer’s laziness was rubbing off on the animals: “This is the slowest sort of an act, the man himself being big and lethargic… and his animals

44 This act was booked by Michael Shea for his Buffalo, NY theatre in 1901 for $125 a week. Michael Shea Papers, Butler Library, Buffalo State College.
45 In a letter dated 25 August 1902, the performer describes his act “There is a machine arrangement that is wound up and worked like the ‘autome,’ as if it really was a mechanical invention…I have electrical wires that permit of gentle shocks being given those who shake hands with me.”
46 ibid.
47 New York, September 15, 1902, KAC, 1, 3.
partaking of it.”

Efficiency reigned on and off stage. Lacking a master-of-ceremony’s bodily presence to orchestrate entrances and exits, vaudeville’s highly regimented structure was choreographed by the invisible hand of the stage manager, who timed each act to the minute so that performers appeared and disappeared with a sense of mechanically ordered proceedings. The theatrical semiotics of the curtain, lights, and music were coupled with sign cards or “annunciators” (backlit signs embedded in the proscenium arch that announced the name of the next act) for transitions. The mechanics of setting up and striking different acts were coordinated with meticulous attention because “the entire show must be dovetailed to the split seconds of a stop-watch.” Acts which took up the entire stage (“in four” in vaudeville lingo) were alternated with acts taking place downstage center in front of the curtain (“in one”) to ensure swift transitions because “In vaudeville there must be no waits. Everything must run with unbroken stride.” Audiences could receive time cards announcing the down-to-the-minute schedule of an entire bill, allowing the spectator to come and go without worrying about missing the headliner or a favorite performer, some of whom were forced to work three shows a day at a pace that rendered them “automatons.” Pace was one way in which the spectacle-oriented animal acts and language-based comedy routines were held to the same standard. As McLean

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48 Boston, April 10, 1905, KAC, 4, 154.
50 George Gottlieb in *Writing for Vaudeville* by Brett Page (Springfield, MA: Home Correspondence, 1915), 10. Similarly, Davis discusses the industrial regimentation of the railroad circus: “The train turned the pastoral circus into an industrial amusement…it also standardized the nation’s sense of time…Time-consciousness pervaded all aspects of the railroad circus. Even the peppy brass big-top band instilled labor discipline.” Davis, *The Circus Age*, 51.
52 James Fitzpatrick testimony, box 71, 1918, FTC v. VMPA. Quoted in Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 207.
observes, vaudeville comics depended on “the joke and machined monologue” in which humor was “economized” so the comedian could “reach his point sooner.” The New York Times reported that vaudeville “artists demand a condensed system of rapid-fire expression.” Comics used the technique of “topping laughs” in which the performer intentionally rushed through material to “spring jokes so fast that the laughs overlap.” The term “jazz” was also applied to “fast comedy that speeds an act up.” Animal vaudevillians were expected to match the pace of the rest of vaudeville, which was enmeshed in the high-paced, commerce-driven realm of the newly electric twentieth-century city, where consumer goods and leisure activities perpetually beckoned.

None Dare Call It Lowbrow

The archive of managers’ notes from the Keith-Albee circuit reveals a fundamental ambivalence towards animal acts. Animal vaudevillians were simultaneously appreciated and dismissed as being, as one manager put it, “a very good act for an unimportant place on any bill” or “simply on for the children.” Vaudeville derived its acts from earlier and concurrent popular entertainment forms including blackface minstrelsy, the dime museum, circus, concert saloon, and burlesque. Minstrelsy and concert saloons were associated with obstreperous, hard-

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53 McLean, American Vaudeville as Ritual, 119.
54 ibid., 122.
58 Cleveland, September 3, 1906, KAC, 6, 97.
59 Boston, April 17, 1905, KAC, 4, 156.
60 For more on these different genres of popular entertainment, see Bluford Adams, E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997); Robert C. Allen, Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Robert M. Lewis, ed., From
drinking, working-class male audiences. The pre-corporate vaudeville impresario Tony Pastor is credited with “doubling the audience” by creating variety venues in New York City that were welcoming to middle class women. Pastor described Civil War-era variety as mainly serving the male public sphere, providing a temporary distraction from the nation’s turmoil. “Freedom from restraint in smoking and drinking” attracted customers to venues that “were essentially resorts for men… Few ladies attended and they only in the company of their husbands.”61 Indeed, many concert saloons provided meagre entertainment and were staffed by “wine girls” whose friendly table service encouraged maximum imbibing. Some saloons operated as brothels by another name. As a profit-seeking strategy, vaudeville owners distanced their enterprise from “unsavory” variety forms by courting middle-class respectability. Audiences, many of whom were transplants to the city, sought social validation by attending sumptuously appointed modern palaces that Robert C. Allen describes as “shrines to middle-class notions of taste, luxury, and cleanliness.”62 Marble floors, crystal chandeliers, and mirrored hallways evocative of European opera houses were part of the value-added experience of an orchestra seat ticket. Theatre bookers balanced their dependence on animal acts to generate novelty with fears of diminishing...

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vaudeville's ambitions for refinement. Following a model established by nineteenth-century dime museums and circuses, vaudeville publicists and theatre managers worked hard to situate such acts within a discourse of classy respectability and intellectual curiosity.\(^{63}\)

For example, in October 1905 a new act from Berlin appeared in big-time US vaudeville. A jowly bulldog in a formal jacket, crisp white cravat, black top hat, and \textit{trompe l'oeil} monocle took the stage at vaudeville magnate B.F. Keith’s Fourteenth Street Theatre in New York City [see figure 1]. A thin white cigarette sat perched at the edge of the dog’s underbite. Was the act mocking capitalist fat cats or aristocratic arrogance? As his trainer sang songs, Kern’s Mimic Dog was put in several costumes. One included an Inverness cape, deerstalker hat, and a pipe jutting to the side, perhaps suggesting the costume of the popular serial story and stage character Sherlock Holmes. Kern maximized the dog’s squat body and brachycephalic face to achieve a dual comic effect. By using hats, outerwear, and smoking paraphernalia, the costumed dog momentarily made strange the normalized costumes of gender and class. Simultaneously, the canine’s body was rendered absurd with these markers of human culture.\(^{64}\) Advance press for Kern’s Mimic Dog both exploited and assuaged the anxieties of US consumers who might be concerned about the


\(^{64}\) When promoted in Rhode Island, newspaper readers were assured “The dog, which is of the bull variety, is anything but beautiful of feature, and in his several costumes presents a highly laughable appearance.” \textit{Providence Bulletin}, October 10, 1905, Clipping, KAC, Series II, 38, 137.
propriety or childishness of watching live animals perform. Readers were promised “a magnificent specimen… with an enviable pedigree.” The New York Daily Tribune promoted Kern’s Mimic Dog with copy most likely written by a vaudeville publicity agent. According to the Tribune, Kern’s was one of “two vaudeville novelties imported directly from Germany” and an act that had “made Berlin laugh all summer.” The other imported act, The Three Seldons, was a tableau vivant of models posing as statuary. Such “living picture” acts consisted of nude models wearing greasepaint, talc, or other powder to approximate bronze or marble statuary, thereby offering “respectable female nudity” in an “imitation of high art” that offered entertainment without a moral quandary for theatre managers or audiences. The Tribune article also included information crucial to elevating the living picture act in the eyes of US consumers: The Three Seldons was originally presented at Berlin’s Academy of Arts alongside the statues the models were emulating. Most impressively, Emperor Wilhelm II had enjoyed the display. In the marketing of The Three Seldons and Kern’s Mimic Dog, Keith’s vaudeville publicity machine played a knowing game of association in which the tableau vivant act became grouped with high art and aristocracy and, by promoting them together, Kern’s Mimic Dog became associated with The Three Seldons’ European sophistication. Similar to the tenuous position of Kern’s Mimic Dog, a sea-lion band booked for Keith’s Theatre in Providence, Rhode Island needed to

65 Pawtucket Times, October 7, 1905, Clipping, KAC, SERIES II, 38, 130.
67 See “Respectable Female Nudity” in Davis, The Circus Age, 2002, 82-141.
be carefully positioned for potential customers. The caption “The Sea-Lion Band at Keith’s Next Week Surrounded by a Bill of Almost Entirely Top-line Features” clearly illustrates the tension around animal acts. In the accompanying newspaper clipping [figure 2], the image of sea lions appearing to play instruments together (particularly the minstrelsy-associated banjo, which traditionally requires fingers) is coupled with an assurance that nearly everything else on offer will be classy. Such rhetorical maneuvers were the result of animals’ inherited position from nineteenth-century US theatrical entertainments.

A deeper historical understanding of the relationship between animal representation and nineteenth-century antitheatrical prejudice recontextualizes the apparent incongruity of bell-playing dogs and mathematical horses sharing the stage with the likes of Eva Tanguay, the Marx Brothers, Buster Keaton, Bert Williams, and Sophie Tucker. During the nineteenth century, a widespread temperance movement and strict Protestant bias against live performance created marketing dilemmas for theatre and circus managers who hoped to attract a wide audience. Even antebellum menagerie managers cited Biblical references to animals in order to characterize their displays as religious and edifying (as opposed to sensational and dissipating). Ministers, civic leaders, and reformers (many of whom were women) warned the public about the possibilities for moral corruption due to the ribald content of performances and the likely presence of swindlers, drunks, and prostitutes in the audience. Religious suspicion of leisure, cosmetics, and costume also fed antitheatrical critiques. Nineteenth-century dime museum and circus owners systematically incorporated animal bodies into their displays and animal representation into their

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marketing as a strategy to attract a family audience and allay antitheatrical anxieties. None was more successful than the canny showman P.T. Barnum, who began his remarkable career as the proprietor of a dime museum.

Dime museums were at the height of their popularity from the 1840s – 1890s. They began as exhibits of portraits, statuary, wax figures, taxidermy, and wonders of nature. As with the permanent indoor circuses of Europe, novelty was crucial to the economic success of dime museums because they depended on local customers returning to see new or embellished acts.\(^\text{69}\) To increase return visits, museum proprietors created “lecture rooms.” According to dime museum historian Andrea Stulman Dennett, “some rooms seated a thousand, were lavishly decorated, and mounted full-scale dramatic productions; others consisted of a small platform and perhaps a few rows of seats, were hardly embellished at all, and presented programs no better than… tawdry variety bills.”\(^\text{70}\) Lecture room presentations (including key melodramas of the nineteenth-century such as The Drunkard and Uncle Tom’s Cabin) drew customers, while the artifacts and curiosities that architecturally preceded the lecture room acted as a sort of antechamber to assuage antitheatrical anxieties. Of this peculiar combination of taxidermy and theatre, a visiting Britisher observed in 1852: “‘A walk through a room full of stuffed birds and beasts, boasting of little to interest anybody, served as a kind of penance for what is to follow.’”\(^\text{71}\) As Barnum biographer Neil Harris and the performance scholar Jane R. Goodall have argued, dime museums played on the nineteenth-century’s popular embrace of scientific inquiry

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\(^\text{69}\) For a discussion of permanent venue circuses and their dependence on novelty, see Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 101.


and general curiosity to connect the realms of science and performance. Dime museums theatricalized the corporality of animal bodies by staging taxidermy figures in various scenarios of life (cuddling, hunting, nursing). In part, these theatricalized animals symbolized intellectual pursuit and (human) family bonding which then permitted the collective acceptance of lecture room performances.

Barnum had identified the power of animal representation early in his career. When he first purchased the American Museum in 1841 and listed all the entertainments he hoped to include in his venue, “educated dogs” and “industrious fleas” topped the list. Barnum boasted of cleaning up the variety stage: “I abolished all vulgarity and profanity from the stage, and I prided myself upon the fact that parents and children could attend the dramatic performances in the so-called Lecture Room, and not be shocked or offended by anything they might see or hear.” Barnum’s cleanup was contingent on the family audience and the family audience was contingent on animal bodies both real and imagined. His autobiography recounts a marketing gimmick in which he had “nearly every important animal known in zoology” painted on “large oval oil paintings” and placed between all the windows of his museum overnight, utterly transforming the edifice. The next day, he claims, crowds poured into the museum thinking the animals had gotten loose; these new customers wanted to see what had become of the museum run amok with animals. Because of the stunt, “receipts took a jump forward of nearly a hundred dollars a day, and they never fell back again.”

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72 Barnum, Struggles and Triumphs, 120, as quoted in Goodall, Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin: Out of Natural Order (London: Routledge, 2002), 35. Harris also quotes from the same passage but with different edits.
73 P. T. Barnum, Struggles and Triumphs or, Forty Years’ Recollections of P.T. Barnum (Buffalo, NY: Warren, Johnson and Co., 1871), 134.
74 ibid., 141.
75 ibid.
narrator, the peculiar memory meshes with his career-spanning dependence on animals to provide novelty in order to achieve his business goals.

Like Barnum, exploiting animal representation and piquing audience curiosity became a strategy for Keith at the beginning of his theatrical career. During the 1870s Keith had worked in Adam Forepaugh’s and other circuses and, according to Keith, “These circus days had naturally imbued me with business ideas.”76 He was able to then work for the famous Bunnell’s dime museum in New York City and then Barnum’s circus. Keith opened a dime museum in Boston in 1883. In a direct echo of Barnum, Keith recalled that, in addition to his regiment of “cleanliness and order,” his business plan depended on a commitment that “the stage show must be free from vulgarisms and coarseness of any kind, so that the house and entertainment would directly appeal to the support of ladies and children—indeed that my playhouse must be as ‘homelike’ an amusement resort as it was possible to make it.”77 Vaudeville scholars have persuasively argued that this type of rhetoric was mainly a marketing strategy that, in fact, allowed more risqué content and bodily display than such discursive commitments to domestic wholesomeness suggest.78 Keith’s dime museum offered the usual assortment of taxidermy and curiosities. Showcasing live and dead animals in the same venue made dime museums unique,79 but may have also prevented them from capturing some of the glamour of the legitimate stage the way vaudeville did. When Albee wanted to attract a more upscale clientele in 1885, he recommended

79 Goodall notes that in nineteenth-century England “exotic animals crossed the boundary from the fairground to the museum when they died.” Goodall, *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin*, 33.
that Keith “‘clear out the monkeys and snakes.’” Following the shift in strategy, stuffed animal specimens and curiosities were pushed aside to make way for “light operas… comedies… and a first-rate variety show.” As Victorian qualms about live entertainment faded and an active pursuit of pleasure and social legitimacy grew, animal representation in the form of taxidermy had transformed from a clever foil to a liability. Stuffed creatures had helped form a crucial buffer for certain audiences to justify entering performance venues without social stigma. However, the inanimate bodies and glass eyes now seemed peculiar and distant from the expectations of those attending polite vaudeville. Big-time vaudeville, however, found the compelling novelty supplied by live animal bodies was a skin much harder to shed. As Keith and his competitors corporatized vaudeville, animal acts came to embody the increasing ambivalence and ultimate disposability of animals within a capitalist consumer economy.

“Mere Flumping”: The Ambivalent Position of the Closer

Of course the trained seals do not need a dramatist to lend them interest, nor does the acrobat need his skill, but without the writer, what would the actress be, and without the song-smith, what would the singer sing?

Brett Page, *Writing for Vaudeville*

Animals’ symbolic location within the hierarchy of a vaudeville bill replicated the Aristotelian view expressed in *The History of Animals* that animals exist outside of language and the reasoning process that language facilitates. The language-based acts that composed about two-thirds of a bill, such as comedy duos, playlets, songs, and monologues, were generally held in higher esteem regardless of whether a monologist pushed the edge of decency with double

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81 Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 27.
entendre or a comedy team pummeled each other throughout a bit. In this way, vaudeville again operated on the Aristotelian logic of *The Poetics*, in which spectacle is deemed the least important element of a cohesive theatrical event. Even if animal vaudevillians performed with a singer or trainer who kept up a running patter with the audience, they were first and foremost bodies: ridiculous, amusing, strange, marvelous, parodic, miniature, and enormous bodies. A big-time vaudeville show began with music from the live orchestra. Optic entertainments such as stereopticons or magic lanterns showing travel landscapes (and, later, Pathé newsreels) were projected. Beginning in 1896, early landscape, comedy, and adventure films by Biograph, Vitascope, or Kinescope often closed a show and were sometimes slotted in the middle. Animal features were usually, though not always, openers and closers because they were termed “sight” or “dumb” acts. The sight act genre included any feature that depended on bodily spectacle for its theatrical impact; language was either not used at all or was incidental because “their appeal was largely, if not entirely, visual.” Types of sight acts included aerialists, equilibrists, jugglers, tumblers, trick cyclists, and eccentric dancers. Managers considered good openers much less valuable than strong closers. Besides serving as openers and closers, a few more sight acts were

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84 Though Aristotle, of course, described the six elements of drama and not variety entertainment, it is still possible to draw on *The Poetics* for contextualizing attitudes towards performances that took place within the architectural semiotics of a formal theatre space. Particularly because, although it was a variety format, managers planned carefully so that audiences would have a cohesive emotional experience of building anticipation culminating in climax (with the headliner) and denouement (with the closer).

85 Allen, “‘A Decided Sensation,’” 76.

86 The Providence manager sometimes rearranged acts that were not successful enough to close a show. He reported on the act Everest’s Monkeys “This is an act after the style of Rochez Monkey Music Hall, although not nearly as good. Put originally to close the show, but was obliged to move them up.” September 20, 1915, KAC, 19, 31. Three weeks later, he moved Seymour’s Happy Family: “Originally booked to close the show, but not strong enough for that position.” October 11, 1915, KAC, 19, 45.
strategically placed in transitional moments in the program, often right before or after intermission. Sight acts were thus literally marginalized within vaudeville’s rigid structure and status hierarchy even though openers and closers served the critical function of delivering audiences into and out of the theatrical mode. After leaving behind the noises and smells of the city streets and settling into their seats, audiences were welcomed to reorient their gaze to the proscenium stage, not with the words of an interlocutor, ringmaster, or master of ceremony, but with the bodies of animals, athletes, and eccentrics.

Writing for *Harper’s* magazine, William Dean Howells wryly complained about the effort necessary to engage with sight acts and animal stunts in particular. Regarding trained seals, Howells commented, “I find myself holding my breath, and helping them along too strenuously for my comfort.” The awkward and out-of-place bodies of seals on the proscenium stage chafed Howells’ sense of the theatre (even the vaudeville theatre) as a site of human expression only: “their mere flumping about the stage makes me unhappy.” Human vaudevillians equally resented animal performers for their double threat of contagion: the symbolic contagion of animals sullying the aspirational vaudeville stage, and the literal contagion of their unwelcome redolence, errant noises, and unpredictable defecation. In vaudeville slang, seals were referred to as “the big smells.” Howells’ characterization of the distastefulness of seals on stage was based

88 ibid.
89 “Argot of Vaudeville Part III,” *New York Times*, December 30, 1917. In his account of life as a vaudevillian, the comedian Joe Laurie Jr. poses the question “Brother, did you ever smell dog food cooking –in a train?” According to Laurie, while a group of performing dogs travelled in the baggage car, their trainer simmered meat on the stove in the “tourist car” that performers rode in together to save money. The stench was enough to provoke bargain-conscious vaudevillians to pay for coach seats rather than stay with the dog trainer and his cooked kibble. See Joe Laurie, Jr., *Vaudeville: From the Honky-Tonks to The Palace* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953), 155. As important as feeding animals was to the quotidian demands of
not on the ethics of animal performance but on a sense of cultural propriety that reflected an
attitude of the literary elite that was coalescing into highbrow culture at the turn of the century in
the United States. However, it is clear that many vaudeville audience members could be
captivated by animal acts. Until at least 1920, managers repeatedly described successful animal
routines as “ideal closers” that kept audiences from leaving early, as when Keith’s Cincinnati
manager praised Apdale’s Zoological Act: “Held them in to the finish and closed strong.” Six
years later, the Philadelphia manager commended an equestrian act because it “held the closing
position in splendid shape.” Managers’ consistent use of the verb “to hold” suggests that
entertaining sight acts, and animal acts in particular, could have an almost coercive effect,
restraining spectators in their seats. Thus, even as audience members witnessed the efforts of
trainers to control animals, the physical feats of animal vaudevillians had the potential to
successfully control the audience.

The notion of the coercive (or at least cajoling) closing act works against the cliché in
vaudeville historiography that closers were “chasers” that always “played to the haircuts,”
meaning audience members chose to exit while acrobats and animals of all sorts went through
their paces in the final time slot. In the same article in which he disparaged the flumping seals,

animal trainers, dealing with waste was even more of an issue. Whereas manure became useful
fertilizer on farms, the cramped spaces of the city turned excrement into the very definition of
abject messy, smelly, a possible disease vector, and, depending on the animal, there can be quite
a lot of it. Large animal acts usually included mats on the stage floor to account for accidents and
ease clean up. Smaller animals were kept in the dressing room and taken outside to relieve
themselves. In later theatres, such as the B.F. Keith Memorial Theatre (1928), large cement pens
in the basement held large animals such as elephants. The cement was practical from an
excrement management point of view because the whole pen could be hosed down with
wastewater dumping into the sewer. However, these damp cement basements contributed to
arthritis in captive entertainment animals and were unethically cramped spaces.

90 Cincinnati, January 1, 1914, KAC, 17, 80.
91 Boston, March 29, 1920, KAC, 18, 78.
William Dean Howells called closers “those poor fellows who come last on the program.”

There is evidence that early exiting was a habit that developed by the mid-1910s. In 1919 the Boston manager complained that Camilla’s Birds, a group of Australian cockatoos who performed eight different stunts including a Roman chariot race, horizontal bars, and “Balancing on the Revolving Globe,” were an unsuccessful closer because they were a “very pretty bird act, but rather quiet for closing. Played to a continual walk out.” As a committed fan of sight acts, the American painter Marsden Hartley criticized managers and audiences in the 1920s when sight acts were “tagged on to the end of a bill” and then “the unmannerly public decides to go home or hurry to some roof or other.” In 1916 the manager of New York City’s iconic Palace Theatre, George Gottlieb, famously described the Keith-Albee formula for scheduling sight acts as closers. He acknowledged “Many have only waited to see the chief attraction of the evening before hurrying off to their after-theatre supper and dance.” Because these audience members would be putting on their coats and shuffling out of their seats, managers booked an act that didn’t need to be heard perfectly to be successful.

The suspicion that trained creatures did not belong on a proscenium stage was enmeshed with the low status and ambiguous character of the closing position they usually held. The fact that early exiting was common for some audience members (particularly those with enough money to then go for dinner and dancing) has been interpreted by many historians to mean that closing acts mattered very little to vaudeville managers and audiences throughout its history and

93 Boston, September, 22, 1919, KAC, 22, 57.
95 George Gottlieb, “Psychology of the American Vaudeville Show from the Manager’s Point of View,” Current Opinion 60 (April 1916), 257-8 in Stein, American Vaudeville, 181.
96 Kibler, Rank Ladies, 152.
in all markets. However, the situation was much more complex. Vaudeville acts largely measured their success by audience applause, which was garnered by providing a “wow finish.” Gottlieb characterized the ideal closer as a “flash” act: something with compelling visual dazzle and energy. It needed flash because it served the crucial role of sending “the audience home pleased with the program to the very last minute.” Here, Gottlieb underscores the importance of the liminal position of closing acts for metonymically shaping the audiences’ reception of the vaudeville bill as a whole.

**Vaudeville’s mise en scène**

For George Gottlieb, acrobats and animals were interchangeable conduits of spectacular delight. Possible flash acts could be “an animal act maybe, to please the children, or a Japanese troupe with their gorgeous kimonos and vividly harmonizing stage draperies, or a troupe of white-clad trapeze artists flying against a background of black. Whatever the act is, it must be a showy act.” Gottlieb’s reference to matching kimonos and draperies and the visual impact of a high contrast trapeze act suggests the significance of the entire mise en scène in vaudeville. Because vaudeville retained the formal apparatus of Western theatre including the proscenium stage, sets, costumes, props, lighting, and sound, animal vaudevillians were always encountered within this highly codified and conventionalized context. B.F. Keith prided himself on the marked improvement in production values that distinguished his polite vaudeville from earlier variety in which “ridiculous costumes” were “a glaring defect” and set design and quality were

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97 For example, Anthony Slide begins his brief entry on animal acts “Almost always placed as the opening item on vaudeville bills, animal acts held little appeal for audiences.” See Anthony Slide, *The Encyclopedia of Vaudeville* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994), 13.
100 ibid.
Managers regularly commented on sight acts’ entire *mise en scène*, noting the visual appeal of special sets, “elegant plush draperies,” intricate costumes, and high-quality props. Unless an act had custom scenery, the default backdrop for animal acts was a pastoral scene of rolling hills along a riverbank with perhaps even a Greek temple or marble statue in the background. This same backdrop, which would also have been used for a pastoral playlet or excerpts from a Shakespearean romance, was also used for other sight acts. It was blatantly incongruous to the very “unnatural” actions of dog pantomimes and chimpanzees smoking cigars, yet it anchored the animal body within a clear reference point to a “timeless” pastoral ideal. For example, in figure 3, the trainer Edward Gillette, clad in a light suit, formally poses sitting on a park bench beside one of the dogs with whom he performed. Behind them is the backdrop of a bucolic slope with treetops and a low wooden fence. Much like the artificial landscapes created for zoological gardens and museum dioramas, these backdrops spoke to the era’s acute nostalgia for an idyllic, untouched landscape, mediating the artificiality of the proscenium arch, zoo cage, or glass box within which the animals were viewed. At the same time, the backdrop connected animal acts with antiquity and the neoclassical theatrical tradition, helping to elevate the dubious status of animal acts.

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Elaborate custom sets wowed audiences not only with the thrill of verisimilitude and decorative splendor but as beguiling examples of affluence. It was not easy to design, build, and transport a custom set and vaudevillians in the Keith-Albee circuit were responsible for their own travel and shipping arrangements. A beautiful set telegraphed quality akin to the legitimate stage or a Broadway revue. For vaudeville’s aspirational audiences, well-executed custom sets compounded the impressive impact of the palaces’ architectural grandeur. They also created contexts in which vaudeville’s theatricalization of animal bodies seemed less incongruous with the conventions of the proscenium stage. As I discuss in chapter two, many animal acts staged circus scenarios as framing devices. In another common move, the pastoral scenes of the default backdrop were extended into the performance space with garden sets like the one that anchored a sketch called “The Wild Guardians” performed by the act “George March’s Lions.” The Boston theatre manager was glad to report: “The opening picture… is interesting and works up the audience in good shape. When the curtain rose on the massive garden scene it received a round of applause at both performances” before the lions’ tricks provided “real thrills.” 102 Each animate and inanimate entity was expected to cohere into a single visual impression. When Gruber’s Animals visited Washington, D.C. in 1914 the manager declared: “the costumes of the trainers and the well groomed animals make a pretty spectacle.” 103 Animal vaudevillians could simultaneously signify within two different symbolic systems because they often existed in a middle space between set piece / prop and animated actor, moving back and forth between the zones as dictated by the themes and goals of the routine. They served as theatrical properties in performances that enacted their moral status as the property of their owners and trainers. In this way, the performing animals of vaudeville embodied a disturbing double meaning of the term

102 Boston, April 30, 1917, KAC, 20, 96.
103 Washington, DC, April 27, 1914, KAC, 17, 239.
property, so particularly loaded at this crucial moment of American corporatization and capitalist expansion.

**Chapter Summary**

This dissertation charts the extensive imbrication of vaudeville with other popular entertainments that depended on animal bodies to attract customers, attesting to vaudeville’s participation in the theatricalization of animal capital. Chapter two pitches a “wide tent” in order to explicate vaudeville’s strong relationship with the economics and aesthetics of the circus: the semiotics of the proscenium arch and circus ring, aggressive marketing to children, equine performance, big cats, and elephants are all considered within the context of theatrical sensation-seeking and personal risk to safety and reputation. In chapter three I discuss historical and contemporary debates regarding advocacy for animals by focusing on the anthropomorphism and abuse inherent in most vaudeville performances. I argue that most vaudeville audiences were reluctant to acknowledge abusive training and performance practices not only because of the ethical challenge of enjoying the theatrical results of abuse, but because the pleasure of the theatrical moment derived from an affective telegraphing of willingness and spontaneity from animal performers to human audience members. To acknowledge animal abuse would be to destroy audience pleasure. In tandem with these dynamics of theatrical reception, I examine animal training, primarily looking at how different styles of nineteenth-century horse training influenced formal manuals and memoirs about training other species, including working dogs and big cats. I also mark the thus far unremarked racist logic embedded in the Jack London text that galvanized animal welfare activists to oppose animal performance in vaudeville. Chapter four traces racialized discourses of animality in vaudeville in order to develop a theory of animalized capital. A “dyad of black and white” celebrated white animals while denigrating
Black human performers as less than human. My final chapter examines primate acts and dog acts alongside each other in order to highlight resonances with evolutionary texts and subtexts. Kinship, companionship, and control were performed with the bodies of apes, baboons, monkeys, and dogs. The primates of vaudeville were the inheritors of a nineteenth-century obsession with scientific classification. Vaudeville primate acts were refashioned and modernized for twentieth century mass culture but still imbued with allusions to evolution and race during a time in which debates about heredity and markers of racial identity proliferated in popular and scientific discourses. The role of the dog on stage as hunter, pet, joker, athlete, companion, and statue, utilized canines’ special role as “companion species,” defining human-animal relationships that became the reference point for various other “companion acts.” Yet, because dogs were easy to train and relatively inexpensive to care for and transport, the intimacy they often performed on stage was coupled with an attitude of “disposability” from vaudeville’s corporate structure. Trainers who were left stranded on the road with no contract (a fairly common situation) left troupes of dogs behind knowing they could accumulate and train a new troupe when circumstances improved; malnourished or abused dogs who died were easily replaced. Finally, this chapter also addresses dog acts’ leap to film in the form of MGM’s Dogville comedy shorts in which racist stereotypes are transposed onto dogs, thus showing how clearly the symbolic potency of animal representation was able to jump to the newly dominant mass-entertainment of film, itself a material embodiment of animal capital.

**Methodology**

When studying popular culture, it seems necessary to acknowledge the less-than-reliable nature of primary sources. Regional newspapers and trade publications ran puff pieces that were essentially press releases written by a venue’s publicity agents, if not taken directly from
performers’ and trainers’ press kits. Playbills were, of course, just as rhetorically inflated while memoirs traffic in exaggeration and omission. This study looks to a variety of materials to assemble a picture of animal vaudevillians that is as complete as possible, though the voices of average audience members are unfortunately rare. My chief source is the managers’ notes of the Keith/Albee Collection, which includes over 6000 pages of weekly reports sent from theatre managers to Keith’s booking office from late 1902-1922. These reports offer perspectives on the theatrical pleasure, appropriateness, and economic worth of each act from the point of view of the managers. In assessing the accumulated notes on animal vaudevillians, the working logic of Keith’s approach to animal capital becomes clear. In addition, the race and sex biases of the era are deeply embedded in the sometimes rambling, sometimes terse syntax of businessmen reporting necessary information and blustery opinion to their coworkers and bosses. Reviews from press outlets that were not mouthpieces for vaudeville powerbrokers offer a more balanced perspective. The memoirs of vaudeville stars also contain occasional but revealing references to animal acts. Popular song lyrics and material culture; including mechanical banks, children’s games, and soap advertisements, help articulate the cultural *mise en scène* in which vaudeville functioned. Finally, early film documentation and Hollywood comedy shorts that borrowed vaudeville tropes provide telling examples and I frequently turn to these films as evidence and objects of analysis.

**Conclusion**

Though animal acts were not as popular as at the turn of the century, the archive suggests animal features still appeared in a third of Keith-Albee bills during the late 1910s and 1920s. Vaudeville’s ambivalence towards animals was part of a larger process of the complete absorption of animal bodies into the modern consumer economy. In this way vaudeville was a
significant mechanism in the early twentieth century’s “rendering” of animals and staged the absorption of animal capital for all to see. By evaluating vaudeville’s elaborate staging of anthropomorphic pantomimes and forced feats of animal athleticism, we can chart the deepening contradictory capitalist ideologies that inform contemporary human-animal relationships in the United States.\textsuperscript{104} We can also better understand our current cultural moment, where elephants will be retired from the nation’s biggest corporate circus in 2018 and SeaWorld has pledged to alter its orca spectacles. Vaudeville’s consistent staging of living animals and various modes of animal representation also portends another capitalist tale. Big-time vaudeville devised and perfected the formula of animal representation + proscenium theatre = family audience that is now so common in Broadway and West End theatres. It can be seen as a template for musicals that feature live animals, such as \textit{Annie} and \textit{Legally Blond: The Musical}, as well as those which depend on animal representation through costume and puppetry. The cornerstone of Disney Theatrical’s rebranding of Times Square has been the courting of the family audience.\textsuperscript{105} In this successful, and now global, enterprise, several Disney musicals have depended on some level of animal representation, including the iconic blockbuster \textit{The Lion King}, most of the characters in the global hit \textit{Tarzan: The Musical}, the sidekicks of the less successful \textit{The Little Mermaid}, and,

\textsuperscript{104} For instance, over 55 billion dollars are spent annually on the pet-care industry while, each year, over seven billion other animals exist in abusive conditions on factory farms before being shipped to slaughterhouses for death and “disassembly.” See the website of the American Pet Products Association. Last accessed May 10, 2014, http://www.americanpetproducts.org. The number of animals killed for food is for the year 2007. See Wolfe, \textit{Before the Law}, 11. Wolfe also discusses the burgeoning first world pet care industry, 53-54.

\textsuperscript{105} Andrew Erdman makes the point that “In a sense, vaudeville anticipated the Disneys of today by promising inoffensive fare for the whole family as a major selling point.” However, Erdman does not discuss animal representation or Disney’s presence on Broadway. Erdman, \textit{Blue Vaudeville}, 2.
arguably, one of the title characters in Disney’s first Broadway musical *Beauty and the Beast*. Historically, the linking of children to animal representation has meant big money. And it is no accident that *The Lion King*, *Tarzan: The Musical*, and *The Little Mermaid* all depend on residual racial formations in which human black racial identity is equated with animality. This dissertation places contemporary musicals that depend on diegetic animals and animal representation within a historical context, showing that contemporary questions of animal performance regarding risk, ethics, and economics are not new phenomena in popular US theatre.

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Chapter 2: Circus’ Spheres of Influence in Vaudeville

Vaudeville’s theatricalization of animal capital borrowed its emphasis on spectacle from the circus and, as such, both reinforced and endangered crucial societal hierarchies of high and low, adult and child. These hierarchies took on particular political salience during an era in which the United States became increasingly invested in severing Europe’s cultural paternalism towards the younger nation. The circus was a site of excess and extremes: extreme talent and absurdity, extreme bodies, and, sometimes, extreme danger. This chapter frames the influence of the modern circus on vaudeville as its own three-ring circus, with three major “rings” of analysis: the history and aesthetics of circus as established in eighteenth-century London; the significance of the juvenile audience; and the meanings, marketing, and precarious material conditions of vaudeville’s largest animal performers. The charismatic megafauna of the circus (particularly elephants, big cats, and horses) brought an aesthetic emphasis on scale and contrast while introducing levels of risk not usually encountered in American proscenium theatres. Vaudeville scaled these extremes to a size and style that matched quotidian patterns of capitalist production and consumption so audiences could experience inexpensive “respectable thrills” on a weekly basis. When animal vaudevillians took the stage, it was often akin to a visit from the circus, wherein a potentially “low,” itinerant and unruly entertainment form was brought into a contingent middle-class context. At the same time, circus-style acts and playlets utilizing circus themes were marketed as spectacular nostalgic reveries fit for the whole family. The contradictions of enticing risk and comforting nostalgia helped vaudeville market itself to a heterogeneous audience while aspirational audiences were often drawn to equestrian dressage and liberty acts. As I argue in chapter one, the majority of vaudeville’s non-sight acts were language based and, therefore, vaudeville’s animal turns existed within a complex struggle
between spectacle and narrative. This struggle took place during an era that increasingly identified spectacle with working-class tastes and narrative with a developing middlebrow aesthetic as American cultural identity formed in tandem with the nation’s global political rise and economic might. Vaudeville’s anxious position as a liminally respectable theatrical genre made the spectacle/narrative tension particularly acute. The aesthetic and affective relationships between vaudeville and circus shaped and were shaped by theatrical spectacle’s relationship with class positioning and taste formation. In order to clarify how theatricalized animal capital mediated these relationships, this chapter addresses the architectural and economic structures of the modern circus, the significance of vaudeville’s juvenile audience, the strategy of respectability that animal trainers used when promoting themselves, the spectacular bodies of large performing animals, and the gendered and aristocratic conventions present in equestrian acts. By better understanding performing animals’ roles in debates about spectacle and taste formation, we more deeply comprehend the significance of animal capital to the development of popular US theatre, a relationship that can still be seen today on Broadway and beyond.

