

ANIMAL METROPOLIS: HISTORIES OF HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONS IN URBAN CANADA
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The Memory of an Elephant: Savagery, Civilization, and Spectacle

CHRISTABELLE SETHNA

Oversized roadside attractions marking small urban centres are a familiar feature across Canada. Perhaps the most curious among these is an enormous statue of an elephant positioned at the west entrance to the city of St. Thomas, Ontario. Elephants are not, of course, native to this part of the world. They originate in Africa and Asia and are unsuited to cold climes. However, elephants have long journeyed to rural and urban Canada as zoo exhibits and circus acts. Notably, the storied African elephant Jumbo, the main attraction of Barnum and Bailey's profitable travelling railway circus, was killed unexpectedly by a freight train on 15 September 1885 in St. Thomas, where his likeness was memorialized in concrete a century later.

This chapter represents a contribution toward "species studies," which arises out of animal rights activism and parallels racial justice movements. But more recently, species studies has been implicated in consolidating "links between species, race, and transnational power structures that underlie the production of culture."¹ Species studies scholars suggest that studying the "circulation of nonhuman species as both figures and materialized bodies within the circuits of imperial biopower" can yield rich information about colonial encounters.² Perhaps because "the ultimate subaltern" is said to be the nonhuman animal, "animalization" is a recurring aspect of those circuits.³ In this chapter animalization refers to the ways in

which human animals are othered by “discourses of animality” and rendered abject. Although animalization can provide compelling insight into the ways human animals are racialized under colonialism, the comparable experiences of nonhuman animals caught up in the very same regime are often obscured.⁴ I suggest that because animalization and racialization are mutually constitutive, the collision between the Grand Trunk Railway’s iron horse and “the world’s first international animal superstar”⁵ should not be treated as mere historical curiosity. Rather, Jumbo’s life, death, and afterlife can be understood as a violence-filled colonial journey that followed a well-worn track common to captive nonhuman and human animal bodies alike, particularly in the business of slavery and freakery. The international urban dimensions of their commodification were striking.

Bodies on Display

For centuries blacks, primarily from central, southern, and western Africa, were abducted and transported in chains across the Atlantic in a dreaded journey known as the “Middle Passage.”⁶ Survivors were sold into slavery to white owners in Europe and the Americas. African human animal bodies were also put on public display in cities as exotic specimens to be examined by natural historians or to serve as entertaining curiosities. In the cases of slavery and freakery, both individual oddities and racial peculiarities were read simultaneously as the monstrous signifiers of the inherent animality of savage Africans and the racial superiority of civilized Europeans.⁷ Out of these racialized human-animal hybrids arose the spectacle of the abject subhuman that could be consumed, literally and symbolically, in life, death, and afterlife. Nonhuman animals fared no better. As the trade in human slaves from Africa wound down in the 1860s, and the scramble for Africa wound up, the demands of European and American zoos and circuses for exotic big game increased. Killing large nonhuman animals for sport and displaying their body parts as trophies have long been associated with imperial power. Large elephant tusks were prized because ivory was the “white gold” of empires, used to fund commercial expansion and to make items such as pianos, combs, and handles for flatware. Capturing large “charismatic megafauna” alive and exhibiting them in colonial metropolises until their upkeep became too problematic also served as an imperial status symbol.⁸

Jumbo was one of many creatures netted for this lucrative transnational enterprise.⁹ He was born circa 1860 in what is now the Sudan near the border with Eritrea. The region was remote, serviced neither by roads nor railways.¹⁰ Elephant hunters from the Hamran tribe who made a living selling tusks and bones killed the elephant calf's mother two years later in order to capture him alive for European animal traders. The traders surmised correctly that Europeans accustomed to Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) in zoos would be keen to view the larger African species (*Loxodonta africana*), considered more exotic because of its fan-like ears. Assumptions about Asian and African elephants sometimes mirrored beliefs about Asian and African peoples; Asian elephants were said to be smaller and more docile in comparison to their larger and fiercer African cousins.¹¹

The elephant hunters delivered Jumbo, along with another captive elephant calf, a rhinoceros, giraffes, ostriches, antelopes, porcupines, and birds of prey to a Bavarian trader who handed them off to an Italian. The latter took the creatures on an arduous desert trek followed by an ocean voyage to the port of Suez, a railway journey to the port of Alexandria, a boat to Trieste, and yet another train to Dresden. Many died en route, including the second elephant calf. A Prussian purchased the remaining lot and toured his newly acquired "Grand Menagerie" from town to town to entertain the local populace. Zoos across Europe soon made individual purchases from the Grand Menagerie, with Jumbo going to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. This urban landmark housed plants, animals, and the Muséum national d'histoire naturelle. Notable natural historians such as Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, as well as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Georges Cuvier, trained here.

These Enlightenment figures' ideas about racial degeneration contributed to the spread of scientific racism. In the early nineteenth century Cuvier, author of *The Animal Kingdom* (1817), would go on to examine Saartjie Baartman from the Khoikhoi tribe of South Africa when she was exhibited in Paris by her keeper on account of her large buttocks and genitalia. After his examination he pronounced: "her movements had something of brusqueness and capriciousness which recalled those of a monkey."¹² After Baartman died in 1815, possibly from alcoholism or syphilis, she remained a figure on display. Cuvier made a plaster cast of her body and preserved her skeleton and genitalia separately. These were exhibited

at the Musée de l'homme in Paris in Case no. 33 until 1974. France agreed to repatriate Baartman's remains to South Africa in 2002 but officials could not confirm that they belonged to Baartman. Two centuries later, she continues to embody the fractured postcolonial and multicultural relations between Europe and Africa.¹³

Jumbo remained at the Jardin des Plantes until overcrowding – thanks to the purchase of two more African elephant calves as well as oxen, monkeys, tortoises, birds, and stags – led his owners to trade him to the Zoological Society in London. Society members founded the London Zoo to support scientific and educational endeavours