**Ring Number One: Circus as a Performance Genre**

The circus is generally defined as a variety entertainment that includes acrobatics, clowning, and animals presented in a ring.¹ When it came to staging animal capital for popular audiences, big-time vaudeville and circus were in competition and collusion because vaudeville wanted the economic benefits of circus-style acts without the “low” connotations they often carried. The US railroad circus was incredibly popular during the Gilded Age and early Progressive Era, however some religious and moral reformers saw it as “a parasite upon the community, coming to a city or town only to carry away thousands of dollars, and bringing in its

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¹ Of course, many “New Circus” outfits such as Cirque du Soleil deliberately choose to not perform with animals.
wake a crowd of sharers and thieves.”² Vaudeville was also critiqued for the “wealth of evil suggestion and vulgarity” that could be found in the innuendo of monologists and dance exhibitions. However, the circus was condemned for its questionable displays of bodies, audience dissipation, and because its itinerancy amounted to an invasion of the civic space.³ Therefore, vaudeville managers were eager to distinguish vaudeville’s animal acts from the circus. For example, a Keith manager complained one animal turn was “essentially a circus act with too much whip and too much shouting. It lacks the polish required in vaudeville.”⁴ At the same time, managers recognized the pleasures of precise spectacle and quickened pace that circus-style acts could bring. The Philadelphia manager gushed about The Novellos: “Circus act: …The elephants, ponies, and dogs are all remarkably trained, and the act moved with a real circus-like rapidity and sureness. The elephants do everything that is possible for elephants to do, and the acrobatic work is up to the true circus stand… Great act.”⁵ The Novellos even mimicked the iconic circus parade to open and close their number. Big-time vaudeville depended on circuses to supply successful sight acts and many animal trainers were glad to work vaudeville during the circus’ off season from late fall to early spring. Yet, vaudeville openly competed with its close cousin, as when Keith’s News promoted Miss Oxford’s Elephants with the claim “Never anything to equal them at the circus.”⁶ The complicated friction between vaudeville and circus becomes clearer when we consider the economics and aesthetics of the early circus.

² Our Dumb Animals, 51, no.10 (March 1919): 148.
⁴ KAC, Philadelphia, November 3, 1913, 16, 246
⁵ KAC, Philadelphia, February 3, 1908, 8, 207b.
⁶ KAC, Series II, 140.
Circus theorist Helen Stoddart maintains that modern circus aesthetics derived from the financial imperative of a commercial variety entertainment occurring in permanent venues. Historians date the development of modern circus to retired British sergeant major Philip Astley “exhibiting trick horsemanship… in an open field on the outskirts of London in the spring of 1768.” The following year, Astley built a permanent amphitheatre near Westminster Bridge and quickly added pantomime-influenced whiteface clowns as well as traditional fairground entertainments such as learned animals and acrobatic tumblers. Astley opened an indoor amphitheatre in Paris in 1773 and his competitor Charles Hughes established a circus in Russia in the 1790s. According to historian A.H. Saxon, by the early 1800s, “every major European city soon boasted at least one permanent circus, whose architecture could compete with the most flamboyant theatres. Similar buildings were also erected in the New World's largest cities: New York, Philadelphia, Montréal, [and] Mexico City.” Though managers changed, frequent fires forced rebuilding, and political upheaval sometimes necessitated the relocation of venues, the indoor circus amphitheatre became a mark of urban locations throughout the West. Networks of European, Arab, and East Asian performers booked acts at these established venues, thus building the internationalism of the modern circus. Throughout the nineteenth century, frequent exchange between the United States and England created a transatlantic circus culture. From the late 1830s to the mid-1840s, the famed American big cat trainer Isaac Van Amburgh

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9 ibid.
revolutionized animal acts in England and continental Europe with his pageantry and performances of animal domination. Van Amburgh drew crowds at Astley’s and Drury Lane and he counted Queen Victoria among his major fans. The years abroad increased his symbolic capital and he returned to the United States an even bigger celebrity. In addition to these types of transatlantic exchanges, early American acts also traveled throughout the Caribbean and to locations in Central and South America.

During the nineteenth century, several innovations “Americanized” the circus. In the 1820s, the widespread use of canvas tents and the incorporation of previously independent menageries changed the US circus by allowing it to expand in size and increase its appeal to a broader audience. The exotic and domestic animals (such as monkeys, ponies, llamas, big cats and elephants) that had toured the eastern seaboard and frontier during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were now part of the circus proper. Along with transportable canvas tents, the introduction of three rings and logistical advancements in railroad car design during the 1870s transformed the American circus from a modest itinerant entertainment to a massive spectacle with five simultaneous performance zones (three rings with two platforms between them) encircled by an outer chariot race track, all of which took place in pitched tents “that could hold over 10,000 people.” This was five times the capacity of most vaudeville theatres. Few US cities could boast of permanent venues as large as Madison Square Garden to host a full-scale

three-ring circus. Due to the size of the enterprise, major US circuses erected their “tent cities” as close to the railroad station as possible to reduce labor demands and costs. Similar to amusement parks built at the end of railroad lines, circuses were geographically marginal to the towns and cities they visited and this compounded the promised mystery and romance of their spectacles. The fleeting nature of the itinerant form compounded circus’ marginal position. “Advance men” travelled to towns where the circus would be appearing and plastered advertising posters months in advance in order to heighten anticipation of the remarkable arrival of wild beasts and trained athletes. When the circus did arrive, the entire entourage marched in a tremendous parade through town. Schools and businesses closed for the event as the civic space was given over to a celebration of the spectacular. Though some with great joy and some with great apprehension, it is clear that communities spent months anticipating “circus day.” In contrast, nearly any day could be “vaudeville day.” While the railroad circus punctured the quotidian with its disruptive arrival to and departure from towns, big-time vaudeville was, as I argue in chapter one, part and parcel of the regimented rhythm of urban working life. One of the foundational contradictions of vaudeville was that it was so completely embedded within daily life yet promised audiences exciting disruptions of daily life. Formulated on anticipated disruption, vaudeville balanced the expected with the novel.

In 1898 B.F. Keith proclaimed, “The element of novelty… is the essence of vaudeville.” Several years later, the critic Caroline Caffin observed, “The caterer of amusements has learned… he must spice his offering with novelty, more novelty, and always

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17 Davis describes the American three-ring railroad circus as a “crowded, carnivalesque environment of thieves, idle teen-agers, vanishing children, and ‘profligate’ consumers” that offered citizens a chaotic and thrilling break from routine. *The Circus Age*, 31.

novelty. Nowhere is this truer than in Vaudeville.”¹⁹ Because owners sought return customers, performing in permanent venues made novelty a financial imperative for vaudeville theatres as much as it was for antebellum dime museums and late eighteenth-century circus amphitheatres. For variety impresarios of all sorts, the enemy was what psychologists call habituation, “the diminishing of response to a frequently repeated stimulus.”²⁰ In keeping with other popular entertainments, big-time vaudeville often relied on exaggerated claims and outrageous stunts to draw audiences. As noted in my first chapter, Keith began his working life in the circus where he learned the intertwined financial and aesthetic demands of the genre. Edward F. Albee was also a circus hand, while theatre owners Tony Pastor and F.F. Proctor began as circus performers. They all brought their knowledge of circus aesthetics and financial practices to vaudeville. Even a decade into the twentieth century, the Keith-Albee Circuit was not above deploying Barnum-style humbug. In 1911 the Keith Theatre in Providence, owned by Albee, printed a newspaper ad: “REWARD. Generous reward will be paid for information regarding the whereabouts of one of Prof. Braham’s Educated Fleas. Lost, strayed, or stolen from B.F. Keith’s Theatre after his performance yesterday afternoon. Last seen running down Westminster street toward Union Station… Small gold collar around the neck. Answers to the name Clarence.”²¹ Two days later, B.F. Green, Clever Clothier, ran this ad in the Providence Bulletin: “FOUND ---A FLEA. Answers to the name of Minnie, wearing a gold-plated collar. Has white star on forehead and white fore feet. WILL BE IN THE WINDOW UNTIL CALLED FOR.”²² As James Cook argues about the public’s willing participation in Barnum’s many humbugs, Albee’s missing flea stunt most likely fooled few members of the Providence public. Yet, the notion that a flea could be

²² ibid. It seems likely that “B.F. Green” was a pseudonym for Albee.
nattily dressed, answer to a name, and run away, depended on an amusing theatricalization of flea ontology in which the public participated. Theatre managers’ promotional strategies kept the audiences coming.

As an economic and aesthetic strategy, vaudeville mimicked the one-ring circus’s structure of carefully assembling a variety of formally contrasting acts that, despite their heterogeneity, were designed to build into a cohesive increase in excitement and pleasure for the audience. Yet, because of structural divergences between the two genres, animal acts in big-time vaudeville were framed differently than at the circus. The British circus expert Anthony Hippisley Coxe compares the proscenium arch theatre to the illusory, two-dimensional world of painting. For Coxe, the circus, performed in a regulation 42-foot ring, is like sculpture: “You can walk around it. It can be seen from all sides… there are eyes all round.”23 Coxe rejects the apparatus of the proscenium arch as an adequate tool for focusing the audience’s gaze; he argues the circus’s raked seating channels an audience’s attention so that they are “forced to concentrate on the spectacle” and “by providing the [background] setting themselves… they become part of the spectacle.”24 He endorses a model of performance that depends on the active exchange of energies between performer and spectator, akin to what Erika Fischer-Lichte calls an “autopoetic feedback loop.”25 As a devotee of the one-ring circus, Coxe sees in-the-round seating as essential to the affective potential of the circus: “The almost hermetic feeling produced by an unbroken ring of spectators initiates a reaction, not only between the public and the performer, but also within the audience itself. Emotion is intensified and runs round the arena like an electrical

24 ibid., 24.
current. Break the circuit and the power goes out of the reaction.”26 For Coxe, the Western
theatre stage forces audiences to flatten that which they witness and smothers the transference of
audience energies. Stoddart critiques Coxe’s circus-theatre binary on several accounts. Not only
does Coxe fail to accept the level of illusion possible in the circus, he neglects half a century of
British circus history during which the proscenium stage and a circus ring existed in single
venues. When Astley’s Amphitheatre was rebuilt after an 1803 fire, the new space included a
103-foot-wide proscenium stage and a regulation 42’ circus ring for spectacular equestrian
melodramas.27 Ramps allowed animal and human performers to move between the two theatrical
zones. According to Saxon, “equestrian and riding master John Bill Ricketts introduced the
structure and its entertainments to Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and other cities in the
1790s.”28 Such venues became important sites of social mixture in the early days of the republic.
The animal acts in vaudeville, then, were in some ways a return to what circus scholars term the
“romantic” era of the modern circus, when, at the turn of the nineteenth century, audiences
watched animal performances in permanent urban venues. By the turn of the twentieth century,
however, animal vaudevillians had lost the dedicated ring their antecedents enjoyed and the
orchestra pit further distanced performing animals from the audience.

When they built new facilities, theatre owners made sure they accommodated large
animals because they understood the importance of circus-style spectacle. F. F. Proctor’s

26 Coxe, A Seat at the Circus, 24.
27 Hannah Velten, Beastly London: A History of Animals in the City (London: Reaktion 2013),
135.
28 Saxon “The Circus as Theatre,” 301. According to circus historians Stuart Thayer and William
L. Slout, Ricketts’ venue “was based on the London and Paris amphitheatres, which were in turn
based on the theatre. The circus might be said to be a theatre with the ring scooped out of the
middle. The seating was divided into boxes and pit, just as in the theatre, the stage, where it
existed, was no different than that of the theatre. The one common difference was the lack of
seats, or of very many, in the pit at the circus.” See “Some Distinctions in the Early Circus
Pleasure Palace boasted an “elaborately moulded relief work” proscenium arch that was wide enough for “ordinary performances” but could “be lifted in grooves, like a piece of scenery, leaving an opening 42 ft. square, should the stage be required for a grand spectacle display.”

For many vaudeville audiences, part of the thrill of watching equestrians and other animals work was not only reveling in their physical capabilities but in seeing large scale acts framed, even compressed, within the proscenium. For instance, the Philadelphia manager noted that famed circus equestrian Rose Wentworth’s impressive feats were “all the more difficult for being placed on the stage.” The advent of the three-ring circus had disgruntled some viewers, for whom it was “too diffused, too enormous… to permit concentrated interest, attention, or pleasure.” The vaudeville stage restored the opportunity to experience these acts of daring expertise without the magnitude of ocular stress demanded by the three-ring circus. It also reintroduced the ambiguous hybridity between theatre and circus that the massive tenting shows had somewhat tamped. It is ironic that, as much as vaudeville was a product and promoter of modern efficiency in its organization, it offered audiences a much older theatrical mode of single-point perspective for enjoying circus routines.

Turn-of-the-twentieth century hippodromes, indoor hybrid theatrical venues with massive stages, complicate questions of spectacle, audience taste, and animal performance still further. The overlaps between circus and theatre were on full display at US hippodromes in Baltimore, Cleveland, and most famously, New York City. “Hippodrome” comes from the Ancient Greek for “horse race” or “horse course” and had been applied to indoor theatres in Europe and England to imbue venues with grandeur. New York’s Hippodrome was founded in 1905 by Fred

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30 KAC, Philadelphia, January 8, 1906, 5, 147.
Thompson and Elmer Dundy, who had opened Luna Park at Coney Island two years before. It was clear they were not hoping to appeal to the wealthy industrialists who filled the prime seats at the Metropolitan Opera four blocks away. Their new building was meant to tap a similar market to Coney Island, but without such a long commute. The Hippodrome was located on Sixth Avenue between 43rd and 44th Street and seated 5200, more than twice the capacity of most vaudeville houses but much smaller than Madison Square Garden. As with the vaudeville palaces, its architecture was inspired by European structures, but was meant to establish American ascendance. According to Broadway Magazine, similar venues in London, Paris, and Berlin “were mere pigmies of construction in comparison with the superb gigantic proportions” of New York’s Hippodrome.\footnote{Broadway Magazine, quoted in Milton Epstein, The New York Hippodrome: A Complete Chronology of Performances, from 1905-1939 (New York: Theatre Library Association, 1993), 1.} The venue specialized in enormous spectacles of all sorts, including music concerts, melodrama, opera, sports, circus, Wild West shows, and, eventually, vaudeville. It easily accommodated large-scale acts with two standard 42-foot circus rings fitting inside a tremendous 98-feet-wide proscenium stage.\footnote{ibid.} This was a scale that other vaudeville theatres could not match. Animals could be managed more easily in such a spacious venue and were integral to many of the Hip’s shows.

As a new indoor urban performance venue straddling the line between theatre and popular entertainment, the Hippodrome’s early success depended on circus aesthetics. It opened with the musical revue \textit{A Yankee Circus on Mars}, featuring the animal-themed songs “Hold Your Horses,” “Git a Horse,” and “The Animal King.”\footnote{ibid., 343.} Frank Melville served as equestrian director for Clarke’s equestrians, Powers’ Elephants also joined the iron jaw and trapeze artists, acrobats,
and clowns in the show. The circus conceit allowed endless variety within a standardized revue structure and new acts were inserted on a weekly basis until it closed after 305 performances. Four days later, *A Society Circus* opened and ran for nearly a year. In another example of the class signifiers that were constantly at work in popular entertainments, the framing device for *A Society Circus* involved “a doubtful Duchess who engages the performers to amuse her friends at a house party.” Thus, the Hippodrome audience was elevated to the status of leisure-class socialites as part of their experience as spectators. In its premiere issue, *Variety* reviewed the show with tepid regard, offering “intense admiration” only for the director/stage manager Edward P. Temple, due to his coordination of the elaborate set changes. *A Society Circus* utilized even more animals than *A Yankee Circus* and *Variety*’s summary sheds light on the hit-or-miss quality of the acts, as well as the public’s acceptance of trainers abusing and drugging animals. *Variety* noted that Claire Heliot’s lion act was similar to the famous female trainer Agie. However, “Whereas Agie must punch the brutes to have them growl, Miss Heliot must punch very hard to induce the opening of their eyes so the meat dangling in front will be seen.” *Variety* was equally unimpressed with Marquis’ ponies because they had already performed in New York City regularly. The reviewer dismissed the Powell Sisters equestriennes as “not sensational in any degree and a poor act of its kind” because the women’s poses were not spectacular enough and, again, the horses moved slowly. *Variety* concluded, “Those having the ‘Hipritis’ fever will go many times, no doubt, but to the others who consider once sufficient, that will do.” Though *Variety* was committed to covering the six pillars of variety entertainment (vaudeville, circus, parks, burlesque, minstrels, and fairs), the reviewer did not favor the hybrid

36 ibid.
37 ibid.
revue/circus form and may have been suspicious of the Hippodrome’s extreme hybridity. It was neither a true stadium style venue like Madison Square Garden nor a proper theatre. It was not even a “true” vaudeville house; yet, it hosted revues and musical comedies under a proscenium. It was an amalgam that showcased an insatiable desire for spectacle. Although it had a libretto and songs, *A Society Circus* was meant to be a novelty-based act anchored in the expectations of sensation-seeking audiences. Barlow’s elephants, the burlesque equestrian Albert Crandall, as well as the “monkey impersonators” the Four Rianos, leaping hounds, trained seals and bears, and new equestrian acts rotated into the show. But even this rotation of theatricalized animal capital was not enough. In the spring, the book was revised to add the extreme spectacle of Thomas and Dundy’s Plunging Horses, who were dunked into a water tank constructed from converted stage apron space.  

*38* "A Society Circus" was enough of a hit that the Hippodrome’s managers launched the fall season with it.  

*39* Animals remained important to the Hippodrome’s offerings and its identity as a hybrid performance space. Stand-alone circus offerings with no musical theatre pretenses were staged at the Hippodrome through 1915 and, from 1915-1922, the producer Charles Dillingham presented a yearly musical revue highlighting Power’s Elephants, who had become synonymous with the Hippodrome.  

*40* With so many animals available for viewing on such a large scale, big-time vaudeville managers were careful to articulate the connections and distinctions between their offerings and related genres.

The one-ring circus was marked as old-fashioned and had come to evoke a bygone Victorian childhood, yet the three-ring circus was in its prime. This created a rich landscape of

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39 ibid, 348. The show finally closed after 440 performances on November 24, 1906.  
circus motifs that proliferated across media and performance genres. According to Ellen Butler Donovan, Gilded Age and early Progressive Era middle-class children’s literature frequently depicted boys attending traveling wagon circuses. The stories, usually in a pastoral setting, addressed both the menace and delight of the circus, and, ultimately, “cautioned readers to postpone an engagement with [the] adult world, to remain as long as possible in the sheltered world of an idealized childhood.” Similarly, Eugene W. Metcalf argues that as industrialization and urbanization changed family life, middle-class “children came to be valued as emotional rather than economic capital.” These were dramatic social shifts, and “removed from the world of adult work, middle-class children became consumers of goods and experience rather than producers of them.” Instead of homemade dolls or simple wooden figurines, middle-class children now received gifts of mass-produced circus-themed toys “from miniature trains and wagons to puzzles blocks, pull toys, paper dolls, articulated figures, and mechanical banks.” The spectacle and action of the circus were well suited to toys with rich illustrations and movable parts. Thematically, the circus seemed both of-the-moment and timeless, encapsulating the immediacy and fleetingness of childhood itself. Metcalf concurs with Donovan’s reading of circus representation during the era. He claims “circus playthings encouraged children to inhabit an imaginary world apart from that of their parents,” yet, parents’ consumer spending on children’s toys “reified… their relationships with their children.” In this model, middle-class parents and children were connected via commerce more than shared experience. However, in

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42 ibid., 360
43 ibid., 361. As I discuss in chapter four, these toys were ideologically loaded and often depicted the same ethnic and racial stereotypes that were part of the circus, therefore reinscribing these attitudes through the repeated processes of playing at home.
45 ibid., 380.
vaudeville, working-class and some middle-class children and parents had the opportunity to share a temporally contained live event together.

Simultaneous with the mass marketing of circus toys and the height of popularity of the railroad circus, the idea of the circus as a nostalgic site of childhood became an important marketing tool in an effort to recontextualize animal and animal-themed acts for vaudeville’s class, age, and sex segmented audiences. The full-page newspaper advertisement for a one-act, *A Night at the Circus*, offers an example of representing the circus to encourage the family audience.\(^{46}\) The newspaper advertisement depicts an intergenerational white family of grandparents, parents, a teenage girl and a young boy all posed to enjoy Keith’s together.\(^{47}\) The ad copy promises “an elaborate miniature indoor circus” and invited adult nostalgia, claiming it would “bring back the peanut and pink lemonade days of your childhood.”\(^{48}\) For parents, the one-ring circus represented their childhoods before the three-ring style came to dominate. By attending the show at Keith’s, they could revisit their own youths while creating a new memory with their children. In a move of intertextuality, the manager booked Winston’s Seals, an act from the contemporary circus with “the only sea lion jockey,” to directly follow *A Night at the Circus*. Together, these acts fulfilled Keith and Albee’s proclamation that Keith’s Providence Theatre “always pleases the whole family.”\(^{49}\) The predictable rhetoric of animal acts attracting “young and old alike” or the “young and young at heart” was based on the assumption that

\(^{46}\) *A Night at the Circus* was a farce comedy written by H. Grattan Donnelly and performed in the early 1890s, starring the beguiling Nellie McHenry as twin sisters (an equestrienne and a governess). A famous poster for the show features McHenry on a brown horse, gazing out at the crowd of adoring fans. She wears a cleavage-revealing top with a tulle skirt cinched to an impossible tiny corseted waist. If the show that appeared on the Keith circuit was an adaptation of Donnelly’s play, then this star vehicle seems to have been transformed into a romp in which human actors played the roles of animals.

\(^{47}\) KAC, December 7, 1908, Series II, 43, 175.

\(^{48}\) ibid.

\(^{49}\) ibid.
animal vaudevillians and the humor they produced needed to be mediated for adult audiences but were inherently appealing to children. Just as animals and children were closely connected in the progressive reform movement discussed in chapter three, they were inextricably linked in vaudeville’s animal acts because animals invoked the circus and the circus invoked childhood. These associations, while profitable, hindered vaudeville’s claims to classiness because both children and animals existed in a separate space outside an anthropocentric legitimate theatre that largely endeavored to articulate the adult human condition.

To distinguish themselves from more large-scale acts coming directly from major railroad outfits, many smaller scale turns labeled themselves as “mini,” “comedy,” or “burlesque” circuses. In some, human and/or dog actors wore costumes representing multiple species such as elephants, ponies, or even roosters. Painted backdrops, sets, and costumes (usually clown and ringmaster) all signaled circus semiotics and therefore engaged in a form of metatheatricality that played with the status of both circus and vaudeville. The circus, something expansive and distant, was contained and brought close. These mini-circuses often set up a working ring on stage, thereby double framing the action within the proscenium. The ring of the mini-circuses reminded audiences of the sights and sounds, and perhaps even smells, of the circus. While the ring no doubt regulated the movements of the performing animals, who had been trained within it, the ring also framed audience expectations. The act Charles Prelle’s Dogs, who appeared on the same bill as the comedian W.C. Fields, used a special drop “representing a circus interior” to help set the scene for fifteen dogs who dressed as elephants, ponies, and people. Ventriloquist manikins provided “fake applause” for the dogs, amusing the live vaudeville audience with this metatheatrical joke while also cuing them to respond in kind. The

50 KAC, Philadelphia, February 2, 1914, 17, 119.
full success of such a parody required audiences to, of course, recognize the conventions of circus performance. Similarly, Wylie’s Dogs (also billed as Wylie’s Circus) featured a “special set representing a circus ring with the audience seated around it.”\textsuperscript{51} The metatheatricality extended to the backdrop depicting an in-the-round audience to spectators seated in straight rows. The dogs were “dressed as various characters” and did many tricks including a boxing match and “somersaults from a small table, [and] trick jumping.”\textsuperscript{52} Wylie dressed as a clown and was a talented performer in his own right. The Philadelphia manager praised the display of skill and recognized its economic value: “No doubt an act like this is very valuable on a Vaudeville bill, as it pleases the children, and we have frequent inquiries at the Box Office as to whether there is anything on the bill especially for the little ones.”\textsuperscript{53} The question of what would appeal to children and teenagers was an absolute economic imperative for big-time vaudeville.

**Ring Number Two: Vaudeville’s Juvenile Audience**

The Keith–Albee circuit aggressively courted children as reliable, repeat audience members. In 1905, Hartley Davis observed that women and children were “the backbone of the success of vaudeville”\textsuperscript{54} and *Midway* magazine published the dictum “Cater to the women and children and the men will follow.”\textsuperscript{55} This had already been the marketing philosophy for several popular entertainments in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century when the canny showman P. T. Barnum used “artful deception” to promote his dime museums and then his

\textsuperscript{51} KAC, Boston, October 8, 1906, 6, 129.  
\textsuperscript{52} KAC, Philadelphia, October 29, 1906, 6, 147b.  
\textsuperscript{53} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{55} “In Vaudeville: A Short History of This Popular Character of Amusement,” *Midway* 1 (October 1905), 27 in *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America 1830–1910*, ed. Robert M. Lewis, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press 2003), 320. The uncredited *Midway* piece was most likely written by Davis as some of the prose is the same.
circus as educational and entertaining family fare.\textsuperscript{56} Thus, vaudeville joined circuses, zoos, Wild West shows and amusement parks in their dependence on animal bodies to appeal to the whole family. Robert C. Allen contends that, at many vaudeville theatres, fifty per cent of matinee and twenty-five per cent of evening audiences were comprised of children.\textsuperscript{57} In 1907 the manager of B. F. Keith’s Providence theatre stated that young customers brought $10,000 of profit to his theatre annually.\textsuperscript{58} Newspaper puff pieces perpetually billed animal acts as “something for the little ones” and announced that child-friendly acts were placed in the line-up to coincide with school dismissal. In one weekly report the Boston theatre manager pledged to “make strenuous efforts to get the children in” to see Gillette’s Dogs, which he described as an “excellent act for the juveniles.”\textsuperscript{59} Children were such an important part of variety entertainment’s audience that Sime Silverman, founder and publisher of the weekly entertainment publication \textit{Variety}, printed the observations of his seven-year-old son, Skigie, “to enable the artist to determine the impression he or his work leaves on the infantile mind.”\textsuperscript{60} Skigie’s laconic prose was a marked departure from the blustery superlatives most press agents used to describe the same acts: “Silbon’s Cats do some good stunts. He has one pony and five cats and one dog. The pony does a couple of good stunts. He has an Angora cat … and that’s about all for them.”\textsuperscript{61} The regular column stirred controversy in the theatre community, some of whom thought it trivialized two real professions – that of performer and of critic. The controversy points to the marketing challenge endemic to appealing to children and adults at the same time. Whether the column was

\textsuperscript{58} ibid., 318.
\textsuperscript{59} KAC, Boston September 25,1905, 5, 45b.
\textsuperscript{60} Sime Silverman, “‘Skigie,’ the Youngest Critic in the World,” \textit{Variety}, December 15, 1905, 5.
\textsuperscript{61} Silverman, “‘Skigie’ Reviews the Bill at The Grand, Syracuse.” \textit{Variety}, XVI, no. 2, 1909.
seen as a gimmick, an insult, or an innovation, its existence points to the increasing presence and importance of children within the marketplace of leisure activity at the turn of the century. In addition, it shows that age was an anxiety-producing category of difference in vaudeville’s heterogeneous audience.

The Keith–Albee circuit courted children with a multi-pronged strategy that included its selection of sight acts, booking child-oriented playlets and young performers, hosting promotional events (such as child celebrity meet-and-greets and appearances by Santa), youth charity outreach, and printing child-friendly newspaper ads filled with drawings of animals, airplanes and other objects. A 1916 notice for a playlet about a divorcing couple instructed readers, “Children: Be sure to send your parents to Keith’s this week to see ‘The Age of Reason.’ … They’ll never contemplate divorce without thinking about your side of it.”62 This ad may have been written for adults, implicitly asking them to imagine the point of view of a child. Adult/child ambiguity also manifested in playlets designed for young audiences, which often featured animal characters played by adults. Such animal masquerade playlets included the Buster Brown feature Auntie’s Visit (1906), Polly Pickle’s Pets in Petland (1907), and Gautier’s Toyshop (1916), which opened with ponies posing as toys and later featured ponies and dogs going “through a routine of showy tricks.”63 Ned Wayburn’s 1906 playlet Kitty-Town featured actors playing an elephant, dog, parrot, and mule, among others and received as much coverage as Wayburn’s popular revues. Variety reported: “Animal impersonations of an artistic nature are foreign in vaudeville. For this reason alone ‘Kitty-Town’ is a novelty.... Mr. Abrams has an

62 Providence, KAC, October 17, 1916, Series II, 53, 118. Keith’s presented several behind-the-scenes circus-themed playlets including The Clown by Edgar Allen Woolf (1912), Polly at the Circus (1916), and Bostock’s Riding School (1917).
established reputation for simulating a feline. The act is a treat for women and children.\textsuperscript{64} The reviewer noted that a dramaturgical adjustment of condensing the action would make the play appealing to men as well, thus suggesting the pliable appeal of vaudeville’s different genres and again clouding the distinction between child and adult. The reviewer himself was in a potentially anxious position of liminal respectability because he was assessing professional actors’ abilities to animalize themselves for a child-oriented show. By commenting on the professional acumen of the performer and situating the playlet as the work of a well-regarded composer and producer, the reviewer mediated the dubious respectability of summarizing a play about a girl in a pet shop full of freakishly large domestic animals and a strangely small wild one. Such rhetorical moves were clearly present in vaudeville’s marketing and promotional materials whether the animal representation depended on costumes or actual animal bodies.

**Ring Number Three: Animal Marketing, Meanings, and Material Conditions**

Anxieties about respectability and taste manifested in many animal trainers’ careful self-fashioning and promotion. Before the establishment of Keith’s United Booking Office in 1906, animal trainers often conducted their own promotion, booking, and travel logistics. As with other vaudevillians such as W.C. Fields, Ernest Hogan, and the Three Keatons, animal trainers used press packets and custom stationary to professionalize themselves and convey an image of respectability and success when they communicated directly with theatre managers. Some trainers preferred to represent animal performers in action to give a sense of the act. For instance, Adgie, an (in)famous lion tamer, used stationary that included six photographs of her in costume with performing lions and impressive blurbs from newspaper coverage of previous performances. In two of the photographs she is inside the cage with the lions, displaying her

unprotected proximity to the big cats as part of the act’s allure. Often, the margins of customized stationary contained the same effusive prose of newspaper puff pieces, revealing the cycle of rhetoric between self-promotion and media coverage. Circus seal trainer Captain Webb’s stationary boasts: “Great Lesson in Natural History” and “The only North Pole Amphibious Artists, Webb’s Famous Sealskin Band, Performing the most marvelous feats in Juggling. Including Charlie the Marine Clown.” 65 Outlandish superlatives were combined with the promise that other species could successfully imitate human behavior. Captain Webb promised theatre bookers “Three amazing Legless and Armless Mimics are the Funniest Creatures performing tricks.” The rhetoric matches the anthropomorphism of the stationary’s image of a seal wearing a frilly clown collar while perched on a low pedestal, playing with a beach ball. Elite animal trainers like Webb could become famous in the burgeoning celebrity culture of the era and this name recognition gave them the bargaining power to charge more. Vaudeville’s hierarchy of human performers—in which headliners received top billing and significantly more pay– was replicated in the world of animal trainers. In addition, larger fees were charged for large animal acts. Turn-of-the-century acts could charge from $125 - $300 a booking and this was on par with other sight acts. 66 Adgie charged $300 in 1901, a fee that covered the upkeep and transportation of her several lions from New Jersey to Buffalo, NY. Leon Morris charged $275 for his comedy ponies while Captain Webb was willing to bring his usual salary of $300 down to $250 to book his seals and sea lions with theatre owner Michael Shea. 67 While animal

65 MSP, 55.
66 For instance, in 1902 a less well-known trainer named Professor Burke only charged $125 for his eighteen-minute act with “novelty musical dogs.” This is the same price charged by the singer Louise Dresser and a novelty act called “Bimm Bomm Brrrr” in 1901. MSP.
67 MSP. There is scant evidence of salaries for most vaudeville animal acts. Albee was secretive about billing and coded his salary records in the ledger of the Keith Theatre in Providence so that it is impossible to tell what an individual act was paid.
capital signified in multiple modes on vaudeville stages, it is clear the animals themselves could be reduced to a specific value of economic capital.

Professionalism and formality were a frequent strategy for trainers marketing animal vaudevillians, even if they were comedy acts that depended on slapstick antics. For example, remarkable sketches of horse, dog, and monkey faces border the yellow and purple stationary of Leon Morris’ Celebrated Educated and Comedy Ponies. The use of color and the detail of the original animal portraits suggest a superior level of care and thoroughness. An impression of professionalism is underscored by the full-body portrait of Morris in a traditional equestrian outfit using both hands to clutch a dressage whip across his groin. At the same time, the formal stationary promises “the wrestling match keeps the audience convulsed from start to finish.” In another example, Goleman’s Dogs and Cats played on the symbolic capital of European cachet by billing itself as a “European novelty act” and corresponding on letterhead with dog portraits entwined with delicate decorative vines. Finally, Fink’s Mules provides a particularly striking example of a promotional image that played on a formality quite distinct from the performance mode of the actual act. Fink’s Mules’ was famous for its slapstick “unrideable mule” routine that depended on racial burlesque (see chapter four). However, in Fink’s promotional photograph, there is no indication of the racist or slapstick content that made Fink’s so popular. Indeed, there is little indication of what the act is like at all. It is a formal display of bodies, presented for the consideration of booking agents, editors, and, possibly, newspaper readers. Six dogs of various breeds sit on pedestals staring into the distance (presumably at an unseen trainer holding treats). Two black horses stand in profile while a mule faces the camera. Two white men

68 MSP, 185.
69 MSP, 197.
70 Photo, Fink’s Mules, Billy Rose Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
without stage make-up are positioned on either side of the mule stare straight ahead with serious expressions. The “negro stooge” character that made the act successful is not presented for formal consideration. Archival evidence suggests that many vaudeville animal trainers retained a Victorian commitment to formal photographic portraiture. They chose solemn stances and carefully decorated stationary, despite their simultaneous promises of convulsive laughter and novel thrills. In this way, trainers were able to professionalize and aestheticize themselves while assuring vaudeville gatekeepers that guaranteed audience pleasure made booking their circus-style acts a financially savvy decision. The tensions between sensation and respectability were particularly on display when vaudeville palaces presented the largest circus animals: elephants, big cats, and horses.

Large performing animals instantiated abstract phenomena of scale, risk, and pace. As I argue in chapter one, they reordered vaudeville’ theatrical energies from language-based or otherwise human-focused performances. Elephants had become the iconic circus animal and, as such, brought the epic scale of the three-ring railroad circus to urban vaudeville palaces. Janet M. Davis ties elephants to the expanding scale of the US railroad circus because their huge bodies became physical evidence of the industrial capacity of steam engine railroads to carry huge heavy loads great distances. Susan Nance maintains that, “for many Americans elephants were interesting because of the contradictions they represented, a species at times gentle and obedient, at times frightening and incomprehensible.”71 In vaudeville, elephant performances compounded these contradictions; their prodigious bodies performed a nature/culture binary as they were framed and contained by the proscenium for audiences who were also experiencing light opera, cakewalk and eccentric dancing displays, wry comic monologues and more.

A Question of Scale: Elephants in Vaudeville

The question of scale remains central in the western theatre. In her explication of nineteenth-century melodrama’s sensation scenes, Amy E. Hughes cites Bernard Beckerman’s discussion of scale as relational. Within a dramatic context, the (adult) human form becomes the unit of measurement by which other theatrical elements are measured. Given this, elephants became theatricalized signs of disruption from their earliest days in the Americas. In April 1796, the first elephant arrived in New York City on a ship helmed by Captain Jacob Crowninshield and was exhibited in towns up and down the east coast. Even in the young republic, the incongruous sight of an animal on the theatrical stage provoked questions of cultural status and the uneasy relationship between dramatic literature and spectacle. In April 1797 the British tragedian Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, best known for playing Macbeth, embellished his benefit night at Philadelphia’s Chestnut Street theatre by renting the Crowninshield elephant for sixty dollars to enhance a production of Nathaniel Lee’s *Alexander the Great*. Cooper heavily promoted the elephant’s star turn in Alexander’s procession into Babylon and reaped financial gain. Although elephants occasionally made theatrical appearances, nineteenth-century elephants in the United States were mainly the provenance of menageries and circuses, eventually becoming ammunition in capitalist circus wars between rivals P.T. Barnum and Adam Forepaugh. The proprietors competitively and compulsively amassed elephants throughout the 1880s, including the tremendous African elephant Jumbo. According to historian Andrew McClellan, Jumbo’s phenomenal celebrity status was due to both his tremendous size and the

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gentle willingness with which he allowed children to ride on his back. Jumbo had become so famous during his seventeen years at the London Zoo that irate fans across England, including Queen Victoria, campaigned unsuccessfully for him to stay. Barnum bought Jumbo in 1882 and his intense promotion led to a national passion for “Jumbomania” and a proliferation of Jumbo-themed merchandise. When, three years later, the elephant was killed in a railroad accident, Jumbo’s skeleton and taxidermied body toured with Barnum’s circus. The stuffed body was eventually displayed at the Barnum Museum of Natural History at Tufts University in Boston while the bones were sent to the Smithsonian. As McClellan contends, Jumbo was as popular dead as he was alive. Elephants captured the consumerist desires of sensation-seeking audiences on both sides of the Atlantic and were booked in vaudeville whenever they were available and a theatre could handle the physical demands of presenting an elephant act.

Vaudeville impresarios relied on elephants’ spectacular bodies to provide hype for new venues and seasons. In 1895, F.F. Proctor chose to open his new Pleasure Palace with an act by the English elephant trainer George Lockhart and a trio of anthropomorphized Asian elephants. Following standard marketing language for European acts premiering in the US, the elephants were promoted as “Lockhart’s

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herd of comedy elephants, a sensation in the big music halls of Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and London.” The *New York Clipper* enumerated their offerings: “The elephants do everything. They see saw, waltz, stand on their heads, sit down on a bench, ride a bicycle, balance on two legs with the others held in the air, play an harmonica, grind an organ and ring a dinner bell…. As a wind up the three elephants sit down to dine.” After their dinner, the smallest elephant drank two bottles of champagne and enacted a burlesque of drunkenness. The elephants performed at Proctor’s for over twenty weeks straight. Mimicking the circus elephant wars of the prior decade, Koster & Bial’s Music Hall went head-to-head with Proctor and began its 1895 fall season with a troupe of five elephants trained by George’s younger brother, Sam Lockhart. Both groups of elephants had great success, pleasing vaudeville crowds at various venues in the northeast United States into the new year. When E.F. Albee took over ownership and renovated the Keith Theatre in Providence, Rhode Island in 1900, he likely recalled the splashy opening of Proctor’s Pleasure Palace five years earlier. Albee chose to christen his newly luxurious theatre with Sam Lockhart’s elephants, who were billed above the major vaudeville comedy team

80 Sam Lockhart and the five elephants worked at Koster & Bial’s for two months before a ten-week contract with the Keith circuit. In January 1896, they traveled back to New York for a stint at Hyde & Behman’s in Brooklyn and then on to The Bijou in Philadelphia. The manager of Keith’s Union Square Theatre, J. Austin Fynes, placed this notice in the *New York Clipper*: “Sam Lockhart’s troupe of performing elephants enjoy the distinction of being the only animals of their kind to travel in this country in a car attached to a first class passenger train. At the close of their successful engagement at Keith’s Union Square Theatre, this city, night of Nov. 23, the elephants were marched to the Grand Central Depot, where they were placed aboard a baggage car…” “Variety and Minstrelsy,” *New York Clipper*, December 7, 1895. Also see “Variety and Minstrelsy: Massachusetts: Boston,” 631 and an advertisement on page 641. For notice of the elephants’ stint at Hyde and Behman’s, see “New York State,” *New York Clipper*, January 11, 1896.
McIntyre and Heath.81 Tellingly, a puff piece referred to the blackface comedians as “straight vaudeville” to distinguish them from the circus-style elephant act.82 In another joke of scale and anthropomorphism, Lockhart’s star elephant Tom-Tom was advertised wearing a tiny clown hat and ruffled clown collar while gingerly walking on bottles set on a narrow beam.83 Peta Tait argues that elephants in the twentieth century became increasingly feminized and infantilized: “As highly trained elephant performers became humanized and humourized through a simulation of cute and cuddly qualities, they supplanted a hundred years of majestic body display.”84 This infantilizing femininity may be linked to the increasing theatricality of elephant performance, wherein more and more costumes and prop work were introduced. Although mid-nineteenth century acts in England featured elephants frolicking on see-saws like children, Tait does map a discernable shift towards frivolity in the twentieth century and the promotional images of Lockhart’s elephants support her claim. Such acts seem to have played well in vaudeville, where the sizeable juvenile population was directly courted with elephants whose actions were in some ways a performance of childishness, which seemed particularly funny because of elephant’s outsized scale.

As particularly charismatic megafauna, vaudeville’s elephants signified in multiple modes. They were evidence of the animals’ political capital, reminders of Gilded Age capitalist accumulations and possessions that depended on colonial trade networks, an icon of the Republican party, and proof of the vaudeville palace’s physical ability to support and contain

81 Providence, August 1900, KAC, Series II, 28, 6.
82 ibid.
83 ibid.
such mammoth nature.\textsuperscript{85} The Gilded Age phenomena of celebrity elephants continued into the twentieth century. One of Powers’ Elephants, Little Hip, had been born at the Hippodrome and was trained to smoke a pipe and dance. He frequently made public appearances, such as a 1907 photo-op with vaudeville sensation Eva Tanguay in Boston.\textsuperscript{86} Juvenile elephants charmed audiences because their contradictory bodies rendered them giant infants or diminutive giants. Powers’ Elephants were the in-residence stars of New York’s Hippodrome, but they also performed on the Keith circuit. When Little Hip visited Columbus, Ohio, the vaudeville manager reported he “went as well as could be desired. --He called on the Governor and Mayor today and was very favorably received. --The Governor, (Republican) said that it was the first time he had ever had the pleasure of meeting personally, the emblem of his party.”\textsuperscript{87} Even when booking elephants with enough celebrity status to warrant meeting a governor, managers were still concerned that audience interest would wane while the tremendous animals graced the vaudeville stage. Therefore, the presence of the trainer remained an important part of the performance: “The man who works the set added to its merit considerably by keeping busy all the time, and thus

\textsuperscript{85} Harper’s Magazine’s famous political cartoonist Thomas Nast is credited with associating the elephant with the Republican party in an 1874 cartoon titled “The Third Term Panic.” According to Smithsonian Magazine, “The rationale behind the choice of the elephant is unclear, but Nast may have chosen it as the embodiment of a large and powerful creature, though one that tends to be dangerously careless when frightened. Alternately, the political pachyderm may have been inspired by the now little-used phrase ‘seeing the elephant,’ a reference to war and a possible reminder of the Union victory. Whatever the reason, Nast’s popularity and consistent use of the elephant ensured that it would remain in the American consciousness as a Republican symbol.” See Jimmy Stamp, “Political Animals: Republican Elephants and Democratic Donkeys,” Smithsonian Magazine, October 23, 1912. http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/political-animals-republican-elephants-and-democratic-donkeys-89241754/?no-ist.

\textsuperscript{86} Albert F. McLean Jr., American Vaudeville as Ritual, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), photo insert between pages 142 and 143.

\textsuperscript{87} Columbus, January 20, 1908, KAC, 8, 186.
prevents the interest from lagging.\textsuperscript{88} Here, the circus’ emphasis on sensation and spectacle combined with vaudeville’s privileging of human action and experience.

Much like the canine melodramas presented by dog trainers, Miss Oxford’s elephants depicted elaborate anthropomorphic domestic scenarios. In the spring of 1914, Miss Oxford’s elephants booked several engagements on the Keith Albee circuit and impressed managers and audiences alike:

As humorous as it is clever keeping the audience in roars of laughter mingled with applause. Miss Oxford is a very pretty woman, a mighty clever dancer and stunningly costumed. The little domestic drama which the elephants play with the baby elephant in the cradle and the dinner served by the smallest of the three mammoths is particularly wonderful. The spectacular finish when Miss Oxford is rescued from the second story window of a burning house brings the act to a splendid close. An act that is bound to be talked about.\textsuperscript{89}

The Philadelphia manager’s comment exhibits many of the performance expectations for vaudeville’s animal acts. They needed to suggest extraordinary effort from both trainer and animals while also conveying a “natural” aptitude and willingness to perform. For female trainers, attractiveness was a constitutive component of effective showmanship but all trainers needed a sense of showmanship in costume and panache while also displaying connection with the creatures. This yearning for connection, in particular, deepens our consideration of what audiences may have desired from elephant acts. Pachyderms were not only performing scale. They could not simply stand on stage and be considered a success. The fact that such tremendous beasts were so trainable and capable of delicate and precise movements was quite awe inspiring. Even so, elephants had been part of popular entertainment for over half a century and a certain national habituation to elephant bodies seems to have developed. Therefore, the animal/human

\textsuperscript{88} Columbus, April 26, 1910, KAC, 11, 231.
\textsuperscript{89} Philadelphia, February 23, 1914, KAC, 17, 148.
connection became a salient theme that trainers stressed. This performance of interspecies connection manifested in both anthropomorphic tricks and trainer/animal interaction.

Concurrent with discourses of scale and interspecies connection, elephants were marketed within an overt colonialist discourse. *Keith’s News* promoted Miss Oxford’s Elephants’ appearance in Cincinnati by quoting a “Field Marshall of the English Army” as saying “I have never in my long experience witnessed such a wonderful exhibition of animal intelligence… I would like to have them in His Majesty’s service in India.”90 The act was a hit and they dazzled the Keith circuit. The Pittsburgh manager sent this gushing report: “There are no superlatives in the lexicon that can be construed as fulsome in describing this act. It is far and away the greatest exhibition of animal training we have ever played, and so distinct a departure from the conventional elephant act that classification as such does it rank injustice. It will be the talk of the town.”91 Later that spring, the elephants gave their final performances at Keith’s Theatre before going to live at the Boston Zoo. Following the afternoon matinee of 11 May, all the children were “invited upon the stage to see the elephants and receive souvenir elephant banks.”92 This connected Oxford’s retiring elephants to the famous Jumbo, as he was the original inspiration for elephant-themed mass merchandizing and was on permanent display in the same city. Miss Oxford’s elephants were made miniature and converted into commercial relics easily held by small hands. In her analysis of American amusement parks, Lauren Rabinovitz takes up Susan Stewart’s discussion of the gigantic and the miniature to argue that the picture postcard converted expansive amusement park experiences into transportable commodities.93 Similarly,

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90 Clipping, KAC, Series II, 140.
91 Pittsburgh, February 2, 1914, KAC, 17, 122.
92 Boston, May 11, 1914, KAC, 17, 250.
banks and other souvenirs reconstructed the experience of witnessing live animals on the
vaudeville stage, thus converting elephants’ special animal capital into economic capital. Art and
cultural historian Kenneth L. Ames asserts, “miniaturization implies control, on the one hand,
and falsification on the other.”94 Therefore, “a toy elephant… was an abstracted, denatured, and
decievably unthreatening evocation”95 of a creature beyond human scale.

The strangely small could be as compelling as the enormous. In Shakespeare’s Hamlet,
the Danish prince ponders the mysterious allure of very small things while discussing the vogue
for child actors and miniature portraits. Of the many things he is unsure about, the appeal of
shrunken pleasures is a mystery Hamlet cannot solve: “‘Sblood, there is something in this more
than natural, if philosophy could find it out.”96 Vaudeville played these same games of small
scale, not only with child performers but also
with animals –and sometimes at the same
time. For instance, the promotional photo for
child performer Zena Keife features a
diminutive pony standing in profile while
Keife’s face turns toward the camera.
Together they look almost like a toy set.
Another miniature animal of the vaudeville
stage was Tinymite, “the smallest equine in

95 ibid.
96 William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, ed: Barbara A. Mowat and
Paul Werine, Folger Shakespeare Library, 3.2.390-1.
http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/PDF/Ham.pdf). Accessed September 20, 2015. This was
Shakespeare’s metatheatrical mockery of the contemporary Elizabethan Blackfriars’ boys’
troupe.
the world.”  As a member of Woodford’s Animals, the pony’s only job was to create a spectacle of smallness; he performed no actions. The Providence manager described Tinymite as “somewhat of a freak being the smallest animal of its kind I ever saw and most attractive for the children.” Managers agreed that Woodford’s Animals was an otherwise lackluster act due to the trainer’s “lack of snap” and “tawdry stage trappings.” However, Tinymite, in conjunction with monkey antics, made it an acceptable feature for children during the holidays and also “brought applause from the gallery.” Tinymite performed excessive miniaturization within a spatial context of grand vaudeville palaces. In addition to circus’ emphasis on scale, the “freak” pony also connected big-time vaudeville to circus and amusement park sideshows. Ponies were among the most innocuous and endearing animals to perform in vaudeville. A very different animal capital was in play during big cat acts, which embodied risk and danger and appealed to thrill-seeking crowds.

The Allure and Apprehension of Risk: Big Cats in Vaudeville

Vaudeville’s definition of acceptable risk was more contained than the daring spectacles found at the three-ring circus and some amusement parks. Indeed, Stoddart identifies “the demonstration and taunting of danger” as the circus’ “defining feature.” When vaudeville audiences began to fear for their own safety, as opposed to the safety of the performer, the acute alarm of self-preservation triumphed over the affective spell of pleasurable worry. In the words of vaudeville comedian Walter de Leon, acts that left the audience “more palsied than

97 Boston, December 26, 1904, KAC, 4, 27.
98 Providence, October 17, 1904, KAC, 3, 183.
99 Boston, December 26, 1904, KAC, 4, 27.
100 Philadelphia, December 25, 1905, KAC, 4, 146.
pleased

The supply of big cat acts depended on Carl Hagenbeck and others’ complex international network of wild animal dealers and trainers. Renowned trainers like Frank Bostock and Jack Bonavita moved their acts across popular entertainment genres, from world fairs and expositions, to circus, vaudeville, and summer amusement parks, adjusting their acts to the performance context of each. In the early twentieth century, female big cat trainers such as Adie, Madame Andre, and Mlle. Vallecita were successful in vaudeville in ways that seem not to have translated to circus fame. Vaudeville had been thoroughly cast as a “feminized” variety entertainment, therefore, the presence of female trainers seems to have been less of an affront to the masculinist narrative of animal experts donning pseudo-military costumes.

Promotional rhetoric for big cat acts often combined a proud acknowledgement of the danger of training with repeated emphasis on the trainer’s skillful control. The invisible labor of training was repeatedly made visible in promotional discourse. For instance, a puff piece about Mlle. Vallecita declared “It took just four years of the hardest and most dangerous kind of work for Mlle. Vallecita, at Keith’s next week, to train five full-blooded Indian leopards.” One manager approvingly noted she was “using a strong steel cage” and that she looked “at home” standing inside it. Ultimately, the goal was to create a climate of excitement, wonder, and safety for audiences. In his assessment of Mlle. Vallecita’s Leopards at Keith’s Philadelphia Theatre in April 1914, the manager wrote: “she handled them in a way that shows that she is master of the animals and there is nothing to make the audience nervous.”

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103 Providence News clipping, KAC Series II, 124.
104 Cleveland, March 25, 1912, KAC, 14, 152.
105 Philadelphia, April 16, 1914, KAC, 19, 145.
manager again approved: “The woman handles the leopards without any display of heroics so
that the audience is never startled at any time.” Providence manager Charles Lovenberg feared
the act would scare his loyal audience. He ran a newspaper ad announcing “NO DANGER. A
great many people have expressed a desire to see Mlle. Vallecita’s Leopards at Keith’s next
week but fear to do so. The management earnestly assures its patrons that there is positively not
the slightest danger. Mlle. Vallecita has absolute control of her ferocious beasts, and in her hands
they are as docile as kittens. Besides they are securely caged.” Lovenberg, however, was not able
to convince the public or himself about Mlle. Vallecita and the five leopards. He reported: “A
very showy act that I believe thrilled more than pleased. I am afraid that it is the kind of an act
that would tend to keep some people out of the theatre.”

Lovenberg’s concern was valid; periodic incidents of big cat escapes and audience injuries added an actual element of danger to
these performances. At the same time, different cities had different audience profiles and
managers held their own biases and enthusiasms. Perhaps Providence audiences were less
interested in acts that contained an element of danger. Nonetheless, the managers’ reports share a
common theme: unlike at the circus, the comfort of the audience was more important than any
theatrically impressive routine when it came to judging the success and value of an act.

Against the Capitol I met a lion,
Who glazed upon me and went surly by
Without annoying me.

William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Julius Caesar.

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106 Philadelphia, April 25, 1918, KAC, 21, 29.
107 Providence, October 6, 1919, KAC, 22, 62.
108 William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, ed Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Wertine,
Folger Shakespeare Library Digital Texts, 1.3.20-22.
In an urban center, big cats created a theatrical spectacle but context was, of course, everything. An act that seemed safe one month might become very unpopular the next due to safety concerns. In reporting about an appearance by Havemann’s Cats in early 1915, the Philadelphia manager described the financial liability of the audience’s perception of risk: “Undoubtedly a wonderful act, but following closely behind the recent incident in New York, it is not a good buy for vaudeville at present. While holding considerable interest, fully one-half of the audience, particularly women, left their seats and watched the remainder of the act from the lobby, showing evidence of nervousness. Those who remained rewarded Havemann liberally with applause.”\textsuperscript{109} The “recent incident in New York” referred to five young lions escaping their cages after their first public performance during a matinee at the Eighty-Sixth Street Theatre near Lexington Avenue on the city’s Upper East Side.\textsuperscript{110} Performing with Madame Andre, six female “man-eating lions” (as they had been billed) had just completed performing inside a cage that ensured the audience’s safety and peace of mind. However, a mishap during their transfer from the larger performance cage to the small traveling/storage cage resulted in five of the lions walking onto the proscenium stage during a male singing quartet.\textsuperscript{111} The lions then walked into the house, reportedly meandering by terrified spectators who ran for the exits in panic. Four of the lions stayed in the theater and were coaxed and coerced back into their cages. However, a lion named Alice wound up on the third floor of a building on Third Avenue where she was sprayed with bullets by several police officers. An officer was also shot in the confusion. According to the New York Times, a police lieutenant ordered the arrest of Madame Andre and

\textsuperscript{109} Philadelphia, January 4, 1915, KAC, 18, 142.
\textsuperscript{111} The lions’ escape was blamed on their having received insufficient training regarding the process of moving from large to small cages.
the theatre’s booking agent “on charges of criminal negligence.” Alice’s body was picked up and disposed by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

At the same time that they were marketed as ferocious beasts, lions and other big cats were particularly vulnerable to the material conditions that shaped their lives as performers. Big cats had become emblematic of the industrialized West’s voracious consumption and commodification of animals native to colonized lands. The escaped Upper East Side lions were imbricated within these structures of animal capital; they were each worth one thousand dollars and had been purchased from Hagenbeck by the British trainer Francis Ferari. Due to their power and potential for danger, performing lions needed to be trained for both on and off stage behavior in order to assure their own survival. In reportedly rushing the animals to perform before they were properly trained in how to enter and leave their different cages, Madame Andre had ignored the fact that lions could not just provide spectacle on stage and be presumed to be compliant performers.

Periodic escapes and disasters offered particularly bleak examples of animal rendering within popular entertainments. Three and a half years before the Upper East Side lion episode, Francis Ferari’s brother, Captain Joseph Ferari, had lost scores of animals when Coney Island’s Dreamland park burned to the ground in the very early hours of Saturday, May 27, 1911. As workers hurried to complete the construction of an attraction called Hell Gate, a light bulb burst, and the boiling tar that the workers were using quickly caught fire and spread. Joseph Ferari and Jack Bonavita were set up at Dreamland to present a substantial collection of trained animals. The loud screaming of panicked animals awoke Ferari. At first the trainers thought

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112 ibid.
the animals might be able to escape if they were rounded up and put in their traveling cages. As the fire escalated, the lights went out and the animals began attacking each other. The New York Times offered two different versions of what happened next. In one disaster narrative, the manager of Dreamland, Samuel W. Gumpertz, “gave the order to shoot all the animals in the animal show” and, while embers fell on the trainers, they continued to go through the venue and shoot the animals rather than have them burn to death. A different version appeared the next day in an article with the alarming headline “Animals Perished by Fire and Bullet. Jungle Beasts Had Little Chance for Their Lives as the Flames Swept On. LION KILLED WITH AN AXE.” The Times reported that Ferari had saved five lions and four leopards when the Dreamland tower collapsed and the whole animal area began to burn. “The keepers retreated and Ferari called them back, ordering them to shoot as many animals as they could to save them from death in the flames. But the heat was upon them and they fled.” Ferari told the Times the animals were worth about $30,000. Popular animal celebrities died, most notably Little Hip, the elephant discussed earlier.

A lion named Sultan escaped and, according to reports, ran along Surf Avenue with his mane aflame. Much like Bedelia the bear’s foray into Coney Island, Sultan’s escape provoked an alarming confrontation with animality in an urban context: “His appearance in the Surf Avenue throng left no doubt as to whether the primitive fear of jungle beasts remains.” Sultan climbed up an amusement ride ramp while police shot at him. Finally, according to the Times, a

115 “Flames Sweep Coney Island,” New York Times, May 27, 1911. The reporting on the Dreamland fire in the New York Times was fairly thorough but cannot be taken as a completely accurate account. In early articles on the incident, the newspaper reported some inaccuracies. These include the falsely reported deaths of the “incubator babies” who had been on display at Coney Island, the falsely reported death of a seven-month-old lion named Marguerite, and the name of the lion who got loose and was slaughtered in public.
117 ibid.
policeman struck Sultan with an axe and killed him. When his body fell to the street below, “souvenir hunters eagerly fell upon the dead lion, snatching teeth and claws with pliers.” In a macabre turn to dime museum-style exhibition, local taxidermists immediately stuffed Sultan and placed his body on display, charging ten cents a view. Similar to Jumbo the elephant decades before, Sultan’s singed, split, and pillaged body was repurposed to become a totem of disaster, a talisman of collective memory. It was a testimony to fire’s destructive power layered onto the body of a male lion—itself a symbol of jungle savagery and the menace of nature.

The Thrill of Equine Performance in the Waning Days of the Urban Horse

While wild cats in the city provoked alarm, horses were a mundane part of daily life. At the turn of the twentieth century, the presence of horses permeated daily life in a way that is difficult to imagine today. Illustrative of this ubiquity, a single page in the New York Times for January 30, 1900 contains three short articles that reveal the intertwined lives of humans and horses. The first article announces that the United States is selling one thousand mules and “several thousand cavalry horses” from the St. Louis area to a representative from the British Army in order to supply the Boer War in South Africa. The next article relays the story of a dentist run over in front of the Plaza Hotel by a horse taxi, for which the badly injured victim decided not to sue because the driver “had apologized for the accident and explained that his horse was unmanageable.” The third article gives the public notice that the actor Edward Morgan would be leaving the title role in the popular equestrian melodrama Ben-Hur. From military battle to daily transportation to entertainment, horses were everywhere.

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118 ibid.
Ben-Hur not only provides a clear example of the significance horses played in many aspects of turn-of-the-century life, it provides a clear example of the increasing anxieties surrounding taste formation. A.L. Erlanger and Marcus Klaw produced William Young’s stage adaptation of Lew Wallace’s novel Ben-Hur at the Broadway Theatre in 1899. According to critics, the play appealed “chiefly as a spectacle” because of the two major scenes that depended on mechanical effects: one in which characters are adrift at sea, and the famous chariot race. An on-stage chariot scene had failed the previous year in a theatrical flop called Year One because of a poorly designed treadmill mechanism. However, Ben-Hur’s theme of redemptive Christianity, audiences’ prior knowledge of the plot, and an improved horse treadmill meant Ben-Hur captured the public’s attention. The New York Times was chagrined:

But there are a few mature playgoers to whom mechanical devices of this sort no longer appeal. So far from being dramatic, such stage pictures are essentially the reverse. They destroy the very illusion they are intended to create in the minds of the sincere dramatic student. Horses galloping from nowhere to nowhere on sliding platforms in front of a quickly rolling panorama: painted canvas shaken from beneath, do not satisfy the imagination that receives the greatest enjoyment from the actor’s art. But the multitude is best pleased with toys.

In arguing that attempts at hyperrealism destroy efforts at verisimilitude, the critic discerns between an easily amused multitude and “the sincere dramatic student,” underscoring the notion that taste needs to be individually cultivated by consistent committed efforts. David Savran has persuasively argued that elite Americans worked to establish a distinct highbrow culture in the early twentieth century. The establishment of the Pulitzer Prize in 1917 and the famous 1913 Armory Show (which heralded modernism in the visual arts) are but two examples. Animals on stage (at least, animals who did not appear in operas) could inspire nose-wrinkling disapproval.

123 “At the Play and With the Players” New York Times, December 3, 1899.
The equestrian acts that appeared in vaudeville, however, were unabashedly spectacular. They recontextualized and romanticized the everyday shape of the workhorses who pulled wagons and trollies in city streets. Audiences were welcomed to behold the remarkable silhouettes of stallions who stood still as statues, galloped around a temporary ring, and seemed to dance the cakewalk with preternatural grace.

Equestrian acts combined the exuberant celebration of virtuosic physical skills with clear demonstrations of control, not only in the semiotics of bridles and crops, but in the elaborate tricks of standing on hind legs, “dancing,” walking in patterns, and posing. Following circus traditions, equestrian acts were categorized into sub-genres: trick riding (which was often bareback), liberty acts (which included all acts in which the horse was not ridden) and \textit{haute école} the European “high school” tradition in which saddled horses were ridden to create the effect of horse and rider becoming one rhythmically performing entity. Several famous trick riders from major US circuses performed in vaudeville, including Edna Bradna and Fred Derrick, Rose Wentworth, May Wirth, and the clown Poodles Hanneford. These riders, or acrobats on horses, brought different energies and meanings to the vaudeville stage as they somersaulted and flipped their bodies into space, dazzling audiences with their precision and fast pace. Novelty acts such as Herzog’s Fighting Stallions came directly from starring in Barnum and Bailey’s circus and were able to impress vaudeville audiences and managers alike by fitting a dozen horses on stage with a special circus set behind them.\textsuperscript{124} Learned horses who seemed to understand math diversified vaudeville’s circus-style equestrian acts still further.

Some liberty acts complicated taste anxieties by exploiting the sexual connotations of woman and beast pressing body to body. In 1903 the Keith circuit booked “Nirvana and her

\textsuperscript{124} Philadelphia, December 5, 1904, KAC, 4, 8.
horse Loki,” who presented eight living pictures in which the two stayed perfectly still while audiences took in their theatrical tableaus. Two of the living pictures emulated key scenes from the famous equestrian melodrama Mazeppa. An approving reviewer described the routine: “the big white animal posing stolidly, while the woman, clad in pink fleshings, lies strapped to his back.” It seems the vaudeville novelty act elicited the same sexual allure that made an international star of Ada Isaacs Menken when she starred in Mazeppa in the 1860s. The reviewer found the apparent powerlessness of the woman to be part of the act’s appeal: “There’s a thrill even in this motionless picture of the wild horse of Tartary and his helpless rider.” Brenck’s Bronze Statue Horse also used horse bodies to display female sexuality, but instead of close interspecies contact providing the erotic charge, the “bronze horse” was a foil for presenting women in a faux nude tableau of fountains and statues.

The importance of women’s beauty in equestrian turns was not limited to novel liberty acts. Female equestrians were regularly evaluated for their beauty in tandem with their animal co-performers, as when a manager assessed Mlle. Theo: “Beautiful horse, pretty woman and fine looking coach dogs that work well.” White Arabian horses were cast to bring glamour and prestige to vaudeville by performing with women whose Western European heritage was consistently touted, such as the German equestriennes Theresa Renz and Milly Capell. In these performances of gender and class, human and nonhuman animal were judged with the same criteria for beauty and good breeding and were presented as existing in a mimetic matrix, in which formal appearance and behavior created a constant feedback loop between woman and


126 ibid.

127 November 3, 1902, KAC, 1, 47.
equine. Indeed, more than one all-female precision dance troupe was called the “Pony Ballet” because the regimented movement of the young women suggested equine cavalry exercises.

German equestrian Milly Capell was the delight of the Keith Albee circuit at the turn of the twentieth century and her performances point to vaudeville equestrianism’s imbrication of conventional female beauty standards, aristocratic aspirations, and popular culture. Capell made her US debut at Keith’s Union Square in late September 1902. According to the *Dramatic Mirror*, “She made her entrance seated on one of the finest Arabian steeds ever seen on the stage in this city. She put the animal through a series of evolutions that were startling and showed that she had thorough control of him.”128 Two hunting dogs and a dog costumed as a deer appeared on stage and the group created a pantomime of a hunting scenario during which Capell directed “the movements of her pets with two whips.”129 The orchestra then played a cakewalk and Capell and the horse moved in step to the music while the three dogs wove in between the horse and Capell. She made such a splash that, a few years later, Harry’s Ponies presented an imitation of Capell’s act.130 When she first appeared in Providence, the newspaper ran this announcement: “The bill at Keith’s this week will be headed by Mr. Keith’s successful European importation, Fraulein Milly Capell and her beautiful Arabian horse, the finest specimen of horseflesh ever exhibited on stage.”131

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129 ibid. The reviewer expresses concern for the dogs who must weave through the horses’ legs and reports that the audience experienced collective concern for the vulnerable canine.
130 Boston, March 13, 1905, KAC, 4, 118.
131 *Providence Telegram*, January 5, 1903, clipping, KAC Series II, 32.
Equestrienne and equine were bound together in marketing rhetoric which emphasized Capell’s and the horse’s value as foreign commodities and, particularly, that the sinewy materiality of “Arabian horseflesh” would be offered for visual display. Thus an element of Orientalism compounded the class and gendered aspects of the performance. In Capell’s promotional headshot she wears formal riding apparel: a top hat and black riding jacket buttoned with a corsage. Gazing directly at the camera, Capell is poised and aristocratic. A dressage crop appears behind the horse and runs along the right-hand side of the photograph’s border. The crop is decorative while also reminding the viewer of the equestrienne’s most important tool of control. With her outfit and addition of hunting dogs to the performance, Capell evoked the highly codified formal hunt, another form of human-animal performance which most likely reminded US audiences of aristocratic Old World aesthetics and leisure. Yet, her horse danced the trendy cakewalk, thus acknowledging that her act was designed for mass appeal.

In the eyes of vaudeville theatre managers, Capell and her horse were metonymically entwined. The New York theatre manager declared “The woman is a strikingly pretty girl and the horse is a beauty” and commended the horse’s “high-grade training movements… which he attained with wonderful accuracy and grace.” Capell was such a hit that her time on the circuit was nearly doubled and she traveled to theatres as far west as Detroit, where the manager described her as “an exceedingly pretty woman” who created a “very pretty picture.” Capell became the act by which other female equestrians were judged. For Mlle. Theo’s first performance in the United States, the manager described her as giving “An act on the same order as Mlle. Capell, possibly not quite as good.” The equestrian Helene Gerard was also said to

132 New York City, September 22, 1902, KAC, 1, 7.
133 Detroit, November 24, 1902, KAC, 1, 77.
134 November 3, 1902, KAC, 1, 47.
not compare to Capell whose beauty seems to be one of the major deciding factors in the comparison. When Girard played Boston, the manager characterized the act as one that divided the audience by class rather than uniting them in the pleasure of spectacle: “Critically speaking, it may be said that some part of her work was appreciated by that class of the audience that understands riding of horses. To me and to the audience in general, there is nothing praiseworthy in her act.”

The famed German circus equestrian Therese Renz, whom I discuss in chapter four, found a politically charged and aesthetically bracing strategy for beguiling audiences; she clad herself all in white to create a spectacle of ethereal aristocratic bearing that seemed to meld her with her white stallion.

Circus-style spectacles helped vaudeville appeal to its heterogeneous audience while delicately navigating taste and class anxieties of the era. Viewing metatheatrical mini circuses or acts booked directly from major railroad outfits created a contradictory theatrical experience for vaudeville audiences in which distinctions between adults and children were simultaneously blurred and reinforced. Acts based on blatant appeals to sensation-seeking were mitigated with careful costuming and marketing designed to stress the professionalism and status of the human trainer. The presence of large animals provided particularly potent examples of vaudeville’s ability to both facilitate and contain the spectacular. Elephants, big cats, and horses performed vaudeville palaces’ ability to match anything the circus could offer, even as vaudeville impresarios chose to distance their venues from circus’s unsavory associations.

Circus aesthetics still offer powerful opportunities for contemporary theatre to access spectacle and risk beyond that which is commonly expected in scripted theatre. A primary example is the Tony-Award winning 2013 revival of Stephen Schwartz’ 1972 musical Pippin.

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135 Boston, March 7, 1904, KAC, 2, 204.
The director Diane Paulus chose to mobilize circus semiotics with a dropping canvas tent as the stage curtain, a trapeze swing, and impressive acrobatics from the ensemble. The reinvention of the Schwartz/Bob Fosse classic was lauded. As the *New York Times* notes, however, it was also a gamble: “A risk of blending circus and choreography is overwhelming the senses of the audience. Ms. Paulus did want moments… of ‘a visceral explosion where you can’t possibly take it all in,’ but she also sought instances of singular virtuosity.” The show featured a poodle-mix named Porridge, who charmed and impressed audiences with his tricks that were (fairly) well integrated because of the circus motif. Press coverage of Porridge celebrates his skills and adorableness. The actor playing Pippin, Matthew James Thomas, owns Porridge. In an interview by *Backstage* magazine, Thomas commented, “I always kind of wanted to train a dog… I realized that he was so moldable and could do anything for my love or a treat.” Although Thomas expresses sincere affection for the dog, it is difficult to get past how compelling the concept of control is for Thomas. Porridge’s malleability is one of his most compelling features. In the following chapter, I take up the issue of animal training and the controversies surrounding the ethics and abuse of performing animals in vaudeville.

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Chapter 3: Ethics, Economics, and Animal Abuse in Big-Time Vaudeville

“Your Pleasure is Our Pain.” So reads a sign held in the teeth of a performing horse in a rudimentary sketch published in the February 1918 newsletter of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The image, which originally appeared in the London publication *The Animals’ Friend*, also includes a small dog wearing a clown hat who is perched on the haunches of the horse and waves a flag reading “Help Us.” The sketch critiques audience pleasure, arguing that animal entertainments are an ethical failing on the part of the audience. Vaudeville became a site for social debates about animal welfare because its precarious respectability uniquely positioned vaudeville as a barometer of the limits of taste and what could be considered acceptable in the modern United States. Wild and domestic animal bodies were sites for debating conflicting ethical positions on divinity and nature, which were inherently related to how Americans wanted to see themselves. Often, Americans who mobilized for animal welfare were inspired by a belief in a “natural order” that included structures of economic imbalance and racial hierarchies. What at first glance seems to be a fringe activist critique of quotidian mass entertainment actually reveals how class elitism and racist ideologies were being rapidly cemented in the domestic United States as the nation developed its modern, twentieth-century cultural identity and global economic and political influence.

Gilded Age and Progressive-era animal advocates took up profound ethical concerns including wild animal capture and captivity, the question of mammalian subjectivity and dignity, and the details of outright physical abuse. Many who opposed the presence of animals on stage were not only horrified by the physical abuse that could take place during training, transport, and performances; they were affronted by the absurdist slapstick comedy and robust displays of

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1 *Our Dumb Animals* 50, 9 (February, 1918), 134.
domination that the abuse was in service to. Activists fought against abusive training tactics and the display of performing animals. They were suspicious of the hidden labor and unseen processes of rehearsing. Aesthetically and ethically, they were opposed to entertainment that depended on violating what philosopher Martha Nussbaum calls animals’ “species-typical behavior” and Lori Gruen terms “wild dignity.”

In this chapter I take up a range of archival materials in order to map the network of ethical debates and animal welfare activism provoked by the performances of animal vaudevillians. Animal training manuals, managers’ references to on-stage abuse, and archival films of animal acts all show how fraught the topic of animal-human interactions were during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. I also examine the Jack London Club, which was the first animal welfare club specifically dedicated to ending the presence of animals in popular entertainment. The club was inspired by Jack London’s melodramatic novel of canine liberation, *Michael, Brother of Jerry* (1917). London’s story depends on an unredeemable white supremacist logic that has thus far been ignored by the few scholars who have examined his text. Ignoring the racism of London’s work dehistoricizes the willful blind spots of seemingly progressive causes such as animal rights and neglects tensions between different social justice movements. If we understand that the rhetoric employed by Progressive-Era animal welfare advocates capitulated to a “natural order” logic that left intact racial hierarchies, class stratification and, to a lesser extent, gendered norms, then we can view contemporary social

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justice debates with more incisive critiques and understand the ways in which live performance was and is a charged site of ideological debate regarding human exceptionalism.

As philosopher Lori Gruen notes, evidence for human exceptionalism has historically been located in tool use, oral and written language, and the ability to reason or to possess “theory of mind.” In the Western philosophical tradition, the Aristotelian and Cartesian lineage of animal marginalization was disrupted when the nineteenth-century English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham supplanted the question of whether or not animals had souls with the question of whether or not they could suffer. Following Bentham, philosopher Peter Singer argues that sentience mandates ethical consideration. Singer defines “speciesism” as harboring a belief that humans are inherently more important than animals and likens the structural power dynamics that permit speciesism to those that perpetuate racism and sexism. Singer’s Animal Liberation (1975) and Tom Regan’s The Case for Animal Rights (1983) are considered pioneering texts of contemporary animal advocacy, and each draws on different philosophical traditions (Bentham’s utilitarianism and Immanuel Kant’s moral philosophy, respectively) to establish different lines of thought for how human-animal relationships should be conceptualized and what ethical determinations can be made. Regan develops his notion of “subject-of-a-life” from Kant’s emphasis on the reasoning individual. Regan’s model foregrounds animal agency rather than protection from pain. Part of the appeal of many animal acts was that animal vaudevillians performed agency and appeared to be “subjects-of-a-life” when they seemed to write and compute or walked about town pushing a baby carriage in melodrama parodies. Of

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3 Gruen, Ethics and Animals, chapter 1.
course, any illusion of agency vanished when the performance was over and performing animals were shipped in crates and loaded into baggage cars for the next booking.

In Keith’s vaudeville, the definition of a “high class” animal act was one in which animals were clean, well groomed, and performed without visible duress. Rough handling of animals on stage was generally not welcome and signs of violent training were worth comment by theatre managers reporting to the head office. When a chimp billed as Peter the Great performed with his trainer, Alleinei, the manager reported that Peter “did not work very well … and had to be whipped repeatedly.”5 That same week in Philadelphia, Cliff Berzac was “cautioned about his free use of the whip. He was hissed last week on one occasion.”6 Karl Emmy hit and whipped his small dogs so frequently that it reportedly provoked murmurs of disapproval from female audience members in Cincinnati and he was warned to stop.7 It is unclear how effective local SPCA chapters were at stopping abusive animal trainers. The famed ballroom dancer Irene Castle disparaged their effectiveness: “A humane officer came around once a week but apparently not to look at the animals. Instead, he went to the corner saloon with the trainer for a drink and a few laughs and if he ever sent in a report, I am sure it was whitewashed.”8 Yet, SPCA inspectors were not innocuous and managers made efforts to avoid unwanted scrutiny from anti-cruelty societies. For example, managers were concerned that the popular Wormwood’s Dog and Monkey Circus brought unwanted attention from anti-cruelty societies.9 Except for the big cat acts that came from the circus to vaudeville, audiences expected animal features to rely on amusement and wonder, not violence. When Thiessan’s Dogs were

5 Cleveland, October 15, 1906, KAC, 6, 136.
7 Cincinnati, January 14, 1912, KAC, 14, 31.
8 Irene Castle (as told to Bob and Wanda Duncan), Castles in the Air (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1958), 101.
lifted by their hind legs and otherwise manhandled in a way that “smacked of cruelty,” the actions led to a poor performance because they didn’t “work well and seem to be much afraid of the trainer.”\footnote{Providence, December 25, 1916, KAC, 20, 10.} Scared animals were not funny and negative publicity was bad for business. The overall effect of an act and its economic viability outweighed any real ethical concern for the animals’ well being beyond an ability to perform. For example, a 1902 report for Wormwood’s Dogs and Monkeys complained of “slovenliness,” a “bad feeling between animals and trainer,” and suggested Wormwood be reminded not to “thrash or abuse his animals, as is his habit.”\footnote{Rochester, December 15, 1902, KAC 1, 118} Yet, because the Newfoundland dog who appeared to solve math problems was so amusing and the “reckless comedy” of the monkeys so enjoyable, the manager concluded that Wormwood’s “must be called a good offering.”\footnote{ibid.} As with slaughterhouse conditions (which had been famously exposed by Upton Sinclair’s book \textit{The Jungle} in 1906), reality might occasionally prick at consumer conscience, but animal abuse was ultimately easy to ignore because of hidden labor practices and extensive marketing that normalized casual consumption of animal bodies. An anti-cruelty stance in vaudeville was more of an aesthetic than an ethic and animal capital was free to circulate as demand dictated.

What sorts of animal actions were considered entertaining and appropriate for vaudeville’s heterogeneous audiences? Films of vaudeville acts can help us understand the conventions of animal turns. Spanuth's Original Vod-A-Vil Movies were created around 1919 in Chicago.\footnote{It is very possible these films represent fare specific to Chicago or West Coast vaudeville circuits and/or that the acts were modified for filming. However, given the fact that trainers were booked on various circuits and often traveled nationally and internationally with their acts, and that the acts were considered worth filming, it is fair to look at these films for evidence.} In “Tom Tinker’s Pony Patter,” six ponies wearing harnesses, bridles, and plumes
create formations in unison and perform tricks in front of a classic pastoral backdrop.\textsuperscript{14} The ponies balance on a see-saw, trot in a circle, and, with awkward effort, kneel and lie down. One performs a struggling three-legged trot and another uses her forelegs to push a barrel forward. Vaudeville’s heterogeneous audiences would likely have catalogued this turn somewhere on a spectrum between amusing and boring. Few would have considered it abusive, despite the fact that the ponies struggle to complete some of the actions. Since we do not know how the ponies were trained and, from our contemporary vantage point, it is difficult to ascertain if the ponies were in discomfort, would it be more meaningful to say the act violates the ponies’ wild dignity? According to contemporary animal studies philosopher Lori Gruen, “When we project our needs and tastes onto [animals], try to alter or change what they do, and when we prevent them from controlling their own lives, we deny them their wild dignity. In contrast, we dignify the wildness of other animals when we respect their behaviors as meaningful to them and recognize that their lives are theirs to live.”\textsuperscript{15} For Gruen, the ethical question of wild dignity pertains to all situations of captivity: medical and scientific research, performance, zoos, and pet-keeping. Under the “wild dignity” rubric, it seems all vaudeville acts would be deemed an “exercise of domination” and therefore a violation of wild dignity, whether or not the acts caused “any obvious suffering.”\textsuperscript{16} Gruen addresses the question of how wild dignity relates to domestic animals since they have “been bred for hundreds of years to have traits that are particularly suited for living in human society.”\textsuperscript{17} She makes a case for domestic companion animals (cats and dogs) being kept in captivity if their needs are well met, however, Gruen still critiques the anthropomorphism and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Gruen, \textit{Ethics and Animals}, 155.
\item \textsuperscript{16} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{17} ibid.,156.
\end{itemize}
commodification of companion animals who are dressed in clothes and put in fancy purses because they become “tools or instruments that satisfy human desires.”¹⁸ This model does not adequately address the ambiguous position of working animals like draft horses or ponies. Is there something undignified about an animal bred to pull a cart being trained to do other actions? Does it depend on what, exactly, those actions are? It seems that necessity versus pleasure becomes the nexus of this conundrum. It is acceptable to expect domesticated working animals to perform work alongside humans, but not to put them in situations where people are experiencing leisure while the animals continue to work and work in ways for which they were not bred.

¹⁸ ibid.
A second Spanuth's Original Vod-A-Vil Movie, "Animal Act with Baboon, Dog, and Monkey," is more fraught than the pony act.
Even as the filmed performance depended on anthropomorphized action, it was designed to highlight human exceptionalism. The dressed baboon plays the violin, roller skates, walks on hands, runs on a ball while balancing on a teeter totter and handling a kitten, and rides a unicycle while tethered to his trainer by a leash with a thick leather collar.\textsuperscript{19} Audiences would have been able to follow the baboon’s frenzied ball balancing while handling a delicate kitten. What might this interspecies interaction have telegraphed to its audience? The kitten can barely control itself and scrambles across the baboon’s body. In an act of double balancing, the baboon teeters between protecting self and kitten. The baboon struggles to master obstacles in physical space. In both films, props which signified child-oriented fun, such as roller skates, tricycles, balls, and see-saws, are in visual conflict with props that signified overt control over animal bodies, such as whips, collars, leads, and harnesses. For vaudeville audiences in 1000-2000-seat theatres, the baboon’s facial expressions would not have been very legible. However, the camera offers the tool of the close up. We can scrutinize the baboon’s distraught face, and this adds to a contemporary sense that duress was part of some animal performances in vaudeville.

Some nostalgic vaudeville veterans insist there was no animal abuse. Joe Laurie Jr., a monologist who wrote two books chronicling US vaudeville, offers this perspective: “And don’t let anyone tell you that any of the animals are mistreated (maybe, when they were being trained – maybe, like a bad kid, they got spanked). But once they were ‘performers,’ the trainer treated

‘em like babies, because after all they were his bread and butter.” This financial explanation — “why would anyone destroy his livelihood?” — reframed the question from a moral to a financial imperative and was a common response to the question of animal abuse. It fails to consider the possibility that trainers could generate an income from abused or unethically treated animals or that abuse exists in a spectrum of severity. Others connected to vaudeville described a climate of pervasive abuse. A vaudeville performer since age two, Elsie Janis reported, “When I was a small girl I left a place where an animal act was playing because my mother and I would not tolerate inhumane treatment of the animals. We have fought this all our theatrical lives.” The ballroom dancing sensations Vernon and Irene Castle became famous for their stance against animals in vaudeville. The Castles were glamorous, high-class headliners who appeared on Broadway and frequently sold out European venues. Despite the fact that vaudeville made the Castles quite wealthy, in her autobiography Irene assures the reader, “we only went into vaudeville when we were hard up.” The Castles did not enjoy performing twice a day and they never felt their style “was suited to the followers of vaudeville.” According to Irene, part of the discomfort came from the regularity with which the couple witnessed animal abuse. She describes a harrowing atmosphere.

We saw dogs beaten unmercifully after the curtain fell and given the water cure in the alley, with the trainer holding a powerful hose close to the dog’s nose and filling his lungs with water. We saw animals shocked with electricity, stuck with needles, and starved except for the few tidbits of reward which made them do the things they were afraid to do. There was little affection between the trainer and his animals. Affection

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21 Letter published in Our Dumb Animals 52, 5 (October 1919): 68. Janis was 20 when she wrote the letter.
22 Castle, Castles in the Air, 101.
23 ibid.
might make a dog unpredictable on stage. So, the animals were cowed, afraid to make the slightest mistake.\textsuperscript{24}

In a haphazard strategy, the Castles began purchasing abused animals and giving them away to “anyone who showed a desire to take them.”\textsuperscript{25} Castle was a consummate entertainer and understood audience pleasure. She notes that when “viewed from the audience,” animal acts were “charming” but these athletic feats and anthropomorphic narratives were often coerced through cruelty.\textsuperscript{26} Castle held no aesthetic judgment against animal turns. She describes an abused roller skating bear as “the most talented bear I had ever seen.” Standing on one leg, the bear could skate a figure eight around bottles. But after his excellent performance, “he was led away to his cage in the basement.”\textsuperscript{27} The Castles watched the trainer thwack the bear with a baseball bat “with such a resounding crack that the bear crumpled to the floor.”\textsuperscript{28} The class tensions endemic to big-time vaudeville and animal advocacy are apparent in how Castle frames her memory. She repeatedly emphasizes the bear trainer’s Italian nationality, describing the brutish demeanor of a man “in his shirt sleeves” who “grunted out a harsh command.”\textsuperscript{29} It is clear that he is the beast in this scenario. In the end, the Castles purchased the bear, brought him to the zoo in a taxi, and from then on had a clause in their contract that they would not be on the same bill with an animal act.

With its inexpensive thrills and fleeting novelties, popular entertainment was a difficult cultural field in which to intervene precisely because it was construed as a space of pleasure that afforded audiences a break from labor and responsibilities. Some audience members likely didn’t

\textsuperscript{24} ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{28} ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{29} ibid, 102.
think animals could feel pain, didn’t care if they did, or even wanted to see something akin to a bowdlerized blood sport. The majority of audience members who enjoyed the spectacle of diegetic, learned, and athletic animals seeming to supersede nature’s intentions, largely did so without considering the potentially coercive training methods necessary to accomplish such feats nor the confining realities of traveling from show to show in baggage car crates. Nevertheless, the managers’ notes suggest Keith audiences did not want to see abuse in the form of rough handling or painful physical interactions with trainers. Although animal welfare activists were in the minority, it was still important to the success of high-class vaudeville that animal performers appeared to act of their own volition. Slow or reluctant movement affronted the industrialized ethos of vaudeville and whipped or intimidated animals diminished acts’ potential for transportive pleasure. Keith theatre managers valued performances that protected audiences from being aware of the animals’ efforts. In other words, managers hoped that, as Nicholas Ridout describes the animal–human theatrical encounter, “all effort should be eradicated from the moment of performance, so that the audience experiences the work as spontaneous free play.”

Training received infrequent attention in marketing but when it was discussed it was framed by the new “kindness” approach. Because of the questions about coercion surrounding animal actions on stage, training methods were a source of conflict for animal welfare activists and professional animal handlers.

**Training: Horses, Dogs, and Wild Animals**

Animal training methods embodied debates about human morality and peoples’ relationships to the natural world, what constituted abuse, and animal ontology itself. Were animals’ temperaments predetermined by species and breed? Or, did they have individual

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30 Ridout, *Stage Fright*, 108.
dispositions? What constituted appropriate physical reinforcement in training and what constituted abuse? These questions reached back to antebellum training discourses for working animals. In his promotion of kindness-based training, one nineteenth-century writer lamented the objectification of the horse, arguing the beast of burden “has not been treated as an animal, but rather as a stump which could be hewn down with an ax and molded by the chisel into any desirable shape; or as a block of marble… hammered, chiselled, cut and carved into an equestrian statue.” As performance scholar Peta Tait notes, the nineteenth century saw significant changes in performing animal training as popular entertainments shifted from menageries that displayed large animals and used overt methods of physical coercion (such as “hooks in the skin” of elephants, or, for big cats, “hot iron prods and lead-tipped whips”) to animals performing physical actions and impressive poses alongside trainers. The German wild animal trader and trainer Carl Hagenbeck (1844-1913) and third-generation British menagerie owner Frank Bostock (1866-1912) represented this “new type of handler.” Tait notes that the “dissemination of training methods” via books and manuals converted authors’ first-person experiences into codified expertise and responded to increasing “criticism of the forceful treatment of animals.” The use of horses for millennia in agriculture, war, transportation, and trade made them the paradigmatic animal for discussing training. Nineteenth-century publications about horse training promoted systematic techniques and shaped discourses for training other species, including dogs, primates, and big cats.

33 ibid.
34 ibid.
Training guides and memoirs in the United States and England interwove a belief in trainers’ intuition and scientific observation, urging readers to follow the rational and systematic guidelines prescribed in the published text. The Ohio-born “horse whisperer” John Solomon Rarey published a pamphlet of instructions in 1853 in which he described horses as “naturally obedient” and not requiring force. He recommended a planned system based on the human moving slowly and acclimating the horse to all changes in physical environment so as not frighten or startle the animal. The question of equine cognition and self-awareness was at the center of Rarey’s philosophy. He argued that horses were in some ways superior to humans, but, because they lacked the ability to reason, horses had “no knowledge of right or wrong” and lacked free will. Because of this mental state the horse “cannot come to any decision as to what he should or should not do” and, by God’s design, this renders the horse “an unconscious submissive servant.” Rarey became a celebrity horse handler and gained an international reputation when, in 1858, he tamed a challenging horse belonging to Queen Victoria and a notoriously violent horse named Cruiser. His modest pamphlet was expanded and reprinted and the Rarey Method became an international training paradigm as he travelled across Europe and Asia, performing for audiences and training the horses of aristocrats.

Authors took sides in debates about “breaking” animals with acts of physical domination versus “gentling” or training animals with kindness. The hunter and dog trainer S.T. Hammond

35 Although I was unable to locate Rarey’s original pamphlet, the date 1853 is taken from the introduction of an expanded new edition of Rarey’s text: “Five years ago he wrote the little book which forms the text of the following.” See J.S. Rarey, The Art of Taming Horses, A new edition, revised, with important additions and illustrations (London: Routledge, 1858), 1.
36 ibid., 32.
37 ibid., 33.
explicitly invoked the binary ideological divide in the title of his “humane and rational” system, *Practical Dog Training: or, Training vs. Breaking*.

Although the book was written for hunters who trained working dogs, Hammond’s strong endorsement of methodical kindness was indicative of the new approach to animal training. “Gentling,” at first a general term that referred to caressing and petting the horse, came to refer to a whole training approach based on positive reinforcement using affectionate human-animal contact.

Positive touch was promoted along with training strategies like food rewards and a soothing tone of voice to affirm desired behavior. In horse training, gentling theories suggested that equine behavior was not mechanical but relational because it depended on a reciprocal connection with the human trainer. Other tenets included introducing one new behavior at a time, not expecting too much too fast, and limiting the amount of training per day. This is not to say the whip was absent. Rather, with “gentling,” the whip was used sparingly. Proponents maintained that a horse who was “broken” by harsh methods also had the spirit broken but that, with gentling, the horse could retain spirit but still be “most successfully subdued and rendered subservient to the uses of man.”

The success of gentling was predicated on selecting an animal with a temperament and physical build conducive to the trainer’s goals as well as the assumption that “there is as much difference in horses as in men.” Yet, this potential extension of liberal subjectivity did not release horses from the market logic of animal capital. In fact, good training was significant to insuring a horse’s owner made good on his investment while bad training could be financially ruinous leading to “injuring and

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38 S.T. Hammond, Note to *Practical Dog Training: or, Training vs. Breaking* New York: Forest and Stream Publishing, 1882). Hammond was the kennel editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine. The book was a collection of articles previously published in the magazine.

40 Rarey uses the term “gentling” as a verb meaning petting / positive touch. The introduction of the English 1858 version of his text calls the term an American invention.

41 Eldridge’s *Oriental Art of Charming Horses*, iv.

42 ibid., 6.
deprecating in value his property in the market. Horse education, really, is a marketable commodity and may be, indeed always is, estimated in dollars and cents.” The British trainer Captain Matthew Horace Hayes promoted a master-servant dynamic and warned that “gentling” required a great deal of time and labor supply whereas his fast and simple methods fit the practical demands of modern life. Hayes claimed to accomplish in a few hours what took other trainers a month. Not only was gentling time consuming, it introduced “the risk of allowing the horse to find out his own power of resistance,” whereas Hayes’ “rapid-style of breaking” kept horses ignorant of their power.

The gentling vs. breaking debate tells us less about various mammals’ abilities to respond to different training methods, and more about how people have constructed their relationships with the natural world via animal bodies in different time periods. What might seem to be a progressive anti-abuse form of animal training did not mean that gentling was part of a holistic egalitarian politics. Horses were not only efficient and adaptable beasts of burden whose power helped form trade routes and modern cities, they were potent symbols of human politics. Training through kindness was strongly associated with Arab and Eastern cultures and various training manuals couched it in Orientalist terms. An Ohio resident, Charles J. Eldridge, promoted gentling techniques in his guide The Oriental Art of Charming Horses and Colts (1857). Eldridge uses the Orientalist binary to oppose his own method of gentling to their version, which mystified science: “If what they call magic is only the practice of scientific principles, that is no fault of mine. It is the fault or the blindness of the Orientals themselves, in attributing to magic or

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43 ibid., 9.
44 Matthew Horace Hayes, Illustrated Horse Breaking (London: W. Thacker and Co., 1889), 35-36
45 ibid., 35.
46 ibid., 147-8.
supernatural agency that which can be and is performed by natural means.” He accuses “the Charmers of the Orient” of having “shrouded the science in the veil of darkness and mysticism.” Eldridge chastises those who believe in trainers’ mystical abilities and replaces it with the belief system of science. The reputation that Eastern horse handlers sang and spoke to their horses, communicating with them in secret tongues, was regarded with suspicion and curiosity. Eldridge situates himself as offering the service of demystifying Eastern horse training. He recommends three straightforward elements of successful training: “What, then, is the Arabian or Black Art of charming Horses? …It may all be summed up in three short words – patience, perseverance, kindness.” Yet, Eldridge uses Orientalism as a marketing strategy or lens through which to view this different mode of human-horse interaction, stating that “the Arabian” not only has patience, perseverance, and kindness, but “an abundance of time” to consistently ride, habitually groom, “talk, whistle, sing to the horse; and, what too many are never known to do, love the horse.” Through consistent contact and emotional exchange, “Oriental” trainers “obtain a wonderful power” over horses. Free time and passionate attachment become the key to gentling. While not supernatural, Eldridge does present eastern horse charming as in some ways unnatural. Indeed, Eldridge relays a story about a Western trainer who characterizes training a difficult horse as an act of courting in which he used his “most wooing tones” while focused on “winning the affection of the horse.” Although the rest of the manual is full of Western practices regarding breeding, care, and medical treatment, it is

48 Eldridge, *Oriental Art of Charming Horses*, iii.
49 ibid., iv.
50 ibid., 5.
51 ibid., 6.
52 ibid.
53 ibid.
54 ibid., 11.
the daily intimacy and emotional attachment that is presented as a foreign and exotic mode of interspecies interaction.

Whereas these manuals contain conversations between professional and amateur practitioners, famous wild animal trainers like Hagenbeck and Bostock were clearly addressing their fans in their training memoirs. Because they had a public to please and impress, they were careful to present training as a process totally in keeping with their performance values. As Tait argues, “Hagenbeck’s [circus] wanted to create a performance with a different emotional tone from that of a menagerie act, and one that animals would do—and were presumed to do-willingly.” As much as Hagenbeck and Bostock may have transformed menagerie-style animal presentations, they were clearly following in the footsteps of horse and dog trainers by applying the ideas of educating large mammals through kindness. Indeed, in the introduction to Hagenbeck’s 1909 memoir Beasts and Men, the secretary of the Zoological Society of London attributes Hagenbeck’s training success to “patience, firmness, and kindness”—a very close parallel to Eldridge’s claims for “Oriental” horse trainers’ “patience, perseverance, and kindness” fifty years earlier.

Instead of presuming wild animals to be vicious brutes that required domination in a pageantry of man vs. nature, Bostock discussed untrained animals as being like children needing schooling. He referred to the celebrity chimpanzee Consul as his “pupil” and titled one chapter “The Wild Animals’ Kindergarten.” In another chapter, Bostock elaborated his animal/child analogy:

Some animals train easily; others learn their lessons with great diffidence and some reluctance… One may as well try to give a hard and set rule for the rearing of a child,

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55 Tait, Wild and Dangerous Performances, 16.
taking it through nursing, kindergarten, the primary grade, the high school and into college, without allowing the slightest leeway for personal equation, as to say what is necessary for the training of an animal in general. Each is a study, alone and complete in itself, and each animal has its distinct individuality.  

Even Hayes, who was interested in efficient horse breaking, describes his most challenging horses as students who made him a better teacher: “It goes almost without saying, that the harder the pupil is to teach, the greater chance has the instructor of becoming expert in his business.” Hammond, the dog trainer, suggests speaking to a dog the same way you would speak to a ten-year-old boy. These rhetorical parallels between training animals and educating children took place in an era in which ideas about childhood development and children’s roles in society were rapidly changing. For some animals and middle-class children, strict hierarchical models of domination were transforming into processes of socializing and acculturation. At the same time, many orphaned or otherwise neglected children were intensely vulnerable to abuse and protection organizations for animals and children inspired each other.

Ethical concerns over captivity, forced labor, and physical abuse connected advocacy movements for animals and children. Directly inspired by the antebellum abolitionist movement, Henry Bergh established the first American SPCA in New York City in 1866. Two years later Boston lawyer and Baptist George Thorndike Angell founded the Massachusetts SPCA. According to American studies scholar Janet M. Davis, “The ASPCA wielded great authority in the streets, and its wealthy, white, native-born, male leaders sought to regulate New York City by prosecuting the largely immigrant working-class people whose livelihood depended on

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animals.” For Angell and other evangelical Protestants, “the animal welfare movement represented a crusade to redefine America – at home and abroad – as a moral nation.” Similarly, child protection efforts saw wealthy, often Ivy-League educated, Protestants intervening in immigrant and working class lives due to concerns about what constituted an appropriate domestic life. Inspired by the plight of an abused orphaned girl in Hell’s Kitchen, Bergh encouraged Elbridge Gerry and the philanthropist John D. Wright to establish a protection organization for children and, in 1875, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was established. Although it is outside the scope of this research project, it is worth noting that the “Gerry Society” had its own contested relationship with vaudeville because of the Society’s adamant stance that all child performers were being exploited and should therefore be removed from the stage. This was yet another way in which children and animals were associated with each other in vaudeville.

The Massachusetts SPCA published the newsletter Our Dumb Animals, running articles that addressed vivisection, the treatment of dairy cows and slaughter animals, fur apparel, steel traps, the proper hydration of city horses, humane slaughter, the adorableness and quirks of companion animals, and the contribution of horses and dogs to war efforts. Angell had printed and distributed British Quaker Anna Sewell’s 1877 novel Black Beauty, passionately supporting it as a tool of animal advocacy that successfully used reader emotion to provoke attitudinal shifts and political action. Indeed, Angell marketed “the novel as ‘the Uncle Tom’s Cabin of the horse.’” Such a characterization emphasizes the common themes of captivity and abuse but also lumps Blacks with beasts that were considered to not have souls or be liberal subjects

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61 ibid.
62 ibid.
possessing the capacity for a self-determined life. Forty years later, as the second head of the MSPCA, the Baptist pastor Dr. Francis Rowley established a corollary between *Black Beauty* and Jack London’s novel *Michael, Brother of Jerry*. Rowley promoted London’s book month after month, publishing excerpts from London’s Forward or passages from the novel.

*Michael, Brother of Jerry and the Jack London Club*

Given the archival evidence of vaudeville managers worrying about anti-cruelty inspectors, it is clear that there was some level of pressure on the entertainment industry in the northeast United States from at least the first years of the twentieth-century. For example, in 1905 the Animal Rescue League of Boston investigated cruel training practices and “a Boston matron, Mrs. Huntington Smith” relayed the findings to the Humane Society, arguing, “that the animal acts of the circus and vaudeville were no better than bullfights.”63 The most substantial and organized movement against the use of performing animals in vaudeville was established in 1918 and called the Jack London Club. It was inspired by Jack London’s posthumously published novel *Michael, Brother of Jerry* (1917). Though the novel has been mentioned briefly in animal activism and vaudeville histories, writers have never examined the extent to which London’s book is freighted with ideologies of race, class, and sexuality. Scholars have focused on London’s call to action and the torturous training practices he described. For example, McLean situates London’s novel within his overall oeuvre of nature-themed adventure books, briefly describes some of the animal characters’ desperate experiences, and then moves on. In her book on wild animal trainers, Joanne Carol Joys provides much more plot overview but limits her analysis to the strong possibility that London took his training descriptions from an existing magazine article. More recently, Diane L. Beers discusses London’s text and quotes his

abuse descriptions and call to action, but ignores vaudeville and presents the Jack London Club as focusing on the circus. In his new book on the welfare of performing animals, David A. H. Wilson draws on Beers’ research and offers few details regarding London’s prose. Since references to the novel continue to circulate in contemporary scholarship, it is important to fill the hole in our awareness of how London structures his animal liberation saga.

It is equally important to mark the political climate into which the novel was introduced. The fifty years that encompassed the vaudeville era spanned the United States’ intense nation building abroad and a particularly violent and agonized period for African Americans domestically. Amidst activism by major figures such as Ida B. Wells and W.E.B. Du Bois, the promises of Reconstruction gave way to legislated segregation and new forms of economic oppression and domestic terror. The Jim Crow “caste system” morphed from social custom to federal doctrine in 1896 with the Supreme Court’s Plessy v. Ferguson ruling. During the Jim Crow era, the majority of Black Americans were acutely vulnerable to physical violence and labor exploitation under a system of white supremacist capitalism that journalist Douglas A.

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65 In her description of the Great Migration, Isabel Wilkerson notes “Over the course of six decades, some six million black southerners left the land of their forefathers and fanned out across the country… It would transform urban America and … would force the South to search its soul and finally to lay aside a feudal caste system.” Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration (New York: Vintage, 2011), 9.
Blackmon terms “slavery by another name.” At the turn of the century lynch mobs terrorized African Americans and were a looming threat that controlled how Black Americans moved and behaved in public, while arrests of unemployed Black men for “vagrancy” supplied free convict labor that fueled US expansion through the staffing of coal mines and steel mills. Demographic shifts also altered how the nation viewed Black citizens. The Great Migration began during World War I and continued for decades, ultimately placing half of the country’s Black population in the industrial north. Meanwhile, backlash against the new waves of immigrants who began arriving in the 1880s and 1890s culminated in anti-immigrant legislation in the 1920s. Xenophobic rhetoric was aimed particularly at Eastern and Southern Europeans, as well as Chinese immigrants. Native Americans were characterized as barbarous and violent savages in popular spectacles while colonial subjects in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and the Philippines were ascribed the same racist traits as African Americans; that of disorderly children needing not just firm guidance, but force. 

Ultimately, London’s moral argument depends on shocking readers by asking them to imagine a Western white culture more savage than that of head hunting cannibals of the South Seas. Michael is a follow-up to Jerry of the Islands: A True Dog Story, in which London told the

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67 For an account of how capitalist industry and local governments colluded to coerce free labor from African American men, see Douglas A. Blackmon, Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II (New York: First Anchor Books, 2009).
68 ibid, 82-85.
tale of a smooth-coat Irish terrier’s adventures among “kinky-haired cannibals.” 

Michael follows Jerry’s equally noble and scrappy wirehair brother. The reader meets Michael in the Solomon Islands before he spends three years enduring torture and neglect as a performer. Michael moves from the crusty but true English steward Dag Daughtry, to the corrupt vaudevillian Harry Del Mar, to the unscrupulous animal trainer Harris Collins, who is portrayed as a sadistic capitalist. London’s sentimental adventure privileges the subject position of the canine protagonist, Michael, over people of color, and conflates animalized Pacific Islanders and Black Americans as global “niggers.” Finally, his initial class critique dissolves into a *deus ex machina* dependent on the *noblesse oblige* of a California couple and all structures of domination remain intact.

In the first several chapters, London’s Anglo sailors and whalers are constantly under threat by violent natives, who are habitually referred to as “niggers.” Indeed, the reader is introduced to the world of the novel with a sentence that establishes Michael’s subject position as a maritime dog in relation to threatening South Sea islanders: “But Michael never sailed out of Tulagi, nigger-chaser on the Eugénie.”

Off the coast of New Guinea, Michael’s owner

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https://books.google.com/books?id=ZIXpCQAAQBAJ&pg=PT19&dq=moan+and+slubber+than kfulness+at+his+feet&hl=en&sa=X&ei=SVWRVdiHFeOnyATJ-a_ABg&ved=0CB4Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=moan%20and%20slubber%20thankfulness%20at%20his%20feet&f=false Accessed June 29, 2015.

Though London and his wife claimed he conducted extensive firsthand research to accurately depict animal training, there is no corroborating evidence of such research in his letters or biography. Nevertheless, London’s detailed accounts and use of vaudeville slang seem informed. McLean notes much of the descriptions in *Michael, Brother of Jerry* “would seem to have been adapted directly from the humane society literature.” McLean, *American Vaudeville as Ritual*, 149.
Daughtry “acquires” the native islander Kwaque when Kwaque collapses at the steward’s feet and “looked up at him with the beseeching eyes of a deer” and continued to “moan and slumber thankfulness at his feet.”

Kwaque was running from two village men with “kinky locks” and “bright, quick, wild-animal eyes” who wanted to kill him as retribution for their dead pig. Wild yet needing saving, Kwaque is established as an animal to domesticate. Possessing Kwaque fulfills a childhood desire for Daughtry, who daydreamed of “wild cannibals in far lands.” Daughtry drinks and feels pleased: “And here he was, he would chuckle to himself, with a real true cannibal for a slave.”

London describes Kwaque’s satisfaction with being a slave much the way wild animal trainers claimed captivity benefitted their charges: released from physical threats and with food provided, animals were safer and more comfortable than in the wild. As living beings under Daughtry’s ownership and care, Michael the dog and Kwaque the native are grouped together. However, whereas Michael brings joy into Daughtry’s life, Kwaque brings death via his diseased body. Kwaque transmits his leprosy to Daughtry, thus leaving Michael vulnerable to the exploitation of new owners.

Michael is proud, brave, and savvy (“a man-dog and a lion-dog in all the stuff of him”). London accords Michael reason, albeit canine reason:

His reasoning—unless reason be denied him—was simple… Now Michael could not reason to this conclusion nor think to this conclusion, in words…. Whether or not he thought to the conclusion in swift-related images and pictures and swift-welded composites of images and pictures, is a problem that still waits human solution. The point is: he did think.

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72 London, *Michael*, chapter 3. It is clear that Kwaque owes much to Herman Melville’s Queequeg and London’s depiction of the South Seas bears more than a passing resemblance to *Moby Dick*.
73 ibid.
74 ibid.
London humanizes Michael and animalizes the native peoples of the region. The savagery of the South Sea islanders becomes a foil to highlight the savagery of the white Western animal trainers: “Quick as Michael was, slashing South Sea niggers… he could not touch his teeth to the flesh of this man, who had been trained for six years with animals.”\textsuperscript{76} Here, however, the trainer had to experience a multi-year training process to match the savagery that, for the South Sea Islanders, was innate.

Michael’s pathos within a racialized tale is further highlighted when Harry Del Mar steals the terrier after Daughtry develops his leprosy. Del Mar tells Michael he will turn the dog into an actor and insists Michael sing along to the harmonica. Because Michael hates Del Mar, he stifles his urge to howl along as Del Mar plays the popular Unionist Civil War song “Marching Through Georgia” and then the syncopated cakewalk tune “Georgia Camp Meeting.” It is only when Del Mar plays a Stephen Foster minstrelsy classic that Michael loses self control because the song accesses primal longings:

Not until the melting strains of “Old Kentucky Home” poured through him did he lose his self-control and lift his mellow-throated howl that was the call for the lost pack of the ancient millenniums. Under the prodding hypnosis of this music he could not but yearn and burn for the vague, forgotten life of the pack when the world was young and the pack was the pack ere it was lost for ever through the endless centuries of domestication.

“Ah, ha,” Del Mar chuckled coldly, unaware of the profound history and vast past he evoked by his silver reeds.\textsuperscript{77}

Stephen Foster triggers the canine’s journey through evolution. In his evocation of plantation nostalgia, London is perhaps as “unaware of the profound history and vast past” as Del Mar. As I will address more thoroughly in chapters four and five, nostalgia for a pastoral ideal, childhood, and the idea of evolution taking humans back to “the childhood of the race” and “when the world

\textsuperscript{76} ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} ibid.
was young” were common models of thought in the early twentieth century. Minstrelsy was the welcome trigger for these psychological and emotional reveries.

London “lifts the curtain” on the production and distribution of trained animals as a commodity, specifying the material conditions of transport as Del Mar ships Michael via railroad from Seattle to New York City:

There was just room in the crate for Michael to stand upright, although he could not lift his head above the level of his shoulders. And so standing, his head pressed against the top… The crate was not quite so long as Michael, so that he was compelled to stand with the end of his nose pressing against the end of the crate… He tried lying down, confined as the space was, and made out better, although his lips were cut and bleeding by having been forced so sharply against his teeth.\(^\text{78}\)

Michael is never removed from his crate during the trip and London makes deliberate note that the cage is full of “filth” (i.e. excrement), thus reminding the reader of the ultimate abjection of animal bodies under human domination. London then shifts focus from Michael’s individual pain, with which the reader has been trained to empathize, to a spectacle of thirty-five commodity canines “piled high” in crates and showing varying states of distress. Class markers are significant to London’s animal advocacy when baggagemen become the voice of moral reason. They are disgusted by the plight of the dogs:

“There ought to be a law against dog-acts. It ain’t decent.”
“It’s Peterson’s Troupe,” said the other. “I was on when they come in last week. One of ’em was dead in his box, and from what I could see of him it looked mighty like he’d had the tar knocked outa him.”
“Got a wollopin’ from Peterson most likely in the last town and then was shipped along with the bunch and left to die in the baggage car.”
…“An’ look at the way they’re packed. Peterson ain’t going to pay any more excess baggage than he has to. Not half room enough for them to stand up. It must be hell for them from the time they leave one town till they arrive at the next.”\(^\text{79}\)

\(^{78}\) ibid., chapter 23.
\(^{79}\) ibid.
London continues to explicate the material conditions of performing dogs: they remain confined once they arrive at the theatre because “From a business standpoint, good care did not pay” and the only way they escape being members of the troupe is death. Much later in the novel a second-rate vaudeville theatre stagehand stands up to his manager and a dog trainer: “‘My mind’s made up. If that cheap guy lays a finger on that dog I’m just sure goin’ to lose my job. I’m gettin’ tired anyway of seein’ these skates beatin’ up their animals. They’ve made me sick clean through.’” The baggagemen’s and stagehand’s casual contractions and slang, as well as their jobs, mark their working-class positions. Although London valorizes their no-nonsense morality, he also implies that if uneducated manual laborers can see the inequity of the situation, then certainly the reader must.

Coupled with an emphasis on class, London divorces amoral treachery from conventional heterosexual masculinity in the figure of effete class-striving animal trainer Harris Collins. “He was slender and dapper, and in appearance and comportment was so sweet- and gentle-spirited that the impression he radiated was almost of sissyness. He might have taught a Sunday-school, presided over a girls’ seminary, or been a president of a humane society.” Collins gives generously to charities and is afraid of his daughters, wife, the police, and physical violence. Yet, at his Cedarwild Animal School, he can master a lion in a locked cage. Collins’ class striving motivates his sadistic, ruthless business practices ("and the Cedarwild Animal School was business from the first tick of the clock to the last bite of the lash"). London details the education, career, and social ambitions of Collins’ seven children, mentioning Yale and Vassar,

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80 ibid.
81 ibid., chapter 30.
82 ibid., chapter 24.
83 ibid.
and alluding to a prep school in Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{84} While his children never see him work, Collins staffs his animal training school with “youths from the reform schools” and teaches them to control the animals “with intelligence and coldness.”\textsuperscript{85} As trained as the animals, the working class boy who cleans Michael with a harsh brush and stinging soap and violently shoots water into Michael’s mouth in order to break his resistance, does so “like an automaton.”\textsuperscript{86}

In contrast to the Christian stewardship approach of many religious activists, London presents animal entertainment as an amoral modern capitalist enterprise in which animals are converted from raw material to commodity through tortuous training. Collins refers to his school as a factory and untrained dogs are kept on hand as “a sort of reserve of raw material.”\textsuperscript{87} Mongrel dogs are desirably “cheap” while a lion is a riskier “investment” and knocking a lion’s teeth out with an iron bar is “destroying valuable property.”\textsuperscript{88} London details Collins’ lucrative dealings as he acquires, sells, and boards animals for vaudeville and circus. In harrowing descriptions, London ties training methods to finished results so the reader cannot divorce production from distribution and consumption. He describes a Shetland pony being poked with a pin to force the head upwards in order to create the ironic illusion of affection: the appearance of the pony kissing the trainer. Another pony has its knees rapped with a rattan whip while assistants use ropes to pull the pony’s forelegs out from under. “It was being taught merely how to kneel in the way that is ever a delight to the audiences who see only the results of the schooling and never dream of the manner of the schooling.”\textsuperscript{89} London’s depiction of a bucking mule act includes both the training by spiked saddle, the patter of the ringmaster daring rubes in the crowd to stay on the

\textsuperscript{84} ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} ibid., chapter 26.
\textsuperscript{88} ibid., chapter 28.
\textsuperscript{89} ibid., chapter 25.
mule for a full minute, and the minstrelsy-style jokes of the mule’s main foil, “Samuel Bacon, a negro tumbler.” As Collins presents the act for the benefit of a potential buyer in an otherwise empty auditorium, he conjures an imaginary crowd of boys, women, and elderly audience members. The reader becomes the missing audience as London walks the reader through the violent training and (what would have been familiar) conventions of this popular animal performance genre:

   “‘It’s all ready to put on the boards, and dirt cheap at five thousand… Listen to arithmetic,’ Collins went on. ‘You can sell at twelve hundred a week at least, and you can net eight hundred certain. Six weeks of the net pays for the turn, and you can book a hundred weeks right off the bat and have them yelling for more.”

   And Barney was sold, and passed out of the Cedarwild Animal School to the slavery of the spike and to be provocative of much joy and laughter in the pleasure-theatre of the world.91

London calls attention to the ethical issues of audience pleasure, delivering a condemnation that registers in an antitheatrical mode. He then ends with the reality of animal-act-as-commodity.

   Along with men of color and working class white boys, white women mirror the forced labor and vulnerable bodies of the trained animals. Collins tells an assistant “you can’t love dogs into doing professional tricks, which is the difference between dogs and women.”92 London describes a female performer with the stage name Miss Marie, who practices an illusion in which she appears to be valiantly struggling to prevent four horses from drawing and quartering her. Marie’s lack of agency is introduced to the reader from Michael’s point of view “from her conduct, he sensed that she, too, was captive and ill-treated. In truth, she was herself being

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90 Note that even the black character’s name, Bacon, evokes an animal state. The connection between kicking mule acts and Black men is addressed in detail in chapter 4.
91 ibid., chapter 26.
92 ibid., chapter 27.
trained unwillingly to do a trick.” Miss Marie begs her husband not to make her practice the maneuver but he and Collins, the true sadist, insist. Then, “With a thin writhe of a smile, Collins investigated the insides of her clenched hands to make sure that the hooks were connected. ‘Now brace yourself! Spread your legs. And straighten out.’ With his hands he manipulated her arms and shoulders into position.” When Miss Marie completes the act successfully but does not embody physical exhaustion as the performance requires, Collins berates her.

“This ain’t a smiling act! Get that smile off your face. The audience has got to think you’re carrying the pull. Show that you are. Make your face stiff till it cracks. Show determination, will-power. Show great muscular effort. Spread your legs more. Bring up the muscles through your skirt just as if you was really working. Let ’em pull you this way a bit and that way a bit. Give ’em to. Spread your legs more.

Her forced labor is a form of sexual domination.

An actual Irish terrier named Peggy inspired the character of Michael. London switched the fictional dog’s sex in order to impart his protagonist with a noble character and to cultivate the impression of interspecies homosocial bonding between Michael and his master Daughtry. London feminizes the dogs training under duress while pointing up vaudeville’s gendered audience expectations. Collins espouses his training philosophy to various assistants: “Do you think you can make those greyhounds extend themselves with the promise of a bite of meat? It’s the whip that makes them extend… You can’t love her into doing it. You can’t pay her to do it. There’s only one way, and that’s make her.” After a description of a tiny dog repeatedly falling, London again ties the production of training to the consumption of live performance: “It’s always a winner, especially with the women—so cunning, you know, so adorable cute, to be yanked out of its beloved master’s pocket and to have such trust and confidence in him as to

93 ibid., chapter 25.
94 ibid.
allow herself to be tossed around that way."

Sexist stereotypes are not relegated to Collins’ expository training philosophies. London describes Sara, the tender South American monkey who befriends Michael, as one who “knew love and hysteria and was remote cousin to human women.” Sara is valorized for her passionate, if irrational, loyalty when she intercedes in a fight between Michael and a leopard.

London dissolves his critique of capitalism and combines women’s “intuition” with substantial racism to resolve the melodramatic plot. In Oakland, California, a wealthy and well-travelled couple named Harley and Villa Kennan (clearly stand-ins for Jack and Charmian London) attends a vaudeville show. Michael performs as the closer after a blackface comedy team. Villa Kennan suspects Michael may be the very same dog the couple knew during their time in the Solomon Islands and the brother of their beloved Irish terrier, Jerry. Backstage after the show, Villa swoons with affection for the dog and devises a strategy to prove Michael’s identity. She tells her husband, “Remember, Jerry was a nigger-chaser before we got him. And Michael was a nigger-chaser. You talk in bêche-de-mer. Appear angry with some black boy, and see how it will affect him…” A phantom black boy becomes necessary to prove Michael’s identity while Villa’s sentimental body remains necessary to the whole endeavor as she simultaneously comforts Michael and directs her husband’s actions: “Sitting down and bending forward to Michael so that his head was buried in her arms and breast, she began swaying him and crooning to him…. he yielded to her crooning and softly began to croon with her. She signalled Harley with her eyes.”

Language, the very process that philosophers and scientists have marked as the “abyss” between humanity and the rest of the animal world, becomes the

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95 ibid., chapter 28.
96 ibid., chapter 29.
97 ibid., chapter 34.
98 ibid.
bridge to interspecies connection between the Kennans and Michael when Harley puts his wife’s designs into action and utters his best bêche-de-mer:

“My word! he began in tones of wrath. ‘What name you fella boy stop ’m along this fella place? You make ’m me cross along you any amount!”

And at the words Michael bristled, dragged himself clear of the woman’s detaining hands, and, with a snarl, whirled about to get a look at the black boy who must have just then entered the room and aroused the white god’s ire. But there was no black boy. He looked on, still bristling, to the door. Harley transferred his own gaze to the door, and Michael knew, beyond all doubt, that outside the door was standing a Solomons nigger.

Michael transforms from a coddled love-object into a ferocious protector and it is his display, his performance, of ferocity towards global blackness that ensures his rescue. The Kennans buy Michael’s freedom. Unlike the detailed haggling for Barney the trick mule, London shifts away from his critique of trained animal as commodity and the reader is not privy to the sale negotiations that make Michael a permanent part of the Kennans household. The read never knows the purchase sum nor does how the Kennans came to be so wealthy that the cost of Michael’s freedom price is of no concern. As opposed to the crass class striving of Harris Collins, the Kennans are naturally and appropriately wealthy.

Michael is reunited with his brother on the couple’s expansive ranch. Though his three years of trauma as a performing dog have taken the bark and enthusiasm out of Michael, he can perform one task that makes him valuable and connects him with his raison d’être:

On account of foot-and-mouth disease and of hog-cholera, strange dogs were taboo on the Kennan ranch. It did not take Michael long to learn this, and stray dogs got short shrift from him. With never a warning bark nor growl, in deadly silence, he rushed them, slashed and bit them, rolled them over and over in the dust, and drove them from the place. It was like nigger-chasing, a service to perform for the gods whom he loved and who willed such chasing.

99 ibid.
By London’s design, Kwakwe bore the leprosy that killed Michael’s beloved English master and diseased dogs threaten the rightful order between Michael and his white owners. The novel ends with Michael and Jerry attacking an escaped criminal who is about to murder Harley. In appreciative wonder that they saved her husband’s life, Villa observes: “The last word has not been said upon the wonder of dogs,” to which Harley responds “The last word of the wonder of dogs will never be said.”

And, as the human couple and canine brothers all sing together, London intentionally evokes the mystery of human-canine coevolution wherein the dogs’ howling connects them simultaneously to their benevolent guardians and their evolutionary past: “they sang back through the Nothingness to the land of Otherwhere, and ran once again with the Lost Pack, and yet were not entirely unaware of the present.”

Dogs belong with certain people in certain places. The savagery of the South Seas and vicious animal trainers can be forgotten as London ends his novel on a mystical note that invites the reader to contemplate interspecies connections without troubling the structural power imbalances of the human world.

In the Forward to *Michael, Brother of Jerry*, London is quick to establish a heteronormative masculine position, lest his compassion for animals be taken as a sign of feminine sentimentality. He assures his readers:

Now I am not a namby-pamby. By the book reviewers and the namby-pambys I am esteemed a sort of primitive beast that delights in the spilled blood of violence and horror…. I have indeed lived life in a very rough school and have seen more than the average man’s share of inhumanity and cruelty… And yet, let me add finally, never have I been so appalled and shocked by the world’s cruelty as have I been appalled and shocked in the midst of happy, laughing, and applauding audiences when trained-animal turns were being performed on the stage.

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100 ibid., chapter 36.
101 ibid.
102 ibid., Forward.
London is not against natural violence; he is against torture for frivolous ends. London aims to increase the legitimacy of his claim and present it as populist rather than effete, elite, or sentimental. Just as women had played significant roles in the nineteenth century abolitionist and temperance movements, women were closely associated with various reform movements of the Progressive Era, including child welfare and education, and anti-cruelty societies. London created a call to action while trying to safeguard his masculine identity. His Forward ends with a recommendation that readers educate themselves about “the inevitable and eternal cruelty” of animal training and join humane societies and local SPCA. Finally, London suggests that whenever one encounters an animal act at the theatre:

we may express our disapproval of such a turn by getting up from our seats and leaving the theatre for a promenade and a breath of fresh air outside, coming back, when the turn is over, to enjoy the rest of the programme. All we have to do is just that to eliminate the trained-animal turn from all public places of entertainment. Show the management that such turns are unpopular, and in a day, in an instant, the management will cease catering such turns to its audiences.\(^{103}\)

London’s solution asks very little of animal welfare advocates and even presents the action of resistance as a physical pleasure (“a promenade and a breath of fresh air outside.”). However, London underestimated how fully interwoven animal capital had become with popular entertainment.

In March 1918, eight months before the end of World War I, the Massachusetts SPCA took up London’s suggestion and inaugurated the Jack London Club (JLC). The JLC promised readers their commitment would not mean arduous activist labor: “No Officers, No Dues, Just Send Your Name.”\(^{104}\) Although there were no dues, it is clear there was a social cost in pledging to leave a vaudeville show during animal acts: “It may be embarrassing. It may seem an

\(^{103}\) ibid.

\(^{104}\) Our Dumb Animals, 50, 10 (March 1918): 148.
annoyance to others. Think of the unhappy animals. Would you want them to do as much for you if you were in their places?”

Such a comment was not directed at the rowdy working-class audience members of the vaudeville gallery. The readers of Our Dumb Animals would have been in the orchestra seats or boxes, ever monitoring their established or aspirational social positions. The Club was anchored in class-consciousness and intentionally targeted vaudeville because of its liminally respectable status and because animals were, in opposition to the circus, comparatively marginal to the vaudeville experience. In 1919, a bill was “introduced to the Massachusetts Legislature forbidding the exhibition of any trained or trick or performing animals at any theatre, park, summer resort, or other regularly established place of public amusement or entertainment.” The bill intentionally did not include the circus because proponents feared that “to include the circus would be to defeat the Bill.” Circus was just too popular. Despite this calculated compromise and the JLC urging members to write government officials to support the bill, it still did not pass. JLC members condemned fans of animal-based popular entertainments because of their comfort with displays of domination and control over captive creatures. At the same time, activists maintained that if the public could only discover the truth of what occurred behind the scenes, there would be outrage and demands for sweeping change.

The prose and excerpts published on the Jack London Club pages of Our Dumb Animals repeatedly focus on the secrecy of training. Writers call attention to tools of restraint and physical punishments, including spiked collars and whip handles, pronged forks, pistol blanks, electrical shock systems, and strings tied to limbs. Animal turns were compared to blood sports like cockfighting and bear baiting, with the suggestion that it was shameful for a civilized twentieth-century nation like the United States to debase itself in this way. In addition to physical

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105 Our Dumb Animals, 51, 3 (August 1918): 36
106 Our Dumb Animals, 52, 10 (March 1919): 148.
abuse, the animal/audience relationship was interrogated on grounds very similar to Gruen’s contemporary concept of wild dignity. An image of a male lion on a tricycle being pushed by dogs was captioned “The Humiliation of a King”\(^{107}\) and chimps wearing clothes and playing instruments were diagnosed as “degrading both to actors and audience.”\(^{108}\) Even as London’s racist rubric went uncritiqued, activists correlated the animal welfare movement with abolition and referred to animal performers as “slave-actors.”\(^{109}\) Yet the writers of *Our Dumb Animals* seem to have little to say about concurrent social justice movements, including anti-lunching legislation and women’s suffrage. According to historian Janet M. Davis, “George Angell condemned US militarism overseas as a glaring contradiction of a patriotic rhetoric of uplift and kindness.”\(^{110}\) Davis, citing Diane Beers and Susan Pearson, also maintains “animal protectionists adopted [antebellum] abolitionist language in nonracist ways to demonstrate their shared commitment to these social justice movements against cruelty.”\(^{111}\) However, there is potentially more ambivalence in the *Our Dumb Animals* archive than these scholars note.\(^{112}\) During the height of the Jack London Clubs’ popularity, the Clubs’ pages do not engage readily with domestic racial discrimination. Even the expressions of regret about race riots in major cities that Davis notes can also be read as politically ambiguous, as regret is hardly a call to change social structures and laws.\(^{113}\) It is fair to claim a disconnect between the messages of kindness and

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\(^{107}\) *Our Dumb Animals*, 52, 9 (February 1919): 132.

\(^{108}\) *Our Dumb Animals*, 53, 6 (November 1919): 84.

\(^{109}\) ibid., 85.


\(^{111}\) ibid, 554.

\(^{112}\) For instance, the only anti-lynching quote Davis cites is from 1934.

dignity promoted by *Our Dumb Animals* and the racist logic of the book that inspired international Jack London Clubs.

Within its first year, the Club devised strategies to increase its profile and impact. Dr. Rowley reached out to England’s Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals *Our Dumb Animals* and fostered enthusiasm for the cause by publishing letters of support from the legitimate actress Minnie Maddern Fiske, the young vaudeville mimic Elsie Janis, and activists from different states and international locations. Rowley wrote letters to theatre managers asking them to stop presenting animal acts. *Our Dumb Animals* ran a 29 June 1918 letter from small-time vaudeville magnate Marcus Loew in which Loew stated, “The proposition is one that we could not possibly handle alone.”114 The MSPCA sold informational cards at cost (a dozen for ten cents) in order to distribute them to theatre and box office managers. The cards read: “Together with thousands of other members of the Jack London Club: I offer my protest against the cruelty that has been practised to make possible nearly every trained animal performance, and I have left the audience of this theater to show my disapproval of such exhibitions.”115 In time, the Club encouraged members to ask ahead of time if there would be an animal turn on the bill and, if so, to abstain from attending and tell the theatre manager why. As film began to eclipse vaudeville throughout the 1920s, the Jack London Club shifted its strategies while trying to maintain relevance. It ran articles on abuse in the film industry and at rodeos. By the end of 1929, *Our Dumb Animals* claimed the Club had over 475,000 members, as well as affiliated clubs in “Canada, England, Holland, Switzerland, and France. Membership in the Clubs grows apace. Former cruelties committed secretly have been exposed and largely eliminated.”116

114 *Our Dumb Animals*, 51, 4 (September 1918): 52.
115 *Our Dumb Animals*, 51, 10 (March 1919): 148.
However, the Club took up much less space on the pages of *Our Dumb Animals* and no longer seemed to mobilize passion as it once had. There are several reasons for this diminishing significance. As I mention in chapter one, vaudeville animal acts declined in popularity in the 1920s. In addition, many anti-cruelty activists shifted their attention to Hollywood, where animals were sometimes killed to create epic shots and performing animals often appeared to be in pain or discomfort (see chapter five). The Great Depression, not surprisingly, also changed the movement as people had fewer resources to sustain campaigns and were criticized for worrying about animals when so many people were suffering.

Progressive Era advocacy for performing animals was led by an elite class fraction of white Protestants and founded in the presumption of human exceptionalism that largely left unchallenged the transmission of racist and sexist ideologies. The movement emphasized dignity and the “natural” relationship between humans and both wild and domestic animals. These historical dynamics are particularly important to address because of fraught contemporary social justice politics. Can animal advocates claim animal rights as a social justice issue without marginalizing needed political attention for oppressed peoples? Do we have time to worry about possible violations of pony dignity when refugees are pouring out of Syria and US citizens are able to document state violence against people of color on a near-weekly basis? July 2015 brought these questions into the public sphere. The month began with social media rage against Walter Palmer, a white US dentist who paid $50,000 to lure Cecil the Lion out of a sanctuary in Zimbabwe. Cecil was tracked, killed, skinned and beheaded. Although Cecil did not perform as a trained animal, his body came to perform complicated networks of international commerce and animal rights that included species and habitat preservation. In addition to social media rage, people protested outside Palmer’s home with signs, threatened him, and the comedy talk show
host Jimmy Kimmel shed a tear discussing Cecil on air. On 10 July Sandra Bland, an African American woman, was pulled over in Texas for failing to signal a lane change and wound up arrested, dying in jail of an apparent suicide. A week after Bland’s death, Samuel Dubose, an African American man in Cincinnati, Ohio, was pulled over for not having a front license plate and was subsequently shot in his car by the officer. Black Lives Matter and others already committed to racial justice responded to Bland and Dubose’s deaths, but where was the national outrage and acute passion for these two citizens of color, many wondered. The Black writer Roxanne Gay tweeted “I’m personally going to start wearing a lion costume when I leave my house so if I get shot, people will care.” Cecil’s story became such huge news because “it offers a strange alchemy of arrogant privilege, an animal’s being lured out of safety and slaughtered, and something onto which we can project outrage without having to contend with the messiness of humanity.” Animal vulnerability seems straightforward and, therefore, animals can become allegories of justice. As Gay maintains, the juxtaposition of these publically discussed deaths provokes questions about “how and when people choose to show empathy publicly. Cecil the lion was a majestic creature and a great many people mourn his death, the brutality of it, the senselessness of it. Some people also mourn the deaths, most recently, of Sandra Bland and Samuel DuBose, but this mourning doesn’t seem to carry the same emotional tenor.” Lori Gruen wrote an op-ed critiquing “the zero-sum mentality that suggests if you protest against one injustice that means you privilege it over another injustice. This is a convenient and distracting narrative that weakens efforts toward social change.” Citing

118 ibid.
119 ibid.
political scientist Claire Jean Kim, Gruen suggests that if social justice advocates, animal rights activists, and others seeking progressive change were to actively acknowledge commonalities and linkages between movements, it would produce better results: “If it were no longer acceptable to treat animals as animals and violate and kill them, the animalization process that serves to justify structures of white male power would be weakened. Weakening that structure is one way to avow the lives of those who were wantonly killed and perhaps allow more just social relations to develop from our grief and anger.”

Gruen deployment of Kim’s “ethics of avowal” does not sufficiently help people of color suffering under state and extralegal violence in the here and now. Nor does it acknowledge the charged history of comparing human and animal captivity, which certainly has the potential to be elided into a comparison of ontology.

In 2011 People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) sued the amusement park SeaWorld for the freedom of five orcas by citing the thirteenth amendment to the US Constitution, which granted slaves their freedom at the end of the Civil War. PETA argued the orcas were slaves being kept in captivity. While Lisa Lange, the white Senior Vice President of Communication for PETA, characterized the strategy as “groundbreaking,” racial justice activist and former Black Panther Elaine Brown described it as “beyond insulting, it is a cruel and racist joke... animal cruelty does not rise to slavery.”

A piercing satire of the situation by The Daily Show correspondent Wyatt Cynac, who is Black, portrayed Lange as the very embodiment of white cluelessness, ignorant of and unwilling to consider how citing a legal precedent from slavery might be problematic.


121 ibid.

Earlier this year, animal activists used legal precedent from the historical captivity of slaves from Africa to argue for the emancipation of two research chimpanzees, Hercules and Leo, from a laboratory at Stony Brook University. Like Cecil, the chimps are not performing animals the way SeaWorld’s orcas are. However, Hercules and Leo have been performing the role of liminal humans for years as scientists use(d) them to study bipedal locomotion and its role in evolution. In keeping with the non-profit organization the Great Ape Project’s international efforts to classify non-human great apes as legal persons, the Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP) was founded in the United States in 2013 as a “civil rights organization” with the mission “to change the legal status of appropriate nonhuman animals from mere ‘things,’ which lack the capacity to possess any legal right, to ‘persons,’ who possess such fundamental rights as bodily integrity and bodily liberty.”

The NhRP filed for a writ of habeas corpus by citing the 1772 English case of Somerset v. Stewart. According to Gruen, “the NhRP was inspired by the highly studied and variably interpreted English case... in which James Somerset, a man captured in Africa and sold into slavery, was freed as a result of a habeas corpus writ filed on his behalf by anti-slavery campaigners.” As a result of the legal challenge, Stony Brook University agreed to stop experimenting on the chimps, and the biomedical corporation that owns Hercules and Leo pledged to send them to a sanctuary in Florida.

NhRP executive director Steven M. Wise embraces the analogy of slavery for articulating the legal, ethical, and economic issues involved in the effort to secure legal personhood for nonhuman animals. His 2004 essay “Animal Rights, One Step at a Time” begins with a

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discussion of transatlantic slavery. Indeed, Wise has written an entire book about the James Somerset case (commonly referred to as the “Mansfield judgment”). In a blog post about the case, Wise compares the lead scientist who used Hercules and Leo in experiments to a nineteenth-century British parliament member who “waxed eloquent on the floor of the House of Commons about the benefits of being a slave.” Writing about the triumphs of legal precedent gained in the current case, Wise ends on this note: “each generation has learned anew what Martin Luther King, Jr. and Theodore Parker reminded us, over and again: ‘The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.’

Claire Jean Kim argues that change-seekers must “get beyond sweeping bromides about domination to the historical specificity of various dimensions, to take seriously this specificity while resisting the temptation to enshrine any one dimension of oppression as the most central, urgent, fundamental.” This is because “various supremacies (racism, speciesism, sexism, homophobia, etc.) are so closely intertwined in thought and deed that they will persist together or

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be interrupted together.” Yet, not all structures of domination act equally at all times and activists are often not intersectional in their commitments. Kim discusses the race scholars she has encountered who are averse to taking up the question of the animal because “the mostly white animal movement’s racial blindness strikes them as an example of the ‘new racism’ that conceals itself in nonracial guises.” Even as these race scholars “pull the human card,” Kim notes, “animal people often make a comparable move, claiming speciesism as the fundamental oppression and casting all humans as privileged beneficiaries of human supremacy.” In other words, those who advocate for social change cannot view their work as a series of sequential problems to solve. A multipronged strategy of justice commitments would require simultaneous advocacy for humans and nonhumans in various categories of alterity. This circles back to the expression of public empathy for the deaths of Sandra Bland and Samuel Dubose being of such a lesser scale than that expressed for Cecil. To return to Gruen’s characterization of active avowal, it seems to be a good starting point but appears to work on a long game that may be too long for those who are daily confronted with corporal vulnerability due to state and/or extralegal violence. What is clear is that a rigid hierarchy of a natural order founded on human exceptionalism and white supremacy continues to allow suffering and marginalization, exemplifying the fact that the material conditions of animal lives and the animalization of humans were never separate issues, but intrinsically connected ones that continue to press us to ask what kind of nation we really want to be.

129 ibid.
130 ibid., 470.
131 ibid.
Chapter 4: Animals, Animality, and the Dyad of White and Black in Vaudeville

Very soon, about a dozen young imps were roosting, like so many crows, on the verandah railings, each one determined to be the first one to apprize the strange Mas'r of his ill luck.

“He'll be rael mad, I'll be bound,” said Andy.

“Won't he swar!” said little black Jake.

“Yes, for he does swar,”: said woolly-headed Mandy.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*¹

Laurey: Has it really got a team of snow-white horses?
Curly: One’s like snow. The other’s more like milk.

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Oklahoma!*²

This chapter deepens and expands my investigation of the processes by which animal performances and discourses of animality were imbricated with racial formations during the vaudeville era. I draw on Nicole Shukin’s rubric of animal capital, extending her model to a consideration of animalized capital and vaudeville’s role in its circulation. As an organizing principle, animal capital depends on multivalent meanings of rendering, including the transformation of animal by-products into new commodities and the proliferation of animal representation in order to sell commodities. Shukin’s model provides a way to understand the processes and logics by which animal bodies and images circulate in modern, industrialized economic structures. My concept of animalized capital articulates the ways in which the material exploitation of racialized bodies worked concomitantly with discursively constructed animalization (via, for example, song lyrics, sheet music, and advertising campaigns) in order to

naturalize racial hierarchies and the exclusion of African Americans from the protections of citizenship and even the category “human.” I therefore argue that big-time vaudeville’s participation in the consolidation of white identity and assumption of white supremacy was not limited to its many ethnic masquerades, blackface acts, coon shouters, and audience segregation policies. Vaudeville’s visions of aristocratic marble horses, snowy canines, and beautiful cockatoos were tethered to its fantasies of Black children as pet-like “pickaninnies” and cavorting “blackbirds,” as well as to comedy acts featuring black(face) buffoons out-smarted by bucking mules. In addition, the racialization of circus elephants normalized such symbolic violence across popular entertainment genres. As common as ethnic impersonations of Irish, German, Jewish, and Chinese characters were in vaudeville, a malignant fantasy of animality was uniquely tethered to blackness. Racist scientific theorists misappropriated Darwinian concepts to claim that African Americans were evolutionarily closer to monkeys and other primates, an idea that was often perpetuated in political cartoons. Rhetorics of animality haunted the American cultural imaginary in other ways as well; blackface minstrelsy and ragtime “coon songs” were saturated with references to possums and chickens. Even the lauded African American poet and librettist Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote the lyrics for the 1898 hit song “Who Dat Say Chicken in Dis Crowd?,” which was first heard in a vaudeville revue at the Roof Garden of the Casino Theatre in New York. The sheet music cover featured a large chicken in profile, squaring off with five Black boys dressed in overalls and patches.\(^3\) Modernism’s obsession with Primitivism and the idea that jazz came from the “rhythmic aggressiveness” of a “savage

\(^3\) Will Marion Cook and Paul Laurence Dunbar, “Who Dat Say Chicken in Dis Crowd? From the Great Success of ‘Clorindy’, or The Origin of the Cake-walk” (Chicago: M. Witmark & Sons, 1898).
musician”

In order to explicate the power of animalized capital during the vaudeville era, this chapter charts a complicated network of material and popular culture; including animal performances, pickaninny acts, coon song lyrics, soap advertisements, children’s mechanical banks, and early film. The “pickaninny” character, in particular, represented animalized capital in which profit was secured via the production, distribution, and consumption of Black children who were usually rhetorically and visually voided of humanity. Coded ideologies of whiteness and blackness were deeply embedded within complex semiotics of the theatre such as *mise-en-scène*, costume, casting, make-up, lyrics, musical composition, and song and dance styles. Vaudeville transmitted these “melodramas of black and white” that were inherited from minstrelsy (and melodrama, of course) and perpetuated this theatrical dyad well into the twentieth century.

Vaudeville functioned as a popular entertainment bridge between nineteenth-century melodrama and minstrelsy, and twentieth-century Broadway. To illustrate the far-reaching and lasting impact of animalized capital’s coded ideologies, I’ve begun with epigraphs from two iconic pieces of US popular culture that reach beyond the vaudeville era: Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II’s 1943 musical *Oklahoma!* Between the antebellum minstrelsy era of Stowe’s

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novel and the golden age of US musicals, vaudeville profoundly shaped popular culture and attitudes. The slaves in Stowe’s novel are defined by her preoccupation with their physical characteristics: black skin, woolly hair, and roosting bodies. Waiting in a group, they become a bustling cluster of undifferentiated blackness that seems “like so many crows.” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was quickly adapted into melodramas performed at dime museums and theatres across the country and remained popular for over sixty years. Stage versions transformed Stowe’s sentimental abolitionist text into opportunities for minstrelsy laughs via the slave girl Topsy. Many scholars argue that Topsy served as the progenitor of the derisive stereotype of the wild and neglected black juvenile “pickaninny.” Topsy became such a common cultural reference that the name was bestowed on a performing elephant who, in 1903, was electrocuted at Coney Island. Vaudeville’s “pickaninny acts” dehumanized African American children at a crucial moment of post-Reconstruction racial politics in the United States when massive immigration and fear of miscegenation provoked anxieties about what constituted American whiteness and the nation struggled to articulate its national identity.\(^6\)

*Oklahoma!* takes place during the tumultuous first decade of the twentieth century as the territory moved toward statehood in 1907. The charming cowboy Curly attempts to woo the feisty farm girl Laurey with a fantasy of fancy transportation: a surrey with silk fringe and a leather dashboard that is drawn by snow-white horses. The song begins with Curley’s verse:

“When I take you out tonight with me / Honey, here’s the way it’s goin’ to be / You will set behind a team of snow-white horses / In the slickest gig you ever see!”\(^7\) “The Surrey With the Fringe on Top” begins in A major but the music for the phrase “snow-white horses” goes into the


\(^7\) Rodgers and Hammerstein, “The Surrey With the Fringe on the Top.”
crisp clarity of C major. The four syllables “snow-white horses” are spread across two measures, which Rodgers composed with an ascending melody beginning at E and ending at high D. This composition heavily emphasizes the snow-white horses’ significance as entities to be celebrated. The horses are further emphasized when Hammerstein inserts a droll commentary on the animals’ (lack of) color. As the second epigraph illustrates, when Laurey seeks verification about the details of the surrey and asks “Has it really got a team of snow-white horses?” Curley answers that they are two different colors: snow and milk (“So y’ can tell ‘em apart!” quips Aunt Eller). This light humor depends on the obvious fact that, of course, both snow and milk are equally pristine and indistinguishable in their perfect whiteness. Snow was repeatedly invoked in promotional marketing materials and managers’ assessments of vaudeville acts that utilized white animals.

“A high-class stage picture”: Visions of Whiteness

In this critical moment in Western industrial history, the idea of “whiteness” evoked powerful overlapping semiotics of personal hygiene, industrial efficiency, high art, moral purity, and racial dominance. Social historians of the United States and England have amply shown that, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, an increasing awareness of germ theory and microbes inspired middle-class reformers’ emphasis on personal hygiene. Efforts to improve public health and sanitation led to advancements in sewers and waste removal in industrial cities while an increased availability of raw materials from colonies led to an economic explosion in the metropoles’ consumer markets for soaps, creams, toothpaste, and other personal care products. With the government, reformers, and manufacturers emphasizing personal comportment and cleanliness, such discourses easily conflated with US nativists’ anxieties about and hostility towards immigration, the migration of former slaves and their descendants, and
colonial subjects—all threatening the “health” of the “national body.”8 The whiteness of ceramic bath tiles and porcelain sinks and tubs (newly common in the domestic space) strengthened associations between whiteness and hygiene.9 As one Russian Jewish immigrant described the facilities at Ellis Island, “the tile was white, the bed was white, the sheets were white, the light was bright and white.”10 Food historian Aaron Bobrow-Strain has recently connected these patterns of social thought and commerce to the rising popularity of factory-made, sliced white bread, which was bleached and doctored to achieve a gleaming white color and uniformity in shape. As Bobrow-Strain notes, the rhetoric of the era was based on the presumption that “white is a moral color.”11 Andrew Erdman has connected the same “promise of cleanliness, purity, even sterility” to the Keith-Albee publicity machine’s efforts to assuage the public’s concerns

11 Aaron Bobrow-Strain, *White Bread: A Social History of the Store-Bought Loaf* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 64-66. Bobrow-Strain details the building of a massive twentieth-century industrial bakery: “In 1910, the country’s greatest bread bakery opened on the corner of Vanderbilt and Pacific in Brooklyn’s Prospect Heights. Six stories tall with an alabaster white neoclassical façade, it was a shining temple to a new way of thinking about food ‘untouched by human hands.’ Gleaming surfaces, massive machinery, and light-filled halls proclaimed a new creed: industrial food is pure food, and pure food is the foundation of social progress.” (Bobrow-Strain, 20). The rhetoric of “‘model palaces of automatic baking’” that Bobrow-Strain cites from the National Association of Master Bakers’ 1915 *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Convention of the National Association of Master Bakers* shows remarkable resonance with the descriptions of vaudeville palaces. (Bobrow-Strain, 24).
over the morally questionable pursuit of mass entertainment. Several scholars have tied Keith and Albee’s obsessions with fastidious cleanliness to vaudeville’s promotional rhetoric of moral purity and wholesome entertainment. McLean and Erdman cite an 1894 Keith publicity pamphlet for its new Boston theatre that claimed the venue’s furnace room was carpeted with red velvet and decorated with marble-topped tables while the boiler room was staffed with coal stokers clad in white aprons. Vaudeville’s discursive evocation of industrial cleanliness and moral purity extended to the marketing of white horses, dogs, and birds.

As far as Keith and Albee were concerned, white animals were considered potent marketing opportunities. The vaudeville theatre managers’ weekly reports contain several comments on how the whiteness of animals impacted and improved the visual effect of acts. For instance, the fifteen small canines of Doherty’s Poodles waltzed and dressed in angel costumes as part of their act but Keith’s Philadelphia manager was more impressed with their appearance than their actions: “The little poodles do a good many stunts, but the fact that they are so snowy-white and

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13 See McLean on vaudeville palaces’ “triumph over dirt” as a “symbolic conquest” of the soot and grime of industrial labor. Albert F. McLean, Jr., *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 209. Also see Erdman’s chapter “‘Clean, Great, and National’: the Mass Marketing of Amusement” and Allen: “No doubt Keith’s obsession with the wholesomeness of the acts appearing on his stage and with rigidly defined norms for audience behavior and Albee’s equally compulsive standards of cleanliness were indications of a deeply felt need to separate their enterprise and themselves from all associations with ‘the low’” Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 185.
ribboned cut so daintily, is the chief attraction.”\textsuperscript{15} White horses seem to have made the most compelling impression. “Miss Thoma and Her Snow White Bronco Indian Chief” appeared on the Keith circuit in 1910 and 1911 and the Providence manager described them as “a manège act by a very pretty young girl on a white horse.”\textsuperscript{16} By naming the equine “Indian Chief” the ethnic masquerade that was so common in vaudeville was extended to the white bronco. According to Albert F. McLean’s rubric, the horse’s name served the totemic function of evoking the vast plains of the American West for the urban vaudeville audiences of the northeast. Meanwhile, the stallion’s whiteness layered a suggestion of pristine nature in its “snow-white” appearance. Snow and marble were common points of reference in marketing copy and managers’ descriptions. When the Cleveland Hippodrome presented Rose Royal and her horse, performing against a black panorama, the manager reported that the horse’s “striking poses…under the spotlight” were “as near like a marble statue as one can imagine.”\textsuperscript{17}

This is not to say that black animals were disparaged or never celebrated for their beauty. The circus aesthetic of symmetry contributed to a sense of what made a strong stage picture and when Herzog’s Horses appeared in Pittsburgh in 1905, the manager noted: “While there is nothing remarkable to the act it is a pretty picture and the act seems to please very much.”\textsuperscript{18} The Cleveland manager concurred: “They present a nice appearance being all black.”\textsuperscript{19} Nevertheless, such occasional appreciation of dark animals is not comparable to the repeated rhetorical and visual evocation of whiteness in vaudeville’s animal acts, which also borrowed its emphasis on equine whiteness from circus equestrian aesthetics. A favorable report of James Dutton and

\textsuperscript{15} Emphasis mine. Philadelphia, July 30, 1906, KAC, 6, 64.
\textsuperscript{16} Providence, January 9, 1911, KAC, 12, 194. Manège is the French term for an equestrian riding school. In contrast to the circus, manège formations traditionally take place in a rectangle.
\textsuperscript{17} Cleveland, January 3, 1911, KAC, 12, page unnumbered.
\textsuperscript{18} Pittsburgh, January 23, 1905, KAC, 4, 71.
\textsuperscript{19} Cleveland, February 27, 1905, KAC, 4, 104.
Company described the successful pairing of animal whiteness with human costumes in an act that played on the aristocratic associations of equestrianism: “one of the prettiest equestrian acts we have ever seen. Two white horses are used for the riding and they draw a white wagon all through the act. There is also a dog which adds to the beauty and everything being snow-white against a black background makes a high-class stage picture.”^20 Three years later, the act still impressed the Providence manager, who briefly described Dutton’s “Society equestrians with their white horse, dogs and paraphernalia and their own white costumes” concluding that, all together, “they make a most striking picture in vaudeville and their entrance is always sure of a round of applause.”^21 Like the haute école acts in the circus, Dutton’s act used signals of aristocratic bearing to frame the audiences’ reception. Whiteness was also the central motif of German haute école circus star Therese Renz, who toured the Keith circuit in 1905 after her US premiere at New York’s Hippodrome. Her signature act “Die Weisse Dame” (“The White Lady”) inverted the traditional European black dressage habit and maximized the vision of horse and woman melding into a single image. Renz donned a white dress (with corset), opera gloves, and large brimmed hat while riding sidesaddle and performing with her Lipizzan stallion, Conversana. The aristocratic heritage and whiteness of the Lipizzan was crucial to the act’s symbolic salience and aesthetic impact. In the European performance context, the agile, all-white horse was an immediately recognized symbol of the Hapsburgs because the breed was intentionally selected for whiteness (along with other physical attributes) at the Hapsburgs’ imperial stud farm. Cherished for its performances of military drills and dressage, it remains the

^21 Providence, December 30, 1918, KAC, 21, 160.
only breed used at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. Keith promoted Renz’s German heritage and her previous performance “before the Bavarian court” (which had taken place decades earlier, incidentally). A manager described Renz’s opening scene: “The stage is covered with a dark mat and backed with a dark drop. The curtain rises with Miss Renz sitting on the white horse on a pedestal --a handsome picture in itself.” By costuming herself to match her horse and by positioning horse and rider on a raised pedestal for admiration, Renz created a sculptural image of unified whiteness that exploited the dark backdrop to maximum effect.

Of Elephants and Soap

The practice of marketing animal whiteness had already been established by the time vaudeville reached its prime at the turn of the twentieth century. To establish this context, this section presents a specific example of the circulation of animal capital and the semiotics of whiteness as they manifested in the fierce capitalist promotion of white circus elephants during the 1880s. In 1880 a London newspaperman discovered that a circus showman was painting an elephant white to attract audiences. A few years after that incident, P.T. Barnum seized on the symbolic potential of whiteness and non-human ontology to market the so-called “white elephant,” Toung Taloung, in London in early 1884. This stunt eventually led to the “white elephant war” in the United States. Barnum obtained the elephant from Southeast Asia (most likely Burma) for an unknown sum and brought the animal to London as part of his on-going practice of exploiting racial discourses to rouse audiences. Sarah Amato argues that Toung

\footnote{See the website of the Lipizzan Association of North America, \url{www.lipizzan.org} accessed January 23, 2015. Also, see the PBS \textit{Nature} episode “Legendary White Stallions” originally broadcast May 1, 2013.}
\footnote{Boston, January 29, 1906, KAC, 5, 170.}
Taloung not only became “a living referent” to the imperial relationship between England and Burma and a “trophy of Britain’s imperial ambitions,” but his unusual hide “inspired a ‘scientific’ discussion of skin pigmentation and the nature of human racial difference” in London’s popular press. The London public was disappointed that Toung Taloung was “splotchy and insufficiently white…” and, according to Amato, this disappointment “provoked anxiety about the maintenance of racial purity and white privilege.” It also spurred Barnum’s main competitor in the United States, Adam Forepaugh, to acquire an elephant and cover it with paint or plaster of Paris (reports differ), and display the animal as the “Light of Asia” in Philadelphia six days before Barnum presented Toung Taloung at Madison Square Garden for the start of the 1884 circus season. Though Forepaugh’s hoax was revealed, “the American public vastly preferred Forepaugh’s dazzling white fake to the genuine, pale grey Burmese elephant.” Circus historian Janet Davis writes that the white elephant war ended when Forepaugh removed the paint from the “Light of Asia” and he became “an ordinary circus elephant again.” Amato relates a more morbid version of events: the competition from Forepaugh provoked Barnum to bleach one of his elephant’s skin and the publicity battle ended only when Forepaugh’s elephant died due to exposure to toxic paint.

Barnum’s publicity stunt in London led to an 1884 advertising campaign for Pears’ Soap in which “the animal became a consumer good linked with soap and concerns for racial hygiene.” Significantly, Amato argues, these animal-themed advertisements “laid the

25 ibid, 32.
27 ibid.
groundwork for more famous and racist ads figuring people.”

Anne McClintock has deftly explicated the racism and imperialist logic of Pears’ Soap advertisements in England. She cites an 1899 advertisement that claims: “The first step towards lightening the white man’s burden is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness.”

The ad depicts “an admiral decked in pure imperial white” and, in a border illustration, an African subject kneeling before an agent of imperialism. Amato articulates the conflation of animal and subjugated human within imperial logic by showing how, a decade and a half before the “White Man’s Burden” campaign, Pears’ Soap advertisements shifted from depicting the scrubbing of an elephant (“The real secret of the white elephant – Pears’ Soap”) to the scrubbing of a Black child. Assisted by a white boy with a scrub brush, the soap turns the Black child’s skin white from the neck down. As Amato notes, the ad copy “For improving and preserving the complexion” promotes the assumption that the Black child’s complexion has been improved by the cleansing power of Pears’.

In this example, the elephant, soap company, and icon of the pickaninny are all elements of a complicated network of economic, animal, and animalized capital that circulate in a global exchange of “signs and substances.”

**The Young Pickaninny and Adult “Coon” as Animalized Capital**

Soap companies in the United States practiced similar conflations of race, virtue, and hygiene, mobilizing animalized capital via renderings of Black children throughout the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era. Advertisements featured white children helping to clean or admonishing black children to clean themselves. For example, in an advertisement for the N.K.

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29 ibid.
30 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 32.
Fairbank Company’s Fairy Soap (“pure, white, floating—the soap of the century”) a blond child in a romper with matching socks and leather boots asks a barefoot black child in rags, “Why doesn’t your mama wash you with fairy soap?” The black child in the ad embodies the pernicious stereotype of the “wild, stupid and unkempt” pickaninny. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term “pickaninny” is likely derived from the Portuguese pequenino, the masculine form for “small child.” Documented use of the word appeared during the mid-seventeenth century in the Caribbean “through the Portuguese-based pidgins associated with trade (and especially the slave trade).” The pickaninny character was illustrated in a variety of visual styles, from the “realism” of the Fairbanks soap illustration to grotesque caricature which rendered the pickaninny beyond the category of human. The illustrator Roy F. Hanaford provided such a grotesquity to accompany a comic rhyme printed for amusement in a Hammerstein’s Victoria theatre playbill in 1912. The minstrelsy-dialect rhyme was about a foolish, cowardly thief and titled “The Picka-ninny’s Predicament.” The Fairbank Company depicted pickaninnies to sell its popular Fairy Soap and, even more famously, its Gold Dust Washing Powder. Fairbank’s “Gold Dust Twins” were black imps, nude from the waist up, who cavorted while they cleaned. Advertising copy invited consumers to “Let the Gold Dust Twins Do Your Work” and asked beleaguered women, “Are you a slave to housework? Gold Dust has done more than anything else to emancipate women from the back-breaking burdens of the

Here, the recent history of chattel slavery translated to ad copy humor directed at white women.

In her book *Racial Innocence*, Robin Bernstein notes that pickaninnies are “defined by three properties: juvenile status, dark skin, and, crucially, the state of being comically impervious to pain.” Bernstein, film scholar Donald Bogle, and vaudeville scholar M. Alison Kibler all point to Topsy from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as the paradigmatic pickaninny. Bernstein, in turn, draws on Linda Williams’s emphasis on the absolute contrast between Little Eva’s saintly whiteness and Topsy’s grotesque blackness as the dyadic structure on which later constructions of racial innocence were built. Bernstein’s close reading of black dolls, children’s literature, advertisements, and other aspects of material culture leads her to argue that “as childhood was defined as tender innocence, as vulnerability… the pickaninny—and the black juvenile it purported to represent—was defined out of childhood.”

More than defined out of childhood, Bernstein argues the category “pickaninny” defined black children out of suitability for future citizenship and humanity itself. The mechanisms of animal capital and animality in vaudeville were important components of this social process. Foregrounding the notion of animalized capital, it is hardly surprising that N.K. Fairbank Company was a lard refiner that depended on the by-products of Chicago’s industrial meat production to manufacture its soap. In fact, during

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36 Undated advertisement, author’s collection.
39 Referring to performed versions of Topsy in stage adaptations of Stowe’s novel, Bernstein notes “This refracted Topsy, emptied of innocence, became the prototype for the pickaninny, an imagined dehumanized black juvenile and a staple of U.S. popular culture.” ibid., 16.
40 ibid.
41 ibid., 36.
the 1890s N.K. Fairbank’s advertisements featured illustrations of pigs and proudly promoted the company as a lard refiner. The company used the animalized capital of pickaninny caricatures to mask the “animal capital” of rendered pig fat in Fairbank’s Fairy Soap, one of its signature consumer products.

“Trained Cockatoos and Things”

Vaudeville was a significant site of transmission for the pickaninny myth, as nearly any young African American vaudeville performer was, in Kibler’s phrasing, “molded into the caricature of the pickaninny.”43 Performances featuring groups of young black singers and dancers were called “pickaninny acts” (abbreviated to “pick acts”). A white adult female singer led the children. Mayme Remington, Leona Thurber, Louise Dresser, and Josephine Gassman all performed in pick acts, sometimes managing the children’s movements from a distance and sometimes joining them.44 The young performers harmonized, danced, tumbled, and performed physical comedy. Unlike white child celebrities such as Anna Laughlin or Zena Keife, most African American juvenile performers in “pick acts” remained anonymous and could be replaced when they became too mature to be contained by the stereotype of the irascible pickaninny. Even as the African American children stayed anonymous, their identity was anchored in the assumption that their character could not change, while the white female performers were permitted to theatrically take on and remove identities.45

43 Kibler, Rank Ladies, 119.
44 ibid, 120-121.
The performing children were presented as something like pets; smaller creatures who could follow commands and endear themselves to the audience with their small stature and boisterousness. Acts were usually promoted with the white woman’s name first and the possessive pronoun “her,” as in, “Mayme Remington and Her Pickaninnies.” This underscored the pick act’s performance of possession and control. In addition, it was the same grammatical structure used for animal acts in which only the trainer was named in the bill. “Picks” were sometimes referred to as “blackbirds,” as this 1901 clipping from a Rhode Island newspaper shows. The linguistic slippage between animals and black children had the potential to confuse vaudeville patrons. *Variety* columnist Anna Marble reported, “Leona Thurber, billed as ‘assisted by her Blackbirds,’ would do well to explain on the program that this reference is to

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46 Nov. 2, 1902, KAC, 32, 56.
pickaninnies. Several men who sat behind me the other night got up and left the theatre before the appearance of Miss Thurber. One said ‘Come on! I can’t stand for trained cockatoos and things!’

African American children were conflated with trained animal performers through both the linguistic and theatrical grammar of pick acts.

The Coon Song Craze

In pick acts, the white women who performed with black children sang “coon songs,” a style that “combined syncopated rhythms with racist lyrics and often racial dialect.”

coon songs reached their height of popularity in the 1890s, though they were still disseminated as sheet music and records into the 1920s and were incorporated into Broadway musicals as well.

The fin de siècle song genre transported antebellum associations into the twentieth century. The racial epithet “coon” has an uncertain etymology, possibly tied to an eighteenth-century English ballad opera that featured a Caribbean character named “Raccoon.”

African American slaves were likely associated with the animal because some practiced the resourceful hunting of small

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48 Kibler, Rank Ladies, 119.  
49 Regarding the historically specific timeframe of coon songs’ popularity, Kibler notes the famed coon shouter May Irwin was already “a nostalgic figure during her 1907-8 vaudeville tour.” ibid, 133. Ernest Hogan, who referred to himself as the “unbleached American,” credited coon songs with fostering his career and integrating the vaudeville stage. “With the advent of ‘coon’ songs came the colored people into variety in large numbers. To the popular demand for ‘coon’ songs the writer believes he owes much, for it was shortly after he wrote the first syncopated ‘coon’ song ever written, ‘Pasmala,’ followed by ‘All Coons Look Alike to Me,’ that he made his debut on the Eastern vaudeville stage.” Hogan also credits Bert Williams and George Walker’s 1896 “Two Real Coons” stint at Koster & Bial’s with popularizing the form and offers accolades to the musical team Cole and Johnson for bringing “new lyrics and an artistic element” to black performance modes in vaudeville. Ernest Hogan, “The Negro in Vaudeville” Variety, December 15, 1906.  
forest creatures such as raccoons, fowl, rabbits, squirrels and possums.\textsuperscript{51} In a nation of frontier folk, many of whom did not own land, could African American slaves ever have been the only ones to hunt small animals? It seems the persistent association of blackface minstrelsy characters with raccoons (and possums) was a rhetorical strategy to mark the economic status of blacks and tether minstrelsy’s fantasies of blackness to animality as a mode of mockery and social control.\textsuperscript{52} The racist use of “coon” to refer to African Americans may also come from a macabre collapsing of human and animal because runaway slaves “were hunted by their masters on horseback and treed by packs of hounds,”\textsuperscript{53} much the way raccoons and possums were hunted.

This section reviews coon songs’ discourses of animality in order to trace a connection between Black juvenile performers in vaudeville and the potentially violent lyrics they may have been dancing to, or might someday sing themselves if they continued to perform as adults. In addition, it underscores vaudeville’s inheritance of minstrelsy’s obsessive circulation of animalized capital via discursive constructions of blackness that aimed to impart symbolic violence. The two iconic characters of antebellum blackface minstrelsy, Jim Crow and Zip Coon, have last names that evoke animals. Zip Coon, the sexually slick northern dandy, was popularized by George Washington Dixon during the 1830s. Before Zip Coon, Dixon had success with the song “Long Tail Blue” (1827), about a black character who preened and pontificated like a cock-of-the-walk. Long Tail Blue wore a special coat on Sundays that made him irresistible to ladies. Monica L. Miller notes that Long Tail Blue’s dapper jacket was “a

\textsuperscript{51} “George and Mack was de hunters. Whey dey went huntin’ dey brought back jus’ evvything: possums, rabbits, coons, squirrels, birds, and wild turkeys.” James Mellon, ed., \textit{Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember: An Oral History} (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 6. A former enslaved subject named Issam Morgan explained how a group of men would hunt together, using hounds to tree a possum, 43-44.

\textsuperscript{52} Chinese immigrants were similarly disparaged as “rat-eaters” as a strategy to define difference, as well as disgust.

\textsuperscript{53} Mellon, \textit{Bullwhip Days}, xiv.
symbol of potential animalism in both physiognomy and sexuality.\(^{54}\) Long Tail Blue and Zip Coon’s lasciviousness stood in contrast to Thomas D. Rice’s genre-defining blackface character, the shuffling “darkey,” Jim Crow. The record is murky at best, but according to an 1867 *Atlantic Monthly* article, Rice was supposedly inspired to imitate the singing and dancing of an elderly (and possibly disabled) slave who was working in a stable singing:

> Turn about an’ wheel about, an’ do jis so,

> An’ ebery time I turn about I jump Jim Crow.\(^{55}\)

To imitate the black laborer who drove horses for his master, Rice wore rags and gave a “simian curl of his fingers”\(^{56}\) to suggest deformity as he sang and danced. A burlesque of age, poverty, and physical ability in addition to race, there is no indication that animality was a blatant part of Rice’s Jim Crow act. Nevertheless, as Barbara Lewis argues, “Through the very name of Crow, the black body was animalized, defined as a member of a subhuman species. Crow made materially evident, through the ludicrousness of the clothes and dance, the excommunication of the black body outside humanity’s gates.”\(^{57}\) The coon songs of the 1890s inherited tropes from antebellum minstrelsy such as the idealization of the southern plantation, stereotypical animal associations, an obsessive preoccupation with black physiognomy, and narratives of the black


\(^{56}\) Lewis, “Dark Daddy” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask*, 267.

\(^{57}\) ibid. Lewis continues, “Crow iconographically confirmed the chattelization or demotion of the black body, an attitude that would find legal sanction in the 1857 Dred Scott decision that decreed that black bodies were only fractionally human.”
urban dandy. However, in an era of acute racial tension and political agitation, overtly menacing themes came to appear in coon songs and this menace added still more power to the symbolic violence against African Americans via discourses of animality. In other words, if a Black child who performed in vaudeville was a success, the child’s professional options were most likely to be further animalized as an adult. The paradigmatic example of this trajectory is the virtuosic dancer Bill Robinson, who started as a pick and grew to become a blackbird.

James H. Dormon notes the characters in fin de siècle coon songs were often marked by violence or the potential for violence, signaled by razors or guns and descriptions of actual black-on-black fights. In addition, coon songs often depicted African American male protagonists in states of moral degeneracy. The characters stole, gambled, spent wildly, and were beholden to their aggressive libidos. As Dormon and others have argued, a more pernicious and threatening black protagonist was imagined for a nation without the legal structures of slavery to maintain the social hierarchy. For an example of how rhetorics of animality and coon songs intertwined beyond frequent references to Black characters hunting possums and coons and stealing chickens, it is instructive to look at the “bully” subgenre of coon songs. This was a subgenre in which the African American protagonist (written in the first or third person) was known for his violent swagger and intimidation. “De Blue Gum Nigger” (1899), “Leave Your Razors at the Door” (c.1900), and “I’m the Toughest, Toughest Coon” (1904), are part of the bully subgenre. The “coon shouter” May Irwin was particularly famous for including the bully song in her repertoire. Ned Wayburn and Stanley Whiting published a second set of lyrics they called a

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58 As Dormon argues, all this happened within the comic veneer of coon songs so it was crucial that the violence only be black-on-black because “to involve whites would eliminate the comic veneer altogether.” Dormon, “Shaping the popular image of post-Reconstruction American Blacks,” 460.
59 ibid., 460-461.
“coon parody” with the sheet music of their 1897 ragtime song “Syncopated Sandy.” To fit the coon genre, they replaced their original lyrics about a “happy and contented darktown dandy” with the story of a criminal brought to the edge of death. The coon parody lyrics begin with “I’m a bold, bad nigger crook” and the second verse details how, after being released from prison, Sandy was accused of stealing a white man’s horse. Sandy’s story culminates in the third verse:

Way down in old Tennessee
They had me up a tree,
‘Twas at a lynching bee
With the hemp necktie on me;
When I stuck my neck like the very goose
Like a big giraffe –they cut me loose
But said this vile abuse

Chorus:
Syncopated Sandy. The Dare-devil dandy,
The meanest man that ever lived,
So mean he beats his wife.
As bad as he can be,
The worst in Tennessee,
A coon that leads a really reckless life.

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By providing two sets of lyrics for one melody, Wayburn and Whiting offered consumers their choice of which stereotype they found more compelling: the antebellum “darky” or the animalized contemporary criminal. Wayburn was responsible for some particularly virulent songs. As I argue in chapter two, white women and horses were often conflated in popular culture during the vaudeville era due to precision dance troupes termed “pony ballets” and the regimented expectations of performing equine and feminine bodies. Wayburn used the analogy in his song “She’s a Thoroughbred,” written for famed coon shouter May Irwin’s 1898 musical comedy *Kate Kip, Buyer*.

Chorus:

For she’s a Thoroughbred
And the best in town
She’s not a regular nigger,
Just a chocolate brown!
If I had my way I’d be hanging ’round
The wench that wears the striped gown.

Second Verse:

If ever this girl you chance to meet
You can tell her by her Chicago feet.
With big, thick lips and a big, flat nose.
She’s inky black from her head to her toes;
She’s a real warm wench from ‘way down South,
With witch-hazel eyes and a mammoth mouth
And up-on her bed, because she’s stout
Wayburn’s lyrics echo the macabre connotations of a *blazon* poem, in which a woman’s body parts are enumerated, or verbally dissected, in an expression of erotic desire. Though sexual conquest is not absent in “She’s a Thoroughbred,” the body parts of the “wench” (possibly meant to be imagined as a minstrelsy drag character) are sliced and diced for mockery rather than celebration. She is evaluated in parts like thoroughbred horses, who are assessed for their “muscling” and “structural correctness,” as determined by an evaluation of their leg bones.

Thus far, pickaninny acts and coon songs have been presented as monolithically dehumanizing and in service to structures of racial domination. One subgenre of coon songs, however, complicates this model. Coon song lullabies addressed to pickaninnies muddle rather than reinforce the characterization of the pickaninny. Some pickaninny-themed coon songs did depict irascible and wicked children in the style of Topsy’s stage manifestations. For example, the 1895 song “Climb de Golden Fence (Oh My! Wicked Pickaninny),” debuted in a production of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* at the Tivoli Opera House in San Francisco and contains predictable lyrics such as “I nebber saw de chicken I did not want to steal.” However, many songs like “Pickaninny Mine, Come Hide Away” (1899) and “Pickaninny Dreams” (1919), were lyrically

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(if not musically) sentimental lullabies in which a mammy sang to an imagined black baby or small child. As in antebellum minstrelsy songs like Stephen Foster’s *Old Kentucky Home* and *Old Folks at Home*, a supposedly idyllic southern domestic scene is evoked with lyrics about ivy-covered cottages or small cabins, bucolic vegetation and animal life, and scene-setting moonlight. Many writers have identified the multiple political possibilities of minstrelsy songs that converted “the South into a kind of timeless lost home, a safe imaginary childhood.”\(^\text{64}\) Even if the songs’ primary appeal was to elicit sentimental nostalgia in the audience and to give more white singers an opportunity to perform racial impersonation, the lyrics present children who are inherently loveable and actively loved. They need care and are entreated to “cuddle to mammy” even as they are threatened with a spanking or being warned about the “bogeyman” coming if they don’t fall asleep. Perhaps these “lullabies” reveal the worst sort of sentimentality in which the over-romanticization of the helpless infant or toddler serves a compensatory function for the hostility that met black juveniles, especially boys, as they grew too close to adult sexuality and potential citizenship. At the same time, the mother is not busy nurturing a white family’s progeny; she is there for her own. Though there are references to watermelon, nappy hair, and rolling on the cabin floor, the black children populating these songs are hardly the same unkempt and, in Bernstein’s formulation, “insensate pickaninnies” of turn-of-the-century soap advertisements and children’s material culture.

Baked Blackbirds

In another iteration of the pickaninny, the dance prodigies Fayard and Harold Nicholas (ages 17 and 11) performed in the 1932 Vitaphone/Warner Brothers short *Pie, Pie, Blackbird*. The brothers, who would eventually perform a sublime dance sequence in the film *Stormy Weather* (1943), began their careers as child prodigies in US vaudeville while their parents ran the orchestra pit at the black-owned Standard Theatre in Philadelphia. *Pie, Pie, Blackbird* opens with singer Nina Mae McKinney glamorously made up yet costumed as a mammy as she sings to the boys, “The master says it takes a blackbird to make the sweetest kind of pie.” The Nicholas Brothers are handsomely dressed in collared shirts under fitted sweaters and are not at all the standard image of wild and wily pickaninnies. Nevertheless, McKinney asks them “Don’t you remember that song I used to sing for ya when you were little pickaninnies?” A pie cooling on the counter opens and becomes a scene (supposedly the interior of the pie) in which the famed African American conductor and pianist Eubie Blake is dressed as a chef and leads a band of black musicians, rendering the virtuosic musicians as “blackbirds” baked into a pie. Thus, the film makes visually literal the linguistic humor of the minstrelsy song: the pie is both made by the “blackbird” mammy and made of “blackbird” musicians. Blake’s band plays the hit song “(I’ll Be Glad When You’re Dead) You Rascal You” and Blake changes the lyrics to address his co-performers while gesturing to them with his baton: “When you is dead it will be grand / ‘cause I’m a get myself another band!” This light ribbing seems good-natured but is in fact a portent of the macabre humor that ends the film. The Nicholas Brothers re-enter (at 7:56) dressed in dark trousers and white chef hats and smocks. For two minutes the boys execute exceptional

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jazz tap steps, which dance scholar and cultural historian Constance Valis Hill has analyzed with illuminating technical precision. Hill recoups the historical significance of Blake, McKinney, and the Nicholas brothers’ engaging display of technical prowess. However, in so doing, she circumvents the metanarrative of the *mise en scène* and special effects that end the short film. In the final forty seconds, “the incinerating rhythms of their time steps, crossovers, and wings are apparently so ‘hot’ that they start to burn up the floor. The blackbird pie containing the musicians and dancers suddenly becomes enveloped in smoke and then bursts into flame.”67 The impending incineration raises the stakes of the film’s symbolic violence as the performers’ combustible talents lead to the depiction of their demise. The burst of flame is accompanied by an alarming howl and driving percussion that momentarily silences the band’s exuberant music. As Hill describes the ending, “Through the fire and smoke… Fayard and Harold continue tapping. All that is left of them, in the very last image of the film, is a pair of rattling, tap-dancing skeletons.”68 The entire blackbird band is, in fact, composed (or decomposed) of skeletons still sitting in the giant pie. They have been baked alive, just as the nursery rhyme states. Not only stripped of their humanity, but also stripped of their bodies, the bones of the brothers and the band play on for the pleasure of the viewer. The film points to Bernstein’s assertion that the label of “pickaninny” welcomed violence and offers a clear example of how racialized bodies were interpolated in animalized capital. *Pie, Pie, Blackbird* uses the “Four and Twenty Blackbirds” nursery rhyme and the persistent animalization of African American performers to create a series of visual jokes that depend on the violent disposability of black bodies.

67 *ibid*, 57.
68 *ibid*, 57-58.
And yet, a monolithic reading of such dispersed and reception-dependent phenomena is impossible. Various scholars have argued Black performers such as the Caribbean American comic Bert Williams and professional dancer Aida Overton Walker were actively signifying on known stereotypes and/or employing strategies of double consciousness throughout their successful careers.\textsuperscript{69} Rhetorics of animality were multifaceted and polyvalent. From African American folk tales to animal-themed ragtime dances including the Turkey Trot, Grizzly Bear, and the Bunny Hop, animal characteristics and movements were evoked within African American cultural production to teach lessons and invite pleasure.\textsuperscript{70} Nevertheless, within a larger social context of post-Darwin eugenic thought and modern industrialization, tropes of animality allowed white producers and consumers of mass culture to ascribe to African Americans the damaging stereotypes of impulsive actions and lack of reason as justifications for disenfranchisement, segregation, economic oppression, and state and vigilante violence.

The “joke” of \textit{Pie Pie Blackbird} depends on the common slang “blackbird” as a term for Black dancers, singers, and/or musicians. The slang could be interpreted as playful, celebratory, or derisive and it is exactly that ambiguity that


kept it circulating in popular culture for so many decades. To be bird-like may have ascribed qualities of gravity-defying lightness or nimble technique to dancers or musicians. It may have evoked the clusters of undifferentiated blackness Stowe conjured in 1852. It could easily do both. In 1906 the Black vaudevillian Ernest Hogan performed “12 Blackbirds” at Keeney’s in New York City. Stowe’s image of roosting blackbirds was echoed in the white comedians Charles Mack and George Moran’s blackface team “Two Black Crows.” Because of the diffusion of mass culture through vaudeville, piano sheet music, film, and early radio, the common association of “blackbirds” with African American performers remained easily recognizable into the Jazz Age. Florence Mills had a tremendous hit with the song “I’m a Little Blackbird Looking for a Bluebird” from Lew Leslie’s 1924 revue *Dixie to Broadway*. The prominent Black critic Theophilus Lewis praised Mills’ interplay between a “technique of restraint” and a “technique of abandon” while castigating Leslie’s production style. Writing under the pen name Roger Didier, the Black journalist P.L. Prattis pointedly condemned Leslie for his “repetition of the threadbare stereotypes of defunct minstrelsy” in *Dixie to Broadway*. The blackbird motif continued in Leslie’s revue *Blackbirds of 1926*, starring Mills at the Alhambra Theatre in Harlem before it travelled to London and Paris, increasing Mills’ international reputation and facilitating the “blackbird” motif’s transatlantic travel. Leslie’s *Blackbirds of 1928* premiered on Broadway featuring Bill Robinson, who had begun his career as a “pick” in Mayme Remington’s act. In such revues, the performers’ virtuosity was usually framed by racist tropes via costuming,

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74 The show existed intertextually with Josephine Baker’s 1925 *La Revue Nègre.*
mise en scène, and themed songs such as “Jungle Nights in Dixieland.”\textsuperscript{75} Blackbirds of 1936 took place at the Gaiety Theatre in London and featured the Nicholas Brothers.\textsuperscript{76} The following year they performed on Broadway in Rodgers and Hart’s Babes in Arms, playing the DeQuincy Brothers and singing, “All Dark People Are Light On Their Feet,” which some scholars classify as a coon song. Pickaninny characters and coon songs remained part of the US popular performance mode, stretching across nearly a century from minstrelsy to Broadway. Vaudeville and musical revues perpetuated the logic of animalized capital that sustained their popularity.

The Animalized Capital of Bucking Mules and Black(face)

The chapter’s final section presents another mode of big-time vaudeville’s animalized capital, this time working in intimate conjunction with animal capital. By examining how black(face) clowns were used in farcical comedy mule and donkey acts, we can see the extent to which animal and animalized capital mutually constituted each other on the vaudeville stage and beyond. The British music hall performer Cliff Berzac transformed the classic slapstick circus act of the kicking/unrideable mule into a US-style minstrelsy routine when he replaced the act’s traditional inept clown with a black character. As was the case with many of the animal routines I discuss in earlier chapters, the Keith circuit pursued a dual strategy of using an animal act to attract the juvenile audience while attempting to elevate the status of the act by emphasizing Berzac’s “European” provenance (despite the fact that music hall was largely working-class entertainment in England). Cliff Berzac was billed as “Mr. Keith’s latest European importation” when he came to the United States for the beginning of the fall 1905 season.\textsuperscript{77} His act featured “four of the cutest and cleverest ponies ever exhibited,” and a donkey named Paul Kruger,

\textsuperscript{75} See Broadway World’s score review for Blackbirds of 1926, Accessed February 21, 2015. \url{http://www.broadwayworld.com/bwidb/sections/shows/score.php?var=5582}
\textsuperscript{76} Baker and Mills had both made names for themselves in 1921’s Shuffle Along on Broadway.
\textsuperscript{77} Providence News, September 9, 1905, KAC, Series II, 38, 93.
presumably named for the Boer political leader and former state president of the South African Republic who had died in exile in 1904. Berzac placed his act within the political context of British imperialism by naming the obstinate but clearly trained donkey after an enemy of the English state. Berzac performed for two weeks in Boston and then in Providence, and continued his stateside engagement at F.F. Proctor’s Fifty-Eighth Street Theatre in New York City that December. Berzac offered $100 to anyone who could successfully ride Paul Kruger. In keeping with the conventions of this standard circus routine, plants in the audience volunteered and failed spectacularly. Most of the laughs came from “the antics and falls of those attempting to ride” which led to audience members “jumping up and down in their chairs shrieking with laughter.”

Though the audience knew the act was rehearsed, their investment in the notion that the performing mule was choosing to reject its would-be rider was essential for its success. The energetic rebuffing by the mule and the convincing performances of the would-be riders imparted “the effect of spontaneity.” Variety reported the act was a tremendous hit “and the gallery is packed as a consequence with all the youngsters.” The matrix of animal agency, juvenile audience members, aspirational marketing, slapstick humor, and semi-legible political associations were all at work in Berzac’s act. While Berzac originally anchored his routine within the context of British imperialism and nationalist identity, the central motif transformed over the following decade to depend on the racial stereotype of the black minstrelsy fool.

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78 Sime Silverman, Variety, December 23, 1905. Proctor’s gave away Christmas presents to young audience members as an additional marketing strategy.
79 Sime Silverman, Variety, December 23, 1905.
80 Chicot, Variety, December 30, 1905.
81 Sime Silverman, Variety, December 23, 1905.
Berzac periodically worked the Keith circuit as a closer for over ten years. In 1916 managers were still pleased the “well known act put an excellent finish to the bill.” Berzac had kept the kicking mule as his wow finish. He had also altered the production values and signifying methods of the act by including a revolving table on which a black character attempted to ride the mule. In this scenario, the African American male, who had been promised forty acres and a mule after the Civil War, became the ultimate stooge. The revolving table, like a slave auction block, served the audience by allowing a panoptic view of this “man vs. beast” burlesque. African Americans slaves and sharecroppers worked alongside mules. Prior to the freeing of the slaves in 1865, it was, of course, common for plantation owners to inventory slaves alongside their livestock. The false promise of “forty acres and a mule” during Reconstruction haunted post-Civil War struggles for social justice and economic independence. There is no escaping the racial significance to the act or its influence on the routine’s long-time success in the United States, thus generating economic capital for theatre owners, bookers, and agents via the circulation of animal and animalized capital.

The routine reverberated in vaudeville because it activated familiar associations. In addition to laboring alongside beasts of burden, African American men had been closely associated with horse riding for several decades. Many of the country’s first jockeys were slaves riding their owner’s horses and at the first Kentucky Derby in 1875, all but one of the jockeys was of African descent. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, African American riders dominated the sport. Indeed, the writer Edmund Day included an African American jockey character named

“Boots Jones” who rode a horse named “Possum” in vaudeville’s tremendous 1906 hit melodrama *The Futurity Winner*. As the playlet was really about a moral struggle between two white brothers who rode against each other in the climactic race, the Jones character served as a sign of authenticity in depicting the Sheepshead Bay stable and to fill theatrical space with a third rider whom the audience could immediately understand to be excluded from the plot. In that sense, Boots Jones served to highlight and clarify the characterization and actions of the white jockeys the same way black backdrops frequently provided contrast for the white animal performers.

Live performance worked intertextually with material culture to circulate forms of animalized capital that degraded people of color and maligned ethnic groups. As with the soap advertisements and coon songbooks discussed earlier, children’s mechanical banks promoted the Black man / mule association and invited users to view violence towards the black body as amusing and within their control. As early as 1879, the J. & E. Stevens Company, a major manufacturer of popular cast-iron mechanical banks and other toys, produced a bank titled “Always did ‘spise a mule.” Advertising copy described it as “A most amusing bank, made of cast iron throughout. Place a coin in the rider’s mouth and touch a spring. The mule’s heels are flung up, the rider is thrown over the mule’s head, and the coin is shot into the bank as the unfortunate nigger's head strikes the ground.”

Mechanical banks and other cast-iron toys were an important aspect of middle-class material culture from the 1880s – 1920s. While these toys engaged stereotypes of Chinese and Irish immigrants, American Indians, and African Americans,

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the representation of African Americans far outstripped those of any other group.\textsuperscript{86} The banks corroborated and perpetuated the ethnic and racial stereotypes performed for a wider class base in minstrelsy and vaudeville.\textsuperscript{87} To briefly return to the figure of the animalized black child, the “Baby Mine” cast-iron mechanical bank (patented in 1884) sold for 85 cents. The bank presented black childhood as an animalized source of open and continuous consumption in its depiction of “a seated black woman spoon feeding a grotesque caricature of a small black child.”\textsuperscript{88} Archaeologists Christopher P. Barton and Kyle Somerville note that when the bank’s designer, Alfred C. Rex, applied for a patent application, Rex claimed the motif of a voracious baby and accommodating mammy was not essential to the bank’s success: “‘If desired, \textit{the figures may be animals in place of human beings}, the essential feature being the feeding [action]’ (Rex 1884).”\textsuperscript{89}

Barton and Somerville point out “Children were taught not only the value of economic capital in a capitalist society but also the reproducing stereotype of the… African American – a race to be viewed by white children as their social inferior.”\textsuperscript{90} As with sheet music illustrations and lyrics, the banks brought embodied stereotypes into the domestic sphere and invited consumers to

\textsuperscript{86} Over 80\% of the toys in Barton and Somerville’s data sample depict African Americans in negative and stereotypical ways. About 10\% depict Chinese characters, and 8\% American Indian. There was only one Irish character toy in the data sample, the “Paddy and the Pig/Shamrock Bank.”

\textsuperscript{87} “Between 1880 and 1930, the popularity of racialized toys and banks were fear-based responses to the perceived encroachment by ‘foreign and exotic’ migrations of African American, Chinese, Irish and Native Americans into the cultural landscape of white middle-class America.” Barton and Somerville, “Play Things,” 47. The authors note the banks that still exist and allow contemporary analysis “have been pulled out of their contexts of their original child owners” and because “these objects lack a firm archeological context” it is difficult to assert how class, gender, age, and even race and ethnicity framed the banks’ domestic uses for their consumers. Nevertheless, the authors organized and cataloged sufficient data on 103 toys (including 48 mechanical banks) to make strong claims about the banks within the late-Victorian social and political context of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Barton and Somerville, 49.

\textsuperscript{88} Barton and Somerville, “Play Things,” 52.

\textsuperscript{89} ibid., emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{90} ibid, 62.
rehearse symbolic and literal violence against ethnic and racial others. The bank is an example of racially ideological slapstick humor in which the body in pain is rendered comic. With these banks, middle-class children were encouraged to pursue the accumulation of capital through violence done to those outside its means of accumulation.

In 1897, a second version of “Always did ‘spise a mule” was produced and was known as “Boy on Bench.” The company described an “innocent-looking mule facing a darkey, touch the spring and the mule whirls about suddenly and kicks the darkey over, throwing the coin from the bench into the receptacle below.” In fact, the mule swings around on a small turntable which functions like a stage turntable by creating movement on a static structure. The abrupt swing creates the appearance of the mule’s hind hooves smacking the black figure in the head. An English company also produced an “Always did ‘spise a mule” mechanical bank in 1902 and, even as late as 1921, Butler Bros. of New York City also manufactured a kicking mule bank. The depiction of an African American man being injured due to the kicking and swinging actions of a mule were kept in circulation for over forty years via mechanical banks. The motif was brought to embodied life on the vaudeville stage. The hands of middle-class white children controlled the actions of the cast-iron mules while, in vaudeville, white male trainers dictated the movements of live donkeys and mules.

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91 See YouTube video “I ALWAYS DID 'SPISE A MULE Bank Mechanical Bank Video,” Video by Jack Allen, posted by THEBANKCOLLECTOR, September 7 2013, accessed March 19, 2015, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHxUPj2sZOo). The same collector has also uploaded footage of the 1882 “Paddy and the Pig” bank. This is the same bank that Barton and Somerville included in their study. A grotesque stage Irishman holds a pig and the coin is placed on the pig’s snout. When the lever is pulled, the pig’s hooves fling the coin into Paddy’s mouth while his eyes roll. As Eric Lott notes, there were overlaps between the stage Irishman and the black minstrelsy buffoon. Lott, Love and Theft, 95.
In an act of typical vaudevillian mimesis, other trainers developed routines nearly identical to Berzac’s.\textsuperscript{92} According to Anthony Slide, the clown character in the famous Fink’s Mules was “a stereotypical stupid Negro.”\textsuperscript{93} Fink’s only innovation was the addition of monkeys. The act opened at New York’s Palace Theatre in April 1918.\textsuperscript{94} Sime Silverman observed in \textit{Variety}, “The trainer is middle-aged, the setting and apparatus are bright looking, also clean, with the animals the same.”\textsuperscript{95} The racialized humor in the act would, of course, have been so ordinary that there would be no reason to mention it. Of more interest to Silverman was the professionalism of the whole presentation and, as I discuss in chapter three, the \textit{apparent} care for the performing animal. A version of Berzac’s act was able to proliferate beyond the temporal confines of vaudeville because it was filmed. The two-minute 1933 British Pathé film “Harnessing a Mule” asks audiences, “Ever tried to ensnare a mule? No? Well, just meet Cliff Berzac.” Staged in the courtyard of a white brick stable, a man in blackface, tails, spats, and white gloves, uses the signature inflections of minstrelsy patter to complain to Berzac: “When I bought this mule you told me he was goin in harness!” Berzac (an older man by now, wearing a hat and dark double-breasted overcoat) claims the mule will go in harness and orders a farmhand to assist. Berzac remains on the periphery of the action. Farmhands evade kicks while other farmhands (standing in for the film audience) laugh as the blackface comedian (performing a version of the bumbling but arrogant minstrelsy negro) struggles to harness the mule and calls

\textsuperscript{92} Rex’s Comedy Circus, Albert Hickey's Comedy Circus and Max's Burlesque Circus all featured an unrideable mule on a revolving platform as their wow finish. It is unclear if they also used a black character to struggle with the animal because the archive does not refer to it. This does not prove much, however, because many managers and reviewers did not bother to comment on standard conventions of specific performance genres.

\textsuperscript{93} Anthony Slide, \textit{The Encyclopedia of Vaudeville} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2012), 185.

\textsuperscript{94} ibid.

“Git to his head! Go on git to his head! Don’t you know which end is his head?” When the blackface comedian gets booted in the rear, a farmhand calls “Oh, you’ll have a black eye in the morning!” The short comedy film ends with Berzac playing a passer-by and earning a shilling by easily harnessing the mule, after which he picks up a crop and leads the animal in a brief display of bipedalism and trotting. This film cannot serve as a precise stand-in for Berzac’s vaudeville routines. Not only was it shot decades after Berzac’s US debut, but, the stable setting naturalizes the mule’s presence, neutering, if you will, the theatrical potency of a spinning turntable under a grand proscenium arch. Nevertheless, the film offers important information about the racial ideologies imbedded in vaudeville’s popular unrideable mule acts. Such “light entertainment” was the flip side of vaudeville’s rhetorical and aesthetic preoccupation with whiteness and would-be purity. Vaudeville performances by animals and of animality promoted ideologies of white supremacy penetrating deeper than the mask of blackface. They mobilized animal and animalized capital in various forms, rendering Black children and adults as base, impulsive, and otherwise outside the category of human, mimetically multiplying discursive constructions of racial hierarchies. Scientific beliefs in such racial constructions were often informed by the misappropriation of Darwinist theories and the study of animal physiology and behavior. In my final chapter, I examine the ways primate and even canine acts contributed to popular discourses about evolution, human cognition, and ontology.

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Chapter 5: Evolution and Co-evolution in Vaudeville

I am the dog. No, the dog is himself, and I am the dog. O, the dog is me, and I am myself.¹

William Shakespeare, The Two Gentlemen of Verona

More than other animal species, performing canines and primates embodied the complex and mysterious processes of evolution for vaudeville audiences. By studying the performances of great apes, monkeys, and dogs alongside each other, we can better see how these animal turns played with questions surrounding natural and artificial selection, as well as what it meant to be a person and have a personality. Many human vaudeville acts addressed these very questions and anthropomorphic acts starring primates and dogs existed intertextually with vaudeville’s human mimics. From Ibsen’s Ghosts to the “humanist hell” of Eugene O’Neill’s The Hairy Ape, the legitimate theatre was also obsessed with whether human personality traits were inherited and inevitable or chosen and ever-changeable.² Such inquiries were particularly significant in the vaudeville era as the nation struggled to articulate a modern American identity and debated qualification for citizenship and the right to move freely in public space. Primate and canine parodic bodies permitted a feeling of distance that allowed these acts to be presented as absurd and even apolitical, even when the performances clearly telegraphed ideologies of gender, class, and race.

Primates and dogs powerfully evoke kinship and companionship. Although horses enabled humans to build cities, transport goods, and fight wars, primates and dogs remain humans’ closest intimates and various anthropomorphic and athletic performances were based on these connections by having the animals stand in for humans through metonymic or metaphoric representation. Apes activated a panoply of potent social associations including childishness, normative masculinity, and social Darwinism. To behold an ape was to contemplate human origins and wonder, is this who we once were? By what criteria do we define humanity, and, once defined, who sits on the boundaries of that definition? Here, audiences contemplated the incomprehensible vastness of evolutionary time within vaudeville’s measured-to-the-minute industrial time. Because of their tails and generally smaller size compared to great apes, monkeys managed to be both curious and ridiculous mimics compared with the remarkable cognitive and physical capacities of vaudeville apes. Primates and canines provided ideal parodic bodies with which trainers could satirize conventions of the stage and offer anthropomorphic comedies of manners. Though less overtly, evolution also shaped the paradigms of canine performances. The diversity of dog breeds and behaviors on display in vaudeville offered extensive physical evidence of artificial selection. As absurd as many of the canine sketches were, their presence reminded audiences of “somewhere between twelve and forty thousand years” of interspecies relationships. Perhaps canine ancestors only chose us for our food scraps but, eventually, we chose each other and evolved together. Indeed, dogs were the human–animal relationship that vaudeville trainers and audiences had most in common and those audience members who kept dogs as companion animals brought that domestic context to their reception of the absurd

3 Included in the ape family are chimpanzees, bonobos, humans, gorillas, and orangutans.  
scenarios presented with dog vaudevillians. Canines’ status in the industrial West as coevolved companion animals rendered them simultaneously valuable as stand-ins for human experience and vulnerable to human exploitation via the logic of animal capital. As I detail in chapter three, dogs suffered normalized abuse and this chapter shows how that abuse was made light of via the symbolic violence of some dog-based comedy. Apes were more valuable commodities because, usually, they needed to be captured, extensively trained, and imported. Vaudeville’s celebrity chimpanzees rendered approximations of humanity that both consolidated and disrupted audience members’ sense of humans as a sacredly or scientifically distinct species defined by special physical and behavioral traits. Questions about evolutionary connections across species remain compelling today, as scientists continue to devise experiments and observe primate and canine behavior and social patterns in order to understand animal cognition and even define animal “personalities.”

In the vaudeville era, evolution became a discursive context in which performers and public intellectuals approached the question of human origins while delineating the boundaries of class and taste. In this chapter, I toggle between vaudeville’s primates and canines, tracing their cultural ancestors and inheritors. To elucidate these acts, I take up the theatricality and phenomenology of Shakespeare’s canonical canine Crab and Early Modern London’s monkey baiting with killer dogs; antebellum orangutan displays and Romantic “monkey men” pantomimes; the exploitation of Black men performing as evolutionary “missing links,” and their intertextual relationship with twentieth-century celebrity chimpanzees who served as pseudo-specimens of Darwinian paradigms. Finally, I address the mimetic and symbolic violence rendered against “man’s best friend” in filmed vaudeville sketches and Hollywood comedy shorts. These are a specific type of animal capital; the films provide a clear example of, as
Shukin puts it, the “ways animals are produced and consumed as signs and substances in cultures of capital.” As in previous chapters, the evidence is clear that racist ideologies repeatedly manifest in discourses of animality. From casting a young Black boy as a chimpanzee’s valet to casting black dogs to play satirical African savages, it is impossible to separate the performance of animals and the perpetuation of racism, specifically against Blacks, in the early twentieth century via logics of animalized capital. Considered together, the chapter’s various examples of theatricalized animal and animalized capital manifest popular performances’ capacity to display cultural preoccupations with evolutionary origins, trans-species relationships, personality, and social hierarchy.

**You’ve Got Personality**

In her chapter “The Strong Personality: Female Mimics and the Play of the Self,” Susan A. Glenn describes the vaudeville era as a “mimetic moment in American comedy” during which “every conceivable kind of comic imitation was in full flower: blackface minstrelsy, gender impersonation, burlesque, parody, and ethnic caricature.” Glenn maps the ways in which scores of white female comics staked their professional careers on their ability to mimic and morph, ultimately arguing these acts helped shape and were shaped “by contemporary fascination with mass production, the role of the artists as critical observer, and debates about the significance of imitation for the constitution of the self.” Animal vaudevillians were part of this “personality” trend. Even though they were not framed as critical observers in their own right, their success depended on the theatrically compelling presentation of animals with specific dispositions and behaviors that were the result of considered responses rather than automatic reactions. Tethered

7 ibid, 76.
by their telltale tails, the anthropoid quality of monkeys and bipedal dogs made them common costars. For instance, Gilette’s Dogs featured both species and were billed to promote the dogs’ ability to capture human characteristics:

The combination of canine and simian talent is presented in Mr. Edward Gillett’s [sic] wonderful act… a whole stage full of dogs and monkeys who actually produce a play without any human being seen upon the stage at all. Each dog plays a distinct and individual part, the corner loafer, the lover, the shy maiden, the can-rusher, the policeman and all the other familiar characters of the city…

The dog and monkey bodies function parodically. In this, they can be compared to the performing children of the Elizabethan boys’ theatre companies such as the Children of Paul’s and Blackfriars. Bert O. States notes the boys’ acting troupes “depended heavily on the audience’s double vision, even to the point that the companies specialized in comedy and satire, the genres most closely linked to any audience’s immediate world.” Although States does not extend this satirical function beyond the diminutive human, he does pave the way for us to consider it: “The point is not so much that they are children but that they are conspicuously not identical with their characters. As a consequence, the medium becomes the message: the form ‘winks’ at the content.” Vaudeville animal trainers such as Belle Hathaway, Wormwood, and Galetti combined primate and canine bodies in their acts in order to wink at content and foster the satirical double vision required for such acts to succeed with audiences.

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8 Keith News, clipping, KAC Series II.
9 States, Great Reckonings, 31.
10 ibid., 33.
In this Monkey Doctor’s promotional photo, he wears a hat, a high collar and smock, and looks quite serious. Nestled into his arms appears to be a small dog, possibly stuffed. The accouterment of a pet dog makes the monkey appear more human, adding to the anthropomorphism of his costume and stated professional credentials. The monkey starred in Wormwood’s Monkey Theatre, which inaugurated the fall season of vaudeville at Keith’s Providence Theatre on 15 September 1902. A puff piece gushed, “These remarkable simians do some of the most marvelous feats, displaying an incredible amount of intelligence. The beautiful dog who solves mathematical problems with amazing ease was a feature of the act, astonishing cleverness. The comedy element was furnished by a monkey doctor and several others.”11 It’s worth paying attention to even this predictable marketing rhetoric to note the goal was to astonish and entertain but that separate species were responsible for these distinct receptions: the learned dog would astonish while the monkeys would entertain. Also, the learned dog was very intentionally given the relative pronoun “who” rather than “that” as a personifying grammatical conjunction.

Wormwood’s made good, with the manager pleased to report, “it will be the drawing card of the week.”12 The following month, Keith’s manager programmed a particularly child-friendly holiday bill featuring another anthropoid troupe: Bell Hathaway’s Monkeys and Dogs. Although the act was not as good, the manager felt monkeys were dependable crowd pleasers. He wrote that Hathaway’s turn was “hardly up to some of the other acts but allowing for the difference in

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12 Providence, September 15, 1902, KAC, 1, 6.
salary it is all right as Monkeys always make a hit anyway.”\textsuperscript{13} Whatever they did or did not do, it seemed monkeys’ mimetics were dependable sources of laughter.

**Evolutionary Spectatorship**

Laughter itself was conceptualized in evolutionary terms. Film and vaudeville scholar Henry Jenkins notes the ways in which late Victorian British and US writers employed discourses of social Darwinism and animality to construct their arguments about humor and the physical phenomenon of laughter. In his extensive treatise on the subject, the British psychologist James Sully described “a general evolution in comic sensitivity from the crude laughter of children, savages, and the animal kingdom… toward a more ‘thoughtful laughter’ being perfected in the modern age.”\textsuperscript{14} John Lawrence Toole, a comic actor of the Victorian stage, accounted for recent changes in the comic tone of plays by citing a recent Oxford lecture on “Cyclical Evolution” given by “Darwin’s bulldog,” the biologist Thomas Huxley. Toole extrapolated from the idea of cyclical evolution to claim that a “new sociological cycle” of “communal ethics” explained the comedic shift in the final decade of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{15} The US writer and professor Burges Johnson (who had written earlier articles on humor) also took up the evolutionary model in a 1915 article published in *Harper’s* magazine. Johnson argued that possessing a sense of humor is a universal human condition, but one that must be monitored and controlled, for “if it control us we may be divested of refinements -nay, even be carried back to savagery.”\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, “the spasm of laughter binds us to the childhood of the race. It is a world-old heritage with the… power to drag us back through lower strata of civilization

\textsuperscript{13} Providence, December 22, 1902, KAC, 1, 120.
even into savagery and beyond.”  

Jenkins cites a passage in Johnson’s essay in which Johnson posits that the experience of a mollusk, “‘this great-grandfather of living things,’” is jostled by surprise and the “‘spasm…followed by a feeling of relief’ sets the pattern of shock and relief that ultimately shapes human laughter.”  

To arrive at the mollusk, Johnson follows the journey that laughter provokes as it “carries us a long leap backward to the most elemental form of animal life. Beyond the savage stands the monkey, and dimly far beyond him, the mollusk, whose only sense was that of touch.”  

Laughter is understood as an ancient impulse, deeply sensorial, and therefore in need of monitoring so as to preserve social order. According to Jenkins, during the Progressive Era, “middle-class anxiety about jokes and laughter displaced legitimate fears about social change onto the aesthetic sphere.”  

Discussions about taste and laughter worked “to maintain class boundaries and to naturalize inequalities of economic and social opportunity.”  

Because his primary objects of analysis are comedy films of the 1920s featuring male protagonists, Jenkins emphasizes the physical gags and verbal non-sequiturs of male human vaudeville performers such as the team Weber and Fields, Eddie Cantor, and the Marx Brothers. In doing so, he identifies the importance of spectacle, direct address, and “affective immediacy” over narrative cohesion for the creation of a “vaudeville aesthetic.”  

In building his method of analysis, Jenkins largely neglects animals and other sight acts, though he does note that “backflips, pratfalls, magic tricks, and trained chimpanzees might all be viewed as more or less equivalent techniques for provoking audience response within a medium whose primary
aesthetic criteria was affective immediacy.” This affective immediacy provoked laughter that was conceptualized as something impulsive, evolutionarily basic, and in need of restraint. Successful comic vaudevillians were “guilty” of potentially provoking animalistic laughter that could spiral audience members down the evolutionary scale. Animal vaudevillians were particularly implicated since animal performances could inspire animalistic reactions.

For centuries, anti-theatrical social critics had expressed fears that theatrical spectacles would beastialize humans. In the late sixteenth century, John Rainolds described the commercial stage as “the meanes and occasions whereby men are transformed into dogges.” According to early modernist and animal studies scholar Erica Fudge, London’s baiting ring was a particularly problematic public space that destabilized the humanity of those who participated. In Early Modern England, monkeys and dogs appeared together in the blood sports of the baiting rings. Monkeys would frantically ride horses as they were chased and bitten by vicious dogs. At the turn of the seventeenth century, London was undergoing urbanization and a population boom. There were many commercial entertainments available, from the Bear Garden, to the theatre, to fairground entertainments. Regarding monkey baiting in early modern London, Fudge notes:

the spectator was invited to perform two forms of recognition: to recognise the anthropoid nature of the animal, but also to recognise that anthropoid only ever means human-like, it can never mean human. At the moment of sameness difference is revealed and the disturbing spectacle of the screaming monkey on horseback becomes a reminder of the superiority of humanity. The monkey can only ever achieve a comic imitation of the human.

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22 ibid., 61.
24 Erica Fudge, Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002).
Fudge summarizes Stallybrass and White’s evaluation of fairground animal entertainments: “the parody of human behaviour which is traced in the animals’ comic attempts to perform human actions can only work if there is a clear and secure sense of what is correct human behaviour.”

That is, “the monkey on horseback reinforces the status of the human viewer.” Indeed, in the case of monkey baiting, Fudge determines that “the stability of the category would seem to be the main result of the sport.” However, Fudge complicates this reading by noting that bear baiting provoked anxiety about vulnerability to nature rather than assuring control of it. With different species triggering different attitudes in a succession of events in one venue, “the Bear Garden emerges as a place of immense contradictions: the place which reveals the difference between the species also reveals their sameness.”

Due to this, for Fudge, the baiting ring becomes “the most explicit and spectacular site of humanity’s confusion about itself.” Across the Atlantic three hundred years later, monkeys and dogs were still being pressed into

\[\text{\textsuperscript{26} ibid., 13.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{27} ibid.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{28} ibid.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{29} ibid.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{30} ibid., 19.} \]
performance to articulate such confusions.

Vaudeville’s mode of animal performance was, obviously, quite different from Early Modern England’s rough and rowdy blood sport arenas. These popular anthropoid entertainments were (ideally) bloodless and primarily aimed at children and their guardians.

Monkeys performed in a variety of human-centric mises-en-scène, including a racetrack set, a “Chinese laundry,” and a barber shop, which the Philadelphia manager found particularly hilarious because the monkeys were “trained so as to appear to be full of uncontrollable devilry.” Other acts parodied popular contemporary performance trends, such as a turn that included trapeze work, “winding up with the disrobing act on the trapeze” and another featuring monkeys dancing The Merry Widow waltz four months after Franz Lehár’s operetta made its United States debut on Broadway. Much like the metatheatrical circus performances I describe in chapter two, vaudeville itself was satirized with monkey bodies. Madame Roechez’s famous skit “A Night in a Monkey Music Hall” featured a troupe of simians performing on “a miniature stage with an orchestra and a pit. Monkey card boys put out the numbers. Five miniature vaudeville numbers are presented by monkeys during which a monkey orchestra plays selections.” This act of mimicry was then mimicked with the near-identical “Monkey Hippodrome” that toured in a future season. Similarly, all-dog scenarios satirized melodrama. Pantomimes such as Merian’s Dogs’ “A Faithless Woman” and Coin’s Dogs “It Happened in Dogville” involved elaborate productions without the trainer on stage. By (re)presenting melodramas with dog bodies, vaudeville used the absurd spectacle of bipedal dogs in costume to parody the conventions of the dramatic stage, temporarily “making strange” and unfamiliar

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31 Philadelphia, January 13, 1908, KAC, 8, 178b.
32 Philadelphia, January 27, 1908, KAC, 8, 195.
33 Cincinnati, October 17, 1910, KAC, 12, 87.
theatrical customs of popular US theatre. Quite in step with Glenn’s assertion that imitation was endemic to vaudeville, animal acts parroted and parodied other successful acts until imitators became successful in their own right. Just as Gertrude Hoffmann made her name delivering a triumphant imitation of Eva Tanguay, animal acts were used to satirize not just stock personalities from familiar storylines but also parodies of each other and vaudeville itself. Although animal acts have been seen as tangential to vaudeville’s success and dominant modes of language-based humor, it is clear that animal turns, and particularly acts featuring monkeys and dogs, were deeply imbricated in vaudeville’s metatheatrical mimicry.

Dogs, Then and Now

It is possible that all animals on stage introduce a metatheatrical component to performance. Certainly they compound the theatricality of the moments when they appear on stage, whether or not they are diegetically embedded in a plot or appear in plotless presentations to perform tricks. Bert O. States’ chapter “The World on Stage” has positioned Crab, from Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, as the paradigmatic example for studying the theatricality of animals on stage.\(^{34}\) In his article on theatre’s Renaissance dog and melodrama dog, Michael Dobson analyzes Crab, arguing there is a shift from the passive Renaissance dog to the active modern dog of melodrama, who was more suited to an Industrial Age.\(^{35}\) Crab belongs to the passive canine Renaissance tradition in which dogs appeared to shore up depictions of human characters; the dogs didn’t take many actions and their actions were not of consequence to the plot. For instance, nameless groups of hunting dogs would appear but contribute more to the *mise-en-scène* than character or plot development. Even the greyhound in Jonson’s *Every


Man Out of His Humour (1599) “remains strictly an accessory, a mute externalizations of Puntarvolo’s folly.” However, Dobson does not take into account that for a dog to do nothing on stage is something. Though Crab does not move the plot forward, he adds another layer of theatricality to Shakespeare’s early tale of disguise, deception, and transformation. For a dog to sit or stand while a comedian does double entendre prop work with a staff and shoe is an accomplishment, a type of performance. The dog playing Crab achieves something by not standing on her hind legs and reaching for treats or losing focus and tugging at the lead to try wandering about a thrust stage surrounded by audience members who may or may not be eating. Act 4 scene iv begins with Lance relaying the story of Crab’s low behavior in high company. However, the audience continues to just see a dog tethered to a clown, thus accentuating the good behavior of the performing dog in the moment of performance and further theatricalizing the dog on stage. Lance tells us Crab farted among “three or four gentlemenlike dogs under the Duke’s table” and urinated on Sylvia’s underskirt. Also, Crab’s dangerous habits of stealing dessert and killing geese have put Lance in perilous straights in the past. Seeing a well-behaved dog while we hear about his poor behavior creates a dynamic of incongruity, one of the foundations of classic comedy. It also gets to one of the basic anxieties of placing live animals on stage. As States inquires, “What if it barks? urinates? Obviously these natural acts…would contribute to further comedy. So the illusion has suddenly become a field of play, of ‘what if?’” By having Lance elaborate on Crab’s indiscriminate release of his lower orifices, Shakespeare and his clown underscore the dread and delight of seeing a live animal on stage. Yet, it might be just such a somatic disruption (during a direct address comic routine, no less) that some

36 ibid, 117.
37 Shakespeare, Two Gentlemen, 4.4.18-19.
38 States, Great Reckonings, 34.
audiences are hoping for and, incidentally, would make Lance a more trustworthy narrator than he seems to be when he describes the misbehavior of a dog the audience sees behaving well. As States observes, “in those moments when we see only the real dog rather than Launce’s dog, our consciousness has simply slipped into another gear. We may see the dog as dog or as image, or we may allow our mind to oscillate rapidly between the two kinds of perception.” There can be quite a bit of theatrical pleasure in this rapid oscillation, particularly if we don’t think about the potential labor and training abuses that might have taken place to get the dog on stage in the first place. Lance’s monologue constructs Crab as an id of pleasure and immediate gratification (in both filling himself up with food that doesn’t belong to him and relieving himself in a place where he has no right to relieve himself). Simultaneously, the dog playing Crab can represent humans’ ability to control their universe, and therefore aid in the articulation of what it means to be human. As Lance expresses in his first monologue, “O, the dog is me, and I am myself.” Lance utters this in a moment of befuddlement but it can be read as an acceptance of the mutually constitutive relationship of coevolution.

It may seem to require a certain sentimentality to invest in the proposition that humans and dogs have innate connections. After all, various cultures revile dogs as filthy germ vectors. However, many biologists, evolutionary anthropologists, and psychologists do look to dogs to try to understand evolutionary and biological processes. I now briefly pivot to the present day to show just how deeply the coevolution of humans and dogs still matters to scientific researchers and, indeed, seems to matter more than ever. Doctor Ádám Miklósi is the head of the Ethology Department at Eötvös University in Budapest, Hungary. In the second edition of his book Dog

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39 ibid., 36.
Behaviour, Evolution, and Cognition (2015), Dr. Miklósi notes the “field of canine science has passed a phase of explosion” compared with just a few years ago.\textsuperscript{41} Dr. Miklósi and his colleagues established the Family Dog Project in 1994. According to the website of the National Canine Research Council,

\begin{quote}
The mission of the Family Dog Project is the study of the “evolutionary and ethological foundations of dog-human relationship.” Ethology is the study of animals in their natural environment, rather than under laboratory conditions. It was once considered only appropriate to the study of wild animals. To place the study of domestic dogs firmly in the science of ethology, as the Family Project has done, is to make a statement that human beings are their natural habitat.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

As an ethologist, Dr. Miklósi’s research models stress the importance of the environment in which the studies take place. Doctor Brian Hare is an evolutionary anthropologist at Duke University in North Carolina. He “studies the origins of human nature” at The Duke Canine Cognition Center (DCCC).\textsuperscript{43} The Center claims it “is dedicated to the study of dog psychology. Our goal is to understand the flexibility and limitations of dog cognition. In doing so, we gain a window into the mind of animals as well as the evolution of our own species.”\textsuperscript{44} The DCCC introduces a variety of thought and behavior experiments to “volunteer” pet dogs, and actively argues for their research significance: “Seen in the past as an artificial creation with unremarkable cognitive abilities, dogs were excluded from cognition studies in favor of primates.

\textsuperscript{43} \url{http://evolutionaryanthropology.duke.edu/research/dogs}. Accessed November 15, 2015.
\textsuperscript{44} \url{http://evolutionaryanthropology.duke.edu/research/dogs}. On the page captioned “Why Study Dog Cognition?” the Center states:

Other than humans, dogs are easily the most successful large mammal on the planet. From the Arctic Circle to the deepest jungles of the Amazon, dogs have traveled with humans for thousands of years, and the role of dogs in society has continued to grow...
However, they are now a dominant player in studies of animal cognition."\(^{45}\) Once upon a time, primates superseded dogs for evolutionary primacy, but dogs are having their day: “Dogs have now caught the attention of linguists, evolutionary biologists, psychologists and anthropologists. The last decade of research has shown that dogs are *more than mere learning machines.*\(^{46}\)

Further linking the evolutionary significance of primates and canines, Dr. Hare also conducts fieldwork with bonobo apes in the Democratic Republic of Congo and heads the Hominoid Psychology Research Group at Duke. This group seeks “to identify which features [of] our social problem-solving abilities have evolved since humans, bonobos, and chimpanzees shared a common ancestor.”\(^{47}\) The idea that humans and (other) apes have a common ancestor was a scientifically fraught and theatrically potent question during the nineteenth century and vaudeville inherited many of the performance modes that addresses ancestry and heredity.

**Missing Links**

Jane R. Goodall has written persuasively about popular entertainment’s urge to concoct and display evolution’s missing links during the nineteenth century, even before the release of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (published in 1859 in England and 1860 in the United States). In fact, missing link performances were particularly popular during the 1840s and 1850s and, as early as 1825, the titular “monkey-man” of *Jocko, or the Brazilian Ape* premiered in a “sentimental drama” in Paris.\(^{48}\) Jocko was performed by a talented pantomime actor named Joseph Mazilier, who wore an ape costume and appeared alongside a white boy actor. The child and ape-adult’s movements were predicated on the mimetic faculty; the performance was

\(^{45}\) ibid.

\(^{46}\) ibid. Emphasis mine.


“choreographed as a sequence of mirror images: the child prays and the ape copies the attitude; 
the ape jumps around and the child does likewise; they go through a dialogue of grimace and 
counter-grimace.”\textsuperscript{49} Goodall maintains that “Jocko emphasizes a fundamental equivalence 
between ape and human; through its balletic and pantomimic interludes, it highlights physical 
and behavioural similarity.”\textsuperscript{50} Though “equivalence” seems to obfuscate the evolutionary 
differences between the boy and Jocko, Goodall’s analysis points to the ways in which these 
performances resonated with popular curiosity about human origins.

Such primate masquerades were rare in vaudeville since living apes could be procured to 
theatricalize the same questions of evolutionary process, species connection, and the relationship 
between human childhood and apes’ cognitive and emotional capacities. Nevertheless, an act 
called the Four Rianos gained great popularity on east and west coast vaudeville circuits by 
presenting an animal masquerade in a jungle setting as a pretense for acrobatic work and 
slapstick comedy. Their sketch “In Africa” depicted a phrenologist professor who “insists upon 
bringing into his apartments all kinds of jungle inhabitants, including snakes and gorillas.”\textsuperscript{51} Two 
human actors costumed as apes (frequently referred to as monkeys) disrupt the sanctuary of 
civilization and “the phrenologist is the victim of their antics and their grotesque actions.”\textsuperscript{52} The 
Rianos pleased audiences by having it both ways: the act mocked a stuffy (pseudo)scientist 
seeking mastery over nature while simultaneously performing “nature” as disruptive chaos 
located in Africa. The act was promoted as “a summer tonic for the blues”\textsuperscript{53} but was popular 
enough to play throughout the year. In December 1902, the Philadelphia manager noted it was a 

\textsuperscript{49} ibid. 
\textsuperscript{50} ibid. 
\textsuperscript{51} KAC, Series II, undated clipping file. 
\textsuperscript{52} ibid. 
\textsuperscript{53} ibid.
“very lively act to close with” and that “the monkey antics are especially amusing.” The Rianos were usually slotted as closers, thus serving as a clear substitute or equivalent to live animal acts.

The questions of equivalence, substitution, imitation, and in-betweeness are all mobilized in two notorious examples of “missing link” performances that spectacularized the bodies of Black men. Among his many theatricalizations of race and animality, P. T. Barnum twice mounted “missing link” displays titled “What is It?” in which Black men performed while wearing partial fur costumes. First, Hervey Leech briefly performed as the Missing Link in London in 1846 and, in a far more successful sequel, William Henry Johnson debuted as the Missing Link at Barnum’s American Museum in 1860. Johnson’s appearance was promoted with a grotesque poster image captioned “Is it a lower order of Man? or is it a higher development of the Monkey? or is it both in combination? Nothing of the kind HAS EVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE! IT IS ALIVE!” According to Goodall, “Johnson, who took the name of Zip after Zip Coon… appeared in the man-monkey role for over sixty years, becoming something of a cult figure.” The stage name aligned Johnson with the well-known minstrelsy character marked by sensual pleasures of sartorial and sexual excess. Thus, a different type of racialized animality – the animal within- became layered with the liminal location of a “missing link” figure. In 1906, another “missing link” spectacle was created in New York City when William Temple Hornaday, the director of the Bronx Zoological Gardens chose to attract crowds by displaying Ota Benga, a diminutive Congolese man, alongside an orangutan in the zoo’s Primate House. According to Pamela Newkirk, Benga’s display bolstered the social and economic capital of a

54 Philadelphia, December 1, 1902, KAC, 3, 99.
55 Goodall, Performance and Evolution, 56.
56 ibid., 57.
network of elite whites, as they essentially kept Benga captive and circulated him in ethnographic displays. As Goodall maintains, such performances of ethnography were inextricably interwoven with primate performances of the era.

Standard tropes of ape and baboon performance included acrobatic tricks, bicycle riding, dancing, dressing in clothes, eating with utensils, and smoking. Such motifs had been in circulation for centuries. For example, in 1660 John Evelyn had watched monkeys at St Margaret’s Fair in London. They “were gallantly clad à la mode” as they performed tight rope walking and executed precise flips.\(^58\) An 1845 promotional image for Barnum’s American Museum featured his star female orangutan, Mademoiselle Fanny, wearing a dress and bloomers while eating from a cup with a spoon.\(^59\) Fanny was named after the Romantic Era ballet dancer Fanny Elssler and the orangutan performed a parody of Romantic femininity while wearing pink tulle.\(^60\) She was promoted not only as “the only living” orangutan “now in America” but as “the nearest approach to humanity of any animal ever yet discovered. She is indeed the connecting link between Man and Brute!!!! Possessing as many characteristics of the one as the other.”\(^61\)

The primates of vaudeville were the inheritors of such spectacles, refashioned and modernized for twentieth-century mass culture but still imbued with allusions to evolution and race during a time in which debates about heredity and markers of racial identity proliferated in popular and scientific discourses.

**Chimpanzee Celebrities**

Unlike the charming Fanny, the celebrity chimps of the early twentieth century were mostly masculine; not only did they wear tailored suits and smoke, they had the privilege to

\(^{59}\) Goodall, *Performance and Evolution*, 196.
\(^{60}\) ibid., 192-196.
\(^{61}\) ibid., 196.
travel internationally meeting dignitaries and politicians. Peter the Great was a chimpanzee who captured the public’s imagination. Simultaneously, he seemed to be a human child, a permutation of an adult, a missing link, a racial parody, and a scientific marvel. Audiences imagined they could watch evolution itself taking place. A Philadelphia reviewer rhapsodized: “the audience sits in wonder and marvels at the patience of man in taking this, his next of kin in the scale of evolution, from the native wilds and teaching him the habits of the genus homo so successfully that one at times is led to believe it must be a small boy under that chimpanzee skin.” Peter began his act with riding a bicycle downstairs and, later, he roller-skated and played with a dog. As the reviewer noted, he seemed like a young boy but, at the same time, his act included “eating dinner with the airs and graces of a gentleman” and smoking “a cigarette in the most approved manner.” In their dual evocation of moving from childhood to adulthood and from less to more evolved being, vaudeville primate acts theatricalized biologist Ernst Haeckel’s theory of recapitulation, which postulated that an individual’s development in life mirrored a species’ development in evolution. The “childhood of the race” or the “childhood of the earth” were common rhetorical strategies for conceptualizing the overwhelming question of evolution and temporality whether it was to discuss the impulse of laughter or the actions of a performing ape. The chimp Prince Floro was billed as “the simian with a human mind” and a profile of Floro was titled “What Man Did When the Earth Was Young.” Racial identity questions were inextricably bound with evolution and individual development narratives. Part of Peter’s routine included

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62 *Evening Telegraph*, October 5, 1909. Clipping, Anna Laughlin file, Billy Rose Collection, NYPLPA.
63 ibid.
64 *Bridgeport News*, 1913. Clipping, KAC, Series II. The Providence manager felt Floro was indeed superior to Consul: “I don’t think there is any doubt but that this is the best monkey that has ever played this house. I can’t see what the great objection is to paying this one $350 when we paid Consul more than double that and he was not nearly as good a monkey.” Providence, March 24, 1914, KAC, 17, 184.
dancing an “African breakdown” before going to bed. The inclusion of a racially marked dance, usually the cakewalk, was a typical feature. References to race were simultaneously blatant and masked, as chimps, monkeys or baboons were rarely declared to be standing in for any particular race of humanity and, yet, larger social discourses of social Darwinism and eugenics made such associations nearly inevitable. Irish residents in Providence, Rhode Island reacted badly to a baboon in Woodford’s Animals being named “Mrs. Murphy,” forcing the theatre manager to do damage control. A manager casually remarked that a gorilla who had been billed as a chimpanzee was “about the size of Irving Jones” – referring to the popular African American vaudeville performer.\(^65\) The discourse of mimetic mastery was also a consistent feature of primate acts. As the quote from the Philadelphia reviewer writing about Peter shows, the public was enthralled by great apes’ capacity to imitate and were equally impressed by the will of the human trainer to coax or coerce such mastery.

Franz Kafka’s 1917 short story “A Report to an Academy” is written in the voice of Red Peter, a captured ape who performed in music halls but has eschewed his apeness.\(^66\) He asserts this to his captive audience: “Nearly five years stand between me and my apehood... your own apehood, gentlemen, to the extent that there is anything like that in your past, cannot be more remote from you than mine is from me.”\(^67\) Red Peter is named after the wound of his captivity – the hunter’s gunshot that “left behind a large, red, hairless scar.”\(^68\) According to Martin Puchner, Kafka’s story uses “negative mimesis” to articulate “the violent process of anthropomorphization

\(^{65}\) KAC, Cleveland, March 16, 1914, KAC 17, 179.
\(^{67}\) ibid.
\(^{68}\) ibid.
In captivity, Red Peter “self-anthropomorphizes only to survive,” existing in an indeterminate space of permanent performance. The contemporary writer J.M. Coetzee’s famous turn toward the topic of animal rights includes a thorough contemplation of Red Peter. Coetzee’s protagonist, Elizabeth Costello, surmises that Red Peter’s inspiration was drawn from the behaviorist experiments of Wolfgang Köhler, who published *The Mentality of Apes* in 1917 based on experiments in which bananas were placed out of chimpanzee’s easy reach and the chimps developed methods to attain the tasty fruit. Perhaps the historical Peter, who was also the subject of scientific analysis, inspired Red Peter. Psychologist J. B. Watson wrote about him in a 1914 comparative psychology textbook. Watson cites the *Psychological Clinic* article “A Monkey With a Mind” by Dr. Lightner Witmer. He enumerates many of Peter’s vaudeville tricks, emphasizing anything that requires fine motor skills (such as lighting a cigarette). Peter genuinely fascinated many scientists of the era and the theatricality of his vaudeville work made his cognitive and physical capacities even more compelling. Several Harvard professors were “photographed by the press watching Peter light a cigarette,” with Dr. Dudley A. Sargent describing Peter as “the nearest approach to a man I have ever seen.” In his textbook section on Peter, Dr. Watson concluded: “At least two general statements may be made of the chimpanzee by way of showing similarity to and difference from man. In the first place his motor development seems capable of being extended to a point where in some instances he can actually

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70 ibid.
72 Albert F. McLean, Jr. *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 152. McLean describes the scrapbook of Boston’s Keith theatre as containing many clippings about Peter the Great’s human-like qualities. One article was titled “Darwin Was Thinking of Me.”
compete with man, and in the second place his lack of language habits put him forever below the plane of comparison with man.” Watson, *Behavior*, 313-14.

Peter’s capabilities were celebrated and he was a public celebrity, as intriguing to vaudeville audiences as Harvard scientists. Peter was not the only celebrity chimp in vaudeville and the trend may indeed have started with an emissary of evolution named Consul.

**Consul’s Brand Name**

Tropes and conventions of certain animal turns circulated, of course, but when it came to the cultivation of ape celebrities, owners and trainers saw animal names as brands with high market value that facilitated their circulation as animal capital. At the height of vaudeville’s popularity, impresarios and agents fought transatlantic capitalist proxy wars with ape bodies, hoping to best the competition as they struggled to dominate the vaudeville market and consolidate power. Consul the Great was a chimpanzee billed as “The Almost Man” and owned by the Jennison family, proprietors of the Belle Vue zoological gardens and amusement park in Manchester, England. The chimp arrived at Belle Vue in 1893 and died in 1894 when he was probably five years old (soon, the Jennisons would acquire Consul II). Yet another Consul was presented by the wild animal trainer Frank Bostock, who established an animal exhibition venue in Coney Island, Brooklyn in 1888. In the fall of 1903, Bostock’s Consul became a transatlantic sensation, serving as an international and interspecies “consul” as he amazed fans. He was the star of the Folies Bergère and charmed Parisian high society. He then performed in a three-week holiday engagement at the Hippodrome in London, where he reportedly made £200 per week.


The twentieth-century Consul was enough of a celebrity to be formally photographed by the popular Campbell and Gray portrait studio in London. Along with images of Consul wearing travel clothes and riding a tricycle, he was photographed with a Black boy and the photograph is captioned “Out For a Stroll With His Valet.” The supposed humor of the image was located in the visual symmetry of costumes and prop: the two wear matching top hats and tails and carry buggy whips in their right hands. The idea that a chimp has a human valet underscores the extent to which, as Michael Lundblad asserts, “discourses of the jungle” often placed blacks below various nonhuman animals. The boy was named Henry (sometimes reported as Harry) Hall and was originally from North Carolina. Newspapers presented Consul and Henry as close companions, brothers or best friends who shared a bed and kept each other company. The coverage of Consul and Henry combines a discomfiting combination of acknowledging interspecies connection with doctrinal racism. One journalist wrote, “No man is a bore to his valet and neither is Mr. Consul. ‘Consul,’ confided the small nigger to a visitor, ‘is as hard to manage as a white man.’ The tone in which the words were uttered indicated sorrow rather than anger.”

Fans were given access to celebrity chimpanzees via the circulation of animal capital, the processes of which guaranteed chimpanzees’ early mortality. Their celebrity played a compensatory role in which audiences over-adored metonymic individual animals while many more apes were hunted or captured for placement in museums and zoos. Shortly after his successful stand at the London Hippodrome, Consul travelled to Berlin, where “members of the

76 “‘Consul’ The Man Monkey” The Tatler, December 30, 1903.
78 “£20,000 Monkey Chimpanzee ‘Consul’ Death Reported at Berlin” The Telegraph, February 23, 1904.
79 ibid.
German Imperial Family went to see him at Schumann’s Circus.”\textsuperscript{80} The visit was promoted with full color commemorative posters. Despite the fact that a physician named Dr. Scott always travelled with Consul, the celebrity chimp died of bronchitis in Berlin. The news was reported internationally and his body was embalmed and shipped to Paris where he lay “‘in state’ for a week.” because Parisians were particularly fond of him.\textsuperscript{81} Consul’s boy companion, Henry Hall, had to return from Europe. The \textit{New York Times} reported Hall and Consul had come “to know each other so well that they played together as two boys would. Hall was greatly grieved by the death of his playmate, and yesterday he said that he would rather have lost a relative. ‘He was just like me,’ he said, ‘except that I can talk and he could not.’”\textsuperscript{82} Again, language is identified as the ultimate gap between humanity and other species. There seems to be no record of Hall’s biography. Who were his parents? How did he come to be a “valet” for a celebrity chimp? What adult was mandated to assure his health and safety during transatlantic travel? What happened to Henry Hall after he returned to the United States (and to whom did he return?). Recalling Robin Bernstein’s notion of “racial innocence,” it is clear that Hall was caught in a system where his status as a child had market value only in terms of the comical “mirror image” of dressing a Black boy and chimpanzee in the same adult clothes, foregrounded on the assumption that apes represented the “childhood of the race.” In the international popular culture market, Hall held little human value. Puff pieces ignore his presence entirely or mention him in passing. While a captured and trained chimpanzee was put in tailored clothes, served gourmet meals, and met political dignitaries, we can only surmise what role Hall played in these publicity stunts. Did he stand silently and invisibly along side? Was he even invited or did he sit in a hotel room waiting

\textsuperscript{80} “Death of ‘Consul,’” \textit{The Daily News}, March 30, 1904.
\textsuperscript{81} ibid.
for Consul and his chaperone to return from these special events? Or, was he required to serve as Consul’s chaperone and tend to the chimpanzee? The excesses of Consul Mania and total disinterest in the details of Hall’s basic needs as a child point to the interworkings of Progressive Era animal and animalized capital.

Bostock procured a new chimpanzee and named him Consul and, in July 1905, he brought the second Consul to his facility in Coney Island. The New York Times announced “‘Young Consul,’ the recently arrived chimpanzee at Bostock's, is the principle attraction there. Some of the visitors seem to be in doubt as to whether the animal is an ape or a human being. The chimpanzee wears his clothes without a trace of nervousness.”

In the midst of a red-hot vaudeville market, an all-out chimpanzee feud erupted in the summer of 1909. Three years after the formation of Keith’s United Booking Office, the manager/agent William Morris struggled to maintain his independent status, using a European scouting tour to secure his professional standing. Morris arrived from Hamburg, Germany with thirty new vaudeville acts under contract and a new chimpanzee named Consul. In another instance of vaudeville’s mimetic proliferation of animal capital, an ape named Consul Peter was already playing at Hammerstein’s. According to Variety, both Consul and Consul Peter were promoted as “the most wonderful piece of the Darwin origination extant.”

Variety seemed to delight in the primate head-to-head, printing details of both the animals’ skills and Morris’ challenge to competitors. Morris offered to “wager any amount that ‘his’ ‘Consul’ was the only monkey which could smoke immediately a cigar or cigarette handed to him, and unassisted while performing the operation.”

Still another Consul, this time the gorilla billed as a chimp, performed in a duet with a chimp named “Lady Betty.”

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84 Variety, June 19, 1909.
85 ibid.
The Washington, D.C. manager approved, reporting that Lady Betty was “some cute soubrette and contrast to the dignified “Consul” and keeps the audience convulsed with her hilarious byplay.” Managers were specific in listing the performance skills of the apes. Each skill was a selling point and managers wanted acts that were familiar yet novel, that mimicked humanity yet capitalized on the physical features of the apes. The evolutionary intimacy between apes and humans left vaudeville chimpanzees precariously positioned within systems of capital. Not only did the chimps get bronchitis and other illnesses that cut their lives short, they were also vulnerable to the material realities of traveling from show to show.

The Last of Charles the First

The celebrity chimpanzee Charles the First “was shipped in a box from Portland to Seattle on the Northern Pacific Railroad.” When the box arrived at Seattle, Charles was dead. Charles’ owner, Charles Judd, sued the railroad for $200,000. According to a newspaper article about the case, “The owner claimed that the animal was cooked to death by steam that escaped

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86 Washington DC, January 12, 1914, KAC, 17, 92.
87 “$200,000 For a Monkey $1 For a Baby” (1912?) KAC Series II clipping, 104, 66.
through a pipe in the baggage car. The railroad claims that the animal was dead when shipped.\(^8^8\) The journalist covering the story used the case as an opportunity to discuss the inconsistent application of market logic to organic life: “there is no law which definitely fixes the value of human life or limb.”\(^8^9\) Here, “value” is understood to mean economic capital, not inherent worth. The writer continues, “Each case is left to a jury to be decided on its own peculiar facts and circumstances, the single rule of law controlling being that the jury shall determine the pecuniary loss suffered by the victim of the accident.”\(^9^0\) As the author enumerates, the paradigm of pecuniary loss as determined by a jury led to “irreconcilable” decisions about the value of life. The newspaper included a startling image to illustrate the thesis of the article, in which a menacing chimp wearing a top hat and suit weighs the balance of a baby in his hand. The underlying critique seems to take issue with the extremely high value of the celebrity chimp as commodity, rather than the fact that he was a commodity at all. The death of Charles the First was understood as a huge loss in economic capital. The article quotes Judd, “I am quite sure that had this monkey lived he would have become the most valuable simian who ever faced the footlights. He had an aptitude for the stage which I have observed in no other monkey.”\(^9^1\) Such “aptitude for the stage” made celebrity primates exciting as vaudeville novelty acts, as scientific specimens, and as animal capital for entrepreneurial businessmen. Any animal with a special talent could potentially be inserted into vaudeville’s circulation of animal capital.

**Canine Celebrities**

Dogs appeared on vaudeville in many guises, including statues, athletes, pets, and musicians. A few male celebrity dogs were known by first names and became famous for displays

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\(^8^8\) ibid.  
\(^8^9\) ibid.  
\(^9^0\) ibid.  
\(^9^1\) ibid.
of apparent exceptional cognition. Dick the Handwriting Dog performed on the Keith circuit. The performance was a ruse in which a mechanism under the table Dick stood upon made it seem as though the dog was writing. Two canine vaudevillians, Jasper the Educated Dog and Don the talking dog, were scientifically evaluated and discussed by Dr. Watson in his comparative psychology textbook along with Peter the chimp. Jasper had an extensive repertoire of commands to which he successfully responded and, in 1917, the Philadelphia manager reported Jasper was “very interesting to our audience and was just as big a hit as on his former visit. A distinct novelty that cannot help but make good.” But even this was within the realm of what people expected of dogs. Don the Talking Dog promised something more.

Language has, of course, been one of the key locations for consolidating human ontology as inherently distinct from other animals. Don the Talking Dog was a medium sized dark brown hunting dog who made waves in the United States, touring the vaudeville circuit and receiving favorable press. Don had been taught to speak, according to the *New York Times*, by the royal gamekeeper Herman Ebers of Theerhütte, Germany. Don was promoted as being able to say six words in German: Don, hunger, want, cakes, yes, and no; and to string those words into ideas such as hunger/want/cake. Don was a novelty of the

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vaudeville stage because he offered audiences intellectual intrigue coupled with the
phenomenological experience of a familiar creature doing something most unfamiliar. For dog
enthusiasts, he embodied a wish fulfillment of bridging the gap between human and canine.
Ebers realized the dog’s economic potential. As the Times writer observed, “a week of Don on
some metropolitan music hall stage is worth a lifetime of royal gamekeeping at $150 a year.”

The Times reporter also described the bodily labor of Don’s speech: “The voice seems to
emanate from the very depths of the throat. He speaks, too, with a manifest effort, and when he is
talking vigorously and proclaiming ‘Hunger! Hunger!’ with particular eagerness, his body
distends, and one gets the impression that the speaking process is not effected without some sort
of internal distress.”

Bert States suggests an equal intensity for audiences hearing spoken
language on stage: “the body, in processing the sound, is ‘gripped’ by its vibrations.” Of
course, States was referring to the beginning of Macbeth’s soliloquy “If it were done when ‘tis
done, then ‘twere well / It were done quickly” and it might be considered a stretch, even an
affront, to compare the Bard with the bark. And yet, States claims the “visceral code” found in
“sound’s very utility” to be phenomenologically imperative to theatre’s “affective substantiality
as the carrier of meanings.” The words Don seemed to know spoke, if you will, to the
foundational demands of survival: to be hungry and to desire food. Don was thus tasked with
representing a superior near-human capacity while simultaneously representing a most basic
urge. In the spring of 1912, Oskar Pfungst, the same German scientist who determined that the
celebrity “learned horse” Clever Hans had been responding to his trainer’s unconscious cues,

94 ibid.
95 ibid.
96 States, Great Reckonings, 26.
97 ibid.
debunked Don’s speaking skills.\textsuperscript{98} Pfungst worked with two other colleagues at the University of Berlin to examine Don, “keeping detailed memoranda on the tests, and making a number of phonographic records.”\textsuperscript{99} An American animal behaviorist at Johns Hopkins University summarized Pfungst’s report in \textit{Science} magazine. To conduct his observations of Don, Pfungst defined speech in three ways:

First…vocal sounds to convey to the listener an idea experienced by the speaker; secondly… vocal sounds learned by imitation, but used without knowledge of their meaning to the hearer; and thirdly, as the production of vocal sounds not imitative of human speech, having no meaning to the speaker, but producing in the hearer illusions of definitely articulated, spoken words, uttered to convey meaning.\textsuperscript{100}

Don was found to not understand the words he seemed to say and was incapable of “learning by imitation.”\textsuperscript{101} Though Don could make a vowel sound and many consonant sounds that together could be construed as German words, ultimately, Pfungst concluded, Don was uttering “vocal sounds which produce illusions in the hearer.”\textsuperscript{102} Don’s success as a performer depended on the active construction of meaning and/or appreciation from the audience. Apparently, some audiences were game. When he appeared on the Keith circuit in the fall of 1912, the talent of his human co-performers, the comedian Loney Haskell and a female assistant, anchored the act. The Cleveland manager accepted the ambiguity of Don’s cognitive capacities: “The audience here took the act good naturedly and seemed satisfied with the canine’s vocabulary… As in all animal acts meat is the inducement. If this act is not put before the public too seriously, and the audience is not led to believe that they are going to hear oratory from ‘Don’ it will go well.”\textsuperscript{103} The

\textsuperscript{98} Harry Miles Johnson, “The Talking Dog” \textit{Science}, May 10, 1912, 749-751.
\textsuperscript{99} ibid, 749.
\textsuperscript{100} ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} ibid, 750.
\textsuperscript{102} ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} Cleveland, September 23, 1912, KAC, 15, 10.
Baltimore manager was less generous, having been given a less impressive performance: “Would be a splendid card, if you could depend on the dog talking his few words at each performance, but, yesterday afternoon he spoke but one word plain, and last night two, consequently he is a little disappointing.” As with the humbugs I discuss in chapter two, the audience was aware that it was a stretch to think a dog was speaking German. Nevertheless, the awareness that dogs possess capacities beyond human comprehension kept Don “facing the footlights.” He even saved a man from drowning at Coney Island in 1913 and the press could not resist sensationalizing the event. The Sun newspaper reported “Don promptly shouted ‘Help!’ as loud as he could and then plunged through the surf to the drowning man.” While learned animal routines like Don and Dick pushed anthropomorphic antics beyond the limits of credulity via displays of verbal and written language, most canine performances relied on dogs’ athletic, parodic, and sometimes desperate bodies.

Rendering Canine Bodies

Vaudeville dogs were often athletic and were, generally, as pliable and as precise as possible. This is clear in Wormwood’s Dogs and Monkey’s appearance in the short comedy film Rube and Mandy at Coney Island (1903). Wormwood holds the dog in his left hand like a waiter with a tray. The dog is on its back, stretched out long and looking dead while several other dogs of various breeds stand on a booth platform behind Wormwood and his “costar.” Wormwood flips the dog in the air like pizza dough, catching the dog and quickly urging it to a position of balancing all four paws on Wormwood’s left palm (one of the acts Jack London described in Michael, Brother of

104 Baltimore, October 28, 1912, KAC, 15, 66.
105 “Talking Dog a Life Saver” The Sun, August 28, 1913.
Jerry). Like a taffy pull, Wormwood stretches the dog to its physical limit by extending the creature’s fore and hind legs apart. He then flips the dog several more times in the air while an assistant brings to the booth what seems to be a tethered baboon, appearing as miserable as the filmed baboon featured in chapter three. This sort of primate/dog formula represented some of the most objectifying form of animal performance in the early twentieth century. While less literally violent than the monkey baiting Fudge analyzes, the act’s symbolic violence is clear. Dogs’ malleability, and continued presence in the face of abuse and neglect, is one of the key features of their coevolution with humans.

The Edison comedy short film *Dog Factory* (1904) also depends on symbolic violence towards dogs and resonates with Shukin’s emphasis on the specter of animals embedded in and embodied by film. The gelatin that allowed the early film industry to flourish was a by-product of the industrial rendering of animal parts and Shukin follows gelatin’s trail from the art house back to the slaughterhouse, establishing the mutually constitutive relations of animal processing and representation. *Dog Factory*’s form and content produced and was produced by animal capital. The film was made in the same year the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov received his

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106 “Dog Factory,” Thomas A. Edison Inc., 1904. Library of Congress, accessed via YouTube November 1, 2015 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ac2fWCwDH9Y. Another dog comedy sketch, “Stealing a Dinner” enacts literal violence against a dog. It features a dozen of Professor Leonidas’ dogs sitting around him while he prepares to eat. Not surprisingly, a dog steals his dinner. The Library of Congress provides a description of the rest of the action: “Thus blaming the cat for the stolen dinner, the man first scolds the feline and then draws a pistol aimed at the ‘thief.’ When the black dog sees the gun, however, he jumps on the table between the pistol and the cat, begging on his hind legs for the master to spare its life. The man grabs the dog by the collar, dragging him to the floor, and instead shoots the unlucky dog. A large dog--perhaps a Great Dane--in a policeman's uniform enters on his hind legs, grabs the man by the shoulders from behind, and chases him offstage. The other dogs follow in an excited pack.” American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1903. Library of Congress, accessed via YouTube November 1, 2015 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_32tELwrMxM.
Nobel Prize for processing dog bodies in systematic, factory-like conditions.\footnote{Concurrent with the vaudeville era, Ivan Pavlov gained international acclaim for his work on digestion, reflexes, and the nervous system in dogs. In his recent biography of Pavlov, medical historian Daniel P. Totes describes how Pavlov “became creator and master of his own physiology factory, an enterprise that harnessed his scientific ideas and management style…”. Daniel P. Todes, \textit{Ivan Pavlov: A Russian Life in Science} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 115. As a reviewer of the book explains, “Pavlov would remove a dog’s esophagus and create an opening, a fistula, in the animal’s throat, so that, no matter how much the dog ate, the food would fall out and never make it to the stomach. By creating additional fistulas along the digestive system and collecting the various secretions, he could measure their quantity and chemical properties in great detail.” Michael Specter, “Drool,” \textit{New Yorker}, November 24, 2014. \url{http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/11/24/drool}. Beginning in 1898, Pavlov also created a “gastric juice factory” in the basement of his lab, tethering “esophagotomized dogs” and gathering the results of their physiological processes to sell to the medical market “as a remedy for dyspepsia.” Todes, 174.} \textit{Dog Factory}’s comedy is premised on thinking of the variety produced by artificial selection as an array of modern consumer options. In the film, two painted \textit{trompe-l’œil} walls and a painted box with a tube serve as the “factory.” The “Patent Dog Transformator” instantly processes canines and turns them into breed-specific hot dog links or transforms the links back into a living dog. Two male proprietors (one in a suit, one in a worker’s apron) will create or destroy any dog, it all depends on the wish of the consumer. The walls of the dog factory are lined with varieties of links, including setter, terrier, “plain dog,” and “trick dog.” A shabby bum makes a little money by having three dogs transformed into hot dog links as the worker plops the pooches into the top of the “transformator” and cranks his arm to signify a machine at work. A snazzy dandy wearing a boater hat orders a spaniel. The wobbly string of links shimmy into the transformator and a spaniel scrambles out. A corseted Victorian matron fusses, rejecting the feisty dachshund she orders and selects a terrier instead. In the end, the factory proprietors manufacture a “fighting bull” dog to attack an argumentative customer. The industrialization of the companion animal is the very premise of the film’s humor.
Dogville Comedies

Dogs were consistently industrialized and mechanized in the early film industry. As in vaudeville, their high trainability made them malleable stand-ins for parodying human desires and foibles. Anthropoid performances of envy, lust, and adventure via canine bodies were on full display in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s Dogville Comedies. Released in the midst of vaudeville’s decline between 1929 and 1931, this series of nine short films was directed by Zion Myers and Jules White and satirized feature films. White became a significant contributor to Three Stooges shorts, and the Dogville shorts show White’s penchant for physical gags. The series followed the comic logic of vaudeville’s anthropomorphic all-dog pantomimes as well as vaudeville’s use of canine bodies to parody established performance genres. The series, sometimes called the “barkies” (instead of the “talkies”), included burlesques of famous films such as The Broadway Melody (1929), All Quiet on the Western Front (1930) and Trader Horn (1931) and were a target for animal rights activists.108

The Dogville Comedies mark a particular moment in film history in which animal abuse and the advancement of sound technology converged. Debates about the ethics of animals in entertainment had long been established through the Jack London Club and became intensified by the sometimes ruthless practices of film directors and producers. However, it was not until 1939 that any substantive animal protection measures were put in place in Hollywood.109 Early

108 Jonathan Burt, Animals in Film (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 142. Trader Hound was the last MGM Dogville Comedy. The same year, Myers and White co-directed Buster Keaton in Sidewalks of New York (1931).

109 The American Humane Association pressured the Motion Picture Association of America to take action after Twentieth Century Fox’s feature film Jesse James was shown to have created a contraption to drive a horse off a cliff. “Cruelty to Horses in Film Charged,” New York Times, January 15, 1939. According to historian David A. H. Wilson, activism in England led to legislative action during the 1920s: “During 1921 and 1922, before the passage of the Performing Animals (Regulation) Act in 1925, a British parliamentary select committee
film practitioners took up vaudeville’s attitude toward dogs as sources of cheap entertainment labor, using various methods to achieve comic effects. In an article condemning animal abuse in Hollywood, Paramount director Rob Wagner refers to “comedy dogs driven almost mad with rubber bands about their muzzles.”110 The man who trained many of Hollywood’s comedy dogs represented their training process with rhetoric similar to that I present in chapter three.111 “Renfro’s Dog Farm” was run by Renfro and supplied the trained dogs who appeared in the Dogville Comedies. He claimed successful training began with the proper selection of the smartest puppies from a litter (never more than two) and depended on the consistent introduction of tricks beginning in earnest at six months old. During the silent film era, Renfro gave his dogs commands by speaking. However, synced sound forced him to switch to hand movements.112 Because of this change, Renfro claimed, “The most important of these tricks for the cinema dog is the ability to move the mouth at a hand signal.”113 The Dogville films can help us understand the canine vaudeville performances that came before and also help us understand how early film harnessed the comedic power of sound to layer aural anthropomorphism onto the visual puns established in the dog pantomime genre. The mouth and the forelegs are the site of action-dependent comedy. Slightly off-sync human voices are dubbed over the strained mechanics of dogs opening and closing their mouths and the dogs’ front legs and paws reach out from beneath


113 ibid.
sleeves and appear to accomplish any number of human tasks such as powdering one’s nose or
shooting a gun.

Although many of the films layer ethnic, racial, and sexual stereotypes onto canine bodies and “voices,” I choose to end this chapter with a consideration of *Trader Hound* (1931) because it so thoroughly instantiates twentieth century consumer capitalism’s driving urge to render animal bodies for visual consumption and is such a strange and theatrical example of racialized animal representation, depending as it does on wigs, costumes, and “casting.” The film readily resonates with my earlier examples of racialized animal representation, including Jack London’s *Michael, Brother of Jerry*, the short film *Pie, Pie Blackbird* and the Gilded Age kicking mule mechanical banks. *Trader Hound* was Mayer and White’s parody of MGM’s controversial Academy-Award nominated film *Trader Horn* (1931). The source material is worth considering in some detail because of its imbrication in systems of imperialist and capitalist modes of production. The “jungle film” was an intriguing choice of source material for a canine parody; its production process and final footage exemplify animal rendering as thorough as that achieved by a Chicago slaughterhouse. Directed by W.S. Van Dyke before the animal treatment guidelines established by the Motion Picture Production Code, *Trader Horn* was based on the memoir of an English ivory trader and was famous for being “the first non-documentary film ever shot in Africa.” According to animal historian Jonathan Burt, the film “caused outrage in some quarters for its depiction of hunting and animal death.” The on-location shoot in East Africa was costly and dangerous, with two crew members rumored to have died and the actress

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115 Burt, *Animals in Film*, 131.
Edwina Booth contracting a career-ending disease. Additional scenes of animal violence were filmed in Mexico to evade animal protection laws in the United States. Variety described Trader Horn as “A good-looking animal picture. The story doesn’t mean anything other than a connecting link for a series of sequences which, at one point, become nothing more than an out-and-out lecture tour, as various herds of animals are described.” In this, Trader Horn represents a transitional form of animal entertainment both visually and aurally. Nature films had become a popular genre because they were considered more edifying than knockabout comedies or sexually suggestive dramas. Trader Horn attempted to create anthropocentric drama “through a succession of narrow escapes from four-footed enemies and a cannibal tribe.” In addition, MGM made the decision to switch from a silent to a synced sound production, which compounded the inexperience and confusion of the on-site film crew.

Myers and White’s satirical short mocks the blustery voiceover of adventure films and is underscored with a song titled “Voodoo Dreams.” Trader Hound begins: “Here we are encamped in the heart of Africa, where mysterious danger lurks in every shadow, where savage men and beasts kill in order to live, where… uh, well, anyway, here we are.” The “travelogue” quality of Trader Horn is satirized by the appearance of humans in unconvincing African animal costumes. The same black dog who played a mammy, minstrelsy-voiced bartender, and an Al

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117 In the same article cited above, Rob Wager claims the scenes filmed in Mexico were created in “utterly inexcusable” conditions, condemns the decision to “drive a herd of hippopotami over a cliff to their death, or at least, great injury” and the practice of keeping captive animals “starved into ferocity.” Wagner, “Movieland Goes Roman.”
119 Burt, Animals in Film, 122.
120 Variety, December 30, 1930.
121 Trader Hound, directed by Zion Myers and Jules White (1931; Culver City, CA: MGM), DVD.
Jolson-style blackface performer in previous films now plays Rencharo, the servant of Horn.\textsuperscript{122}

In \textit{Trader Horn}, Rencharo was played by Kenyan actor Mutia Omoolu. This makes \textit{Trader Hound} the clearest case of Mayer and White intentionally color casting the dog and, in fact, expecting audiences to interpret the character the dog portrays as a reference to a specific Black actor. The dog trainer Rennie Renfro discussed their casting choices:

I needed a certain type of dog to talk in “\textit{Trader Hound}”... We used the dark colored graduates of my dog school for African savages and we still needed one more that could take the part of a cannibal chief. Among the dogs that were still in the earlier stages of training I found one sufficiently dark in coloring to take the part. This dog had not been taught mouth movements; he knew only the very first fundamentals of my course. I gave him a very intensive course of training for several days before production began, so that he could join the cast as one of the “talking dogs.”\textsuperscript{123}

The canine Rencharo has only a few lines; however, whenever language is dubbed for the character it is delivered as minstrelsy patter and mumbling such as “Iiis skeered, boss...” and “Hot dog! That mama sho’ aint forget how ta neck!” The short film parody follows the era’s conceptions of Africa as a savage land where human and beast merge into images of violent black warriors and sexually voracious gorillas. In \textit{Trader Hound}, the Izorgi village is the “home of the fiercest Afri-curs.” The tribe of cannibals is depicted by a ragtag group of dogs festooned with body paint, plumes, nose bones, shields, and wigs. The camera pans slowly across each dog as he is introduced so the audience can properly take in the comic effect of canine costuming. One dog even has a bird nesting in his prodigious wig.\textsuperscript{124} As in \textit{Trader Horn}, the villagers are keeping the kidnapped daughter of a missionary captive as their “White Goddess.” Donning a

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Variety} described the character as Horn’s “native gun boy.”
\textsuperscript{124} The camera similarly lingers over the bejeweled dogs of the Sultan’s harem in one of the revues depicted in \textit{The Broadway Melody}. The erotic enveloping gaze of the camera is both employed and mocked as, once again, the dogs’ various physical characteristics are made ridiculous via dazzling bra tops, diaphanous veils, and other ornamented clothing.
long blond wig, the same French bulldog coded as the white female victim in The Dogway. Melody plays the captive. Rhona J. Berenstein argues that “the role of white heroines in jungle films is coded in racial terms – they represent the civilizing ‘superiority’ of their race, and their interactions with male natives and gorillas invoke the white fantasy of an uncontrollable black man ravishing a helpless white woman.”125 Myers and White parody the cinematic genre and render another iteration of animalizing race by racializing animals, merging animal and animalized capital.

The Dogville Comedy shorts are an important tool for understanding how vaudeville’s use of animal capital functioned. Canine and primate vaudevillians amused audiences with absurd mimetic performances that simultaneously invited spectators to contemplate evolution’s interspecies connections while losing themselves to the pleasure of parody and mimetic precision. The performances were presented as apolitical diversions but they, in fact, provoke, haunt, and question the construction of the human subject. Despite the interspecies intimacy stressed in primate and canine acts, they ultimately reinforced hierarchies of race and class in an era threatened by mass immigration and domestic migration. Vaudeville facilitated audiences’ temporary access to animal bodies, ultimately reinforcing a sense of human/animal distance and spectator supremacy.

125 Rhona J. Berenstein “White Heroines and Hearts of Darkness: Race, Gender and Disguise in 1930s Jungle Films” Film History 6, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 318.
Conclusion

Comparing archival evidence from 1906 and 1916, animals presence on Keith’s vaudeville stages declined between 15-20 percent as the United States dealt with the global impact of World War I, moved towards the Jazz Age, and cared much less about residual Protestant and Victorian anxieties about respectable live entertainments. Playlets and dance demonstrations became more popular in vaudeville, and nickelodeons and film houses siphoned off some of the youth market as well as audiences looking primarily for spectacle. Large corporate circuses also struggled to recapture the market share and magic of previous decades. In this new paradigm, both animals and acrobats decreased in importance in vaudeville. Marsden Hartley lamented the change: “the stage that once was so full of knockabout is now so full of stand-still.”

We can still see the patterns established by vaudeville’s mobilization of animal capital. When Shania Twain began her glitzy “career comeback” Las Vegas concert show titled “Shania: Still the One” in December 2012, the wow finish was a contemporary manifestation of the united white woman / snowy white horse that was popular over one hundred years ago. Although the act also featured a black horse, it was the white horse who received press coverage and an accompanying Getty Images publicity photo. One critic was swept away by the theatrical impact: “Confetti in the shapes of snowflakes falls heavily as Twain rides in on the white horse (which follows her every move) for the romantic one-two punch of ‘You're Still the One’ and ‘From This Moment On,’ delivered divinely but with an air of melancholia, considering her

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devastating breakup with the song's cowriter.”\textsuperscript{3} The \textit{New York Times} described the moment as equally enchanting, “looking the horse in the eye… her voice was milky and resonant.”\textsuperscript{4} Snow milk, horse, and woman melt into a vision of theatrically compelling whiteness.

Broadway has also taken notice of the animal turn in popular taste and, in addition to the \textit{Pippin} revival I mention in chapter two, several post-millennium productions have depended on animal bodies to disrupt the semiotics of the proscenium, advance plots, and deepen character development. The West End production of \textit{The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime} won seven Olivier Awards, including Best Play and has been a success since it transferred to Broadway in 2014. The show features a pet white rat and a golden retriever puppy who fulfills the function of an eleven o’clock number by bounding on stage to help everyone feel better about the brutally murdered prop dog that opens the play. The 2014 revival of John Steinbeck’s \textit{Of Mice and Men} was mainly known for celebrity actor James Franco playing George, but it also featured a fourteen-year-old pit bull named Violet who actively telegraphed Steinbeck’s condemnation of an ethos of disposability as she limped slowly off stage to be shot because of her uselessness and smelly old age. Marketing to the juvenile audience has also depended on dogs. \textit{Legally Blond} (2007) brought the popularity of the feature film to Broadway and further intensified Chihuahuas’ millennial moment. A revival of the 1977 hit \textit{Annie} opened in November 2012 and closed after the end of the family-friendly holiday season in January 2014. Performing dogs have become so culturally compelling that Bill Berloni, the top dog trainer for Broadway and the man who cast and trained Sandy for the original 1977 production of \textit{Annie}, starred in his own Discovery Family Channel reality show “From Wags to Riches With Bill Berloni” in 2015.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{3} ibid.
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Apparently dogs are middlebrow and cats are highbrow. The Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota has hosted a “wildly popular” Internet Cat Video Festival since 2011 (for which winners receive a Golden Kitty Award). In 2013, the New York City art space White Columns in the West Village mounted “The Cat Show,” featuring the work of nearly 90 artists. Currently, the Museum of the Moving Image in New York City has an exhibition titled “How Cats Took Over the Internet,” which tells the history of cats online, examining phenomena like Caturday, lolcats, cat videos, celebrity cats, and more to unearth why images and videos of the feline kind have transfixed a generation of web users. Touching on concepts like anthropomorphism, the aesthetics of cuteness, the Bored at Work Network, and the rise of user-generated content, this exhibit takes a critical look at a deceptively frivolous phenomenon.5

As this show suggests, digital media has profoundly impacted many first world consumers’ relationships with the circulation of both the signs and substances of animal capital. Serving a compensatory function in an increasingly overwhelmed and anxious era in which news and images of state and civic violence and the impact of climate change can make personal agency seem impossible when operating within the overdetermined macro structures of global capitalism, casual access to animal images has become part of an animal-centered coping mechanism for millions of internet users. Indeed, the animal/internet feedback loop strengthened in June 2015 when the scholarly peer-reviewed journal Computers in Human Behavior published an article showing that “by watching cat videos, viewers boost their energy and positive emotions, and decrease their negative feelings.”6

5 http://www.movingimage.us/exhibitions/2015/08/07/detail/how-cats-took-over-the-internet/
Digital media likely has much to do with the recent paradigm shift in how many people feel about captive charismatic megafauna being trained to perform. In early spring, Feld Entertainment Inc., which owns Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus, announced it would phase out its elephant act by 2018 and send remaining elephants to the elephant sanctuary Feld Entertainment runs in Florida. The company was careful to control its message about the change. Company president Kenneth Feld told the Associated Press, “We’re not reacting to our critics; we’re creating the greatest resource for the preservation of the Asian elephant.”\(^7\) At the same time, it is clear that activism and legislative changes provoked the decision: “Feld acknowledged that because so many cities and counties have passed ‘anti-circus’ and ‘anti-elephant’ ordinances, it’s difficult to organize tours of three traveling circuses to 115 cities each year. Fighting legislation in each jurisdiction is expensive… ‘All of the resources used to fight these things can be put toward the elephants,’ Feld said.”\(^8\) Despite the careful messaging, the company’s spokesperson Stephen Payne conceded, “we have detected a shift in mood from some of our customers that didn’t necessarily feel comfortable with elephants traveling city to city.”\(^9\) Elephants are no longer expected and demanded as epic spectacles in the three-ring circus in the way they were. For many, they no longer impress on an enlarged scale that merges national pride with natural wonder without considering their complex interior lives. This could be because of increased public awareness of shrinking habitat and dwindling populations of Asian and African elephants. Targeted legislation in prominent municipalities, such as Los Angeles, helped to finally make elephants no longer financially viable in this instance. It is worth considering that


\(^8\) ibid.

\(^9\) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/03/05/the-long-battle-to-remove-elephants-from-the-ringling-bros-circus/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/03/05/the-long-battle-to-remove-elephants-from-the-ringling-bros-circus/)
film, the technology that captured Topsy’s death over a century ago, has done crucial work to convey the complexity of elephant ontology to humans. Along with scores of amateur videos uploaded to YouTube, professional television documentaries such as The Urban Elephant (2000) feature intense and intimate depictions of elephant behavior in isolation and community. The film, which was broadcast on the PBS program Nature in 2000, follows the injured circus elephant, Shirley, who spent “over two decades, chained by the hind leg, without other elephants” in a Louisiana Zoo. Shirley reacts strongly when reunited with another elephant she last saw nearly twenty-five years earlier. While the realities of animals in zoos are beyond the scope of this research, it is worth noting that training and transportation, the material conditions of the performing animals, became the strategic target for legislative change rather than efforts to confront or otherwise convince consumers to actively change their entertainment consumption.

In another significant example of a change in animal entertainment spectacles, SeaWorld just announced it would phase out its current trick-based orca shows. The 2013 documentary Blackfish, directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite and produced by CNN, is largely credited for bringing the captivity of SeaWorld’s orcas to international attention. Even though animal activists and the sporadic deaths of trainers spurred controversy in the past, a new focus on the cognitive and emotional complexity of orcas generated a new urgency for the issue of keeping orcas as captive performers. SeaWorld San Diego announced it is ending its well-known orca show sometime in 2016. However, the animal enthusiast website The Dodo described this shift as “more of an attempt to repackage the experience to make captivity more palatable to potential guests. CEO Joel Manby announced during an investor presentation that the current ‘theatrical’ show will be replaced with an attraction that features a ‘conservation message inspiring people to

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act’ sometime in 2017. ‘It will be focused on … the natural behavior of the whales,’ Manby said.”11 The frame of unabashed theatricality, with trainers swimming alongside orcas and diving off their snouts, is being replaced by a more zoo- or science-museum-style educational model, which, of course, is no less imbricated in the history of captivity and animal performance than amusement parks.

Animal vaudevillians lived and labored in a rapidly developing network of globally circulating capital. Thus far, their histories have been largely absent from academic consideration. This dissertation introduces many threads of inquiry that could lead to new research regarding taste formation, racial categories and positions of alterity, theatre aesthetics, and the science of animal cognition and behavior, to name a few. The central irony of this entire research project is that vaudeville’s performing animals compelled me to take notice of their lives due to the additional training and professional marketing that put them in the theatrical spotlight. Yet, when we truly privilege animals as subjects-of-a-life not beholden to the circulation of animal capital, it does seem it would have been better if they had never been in vaudeville at all.

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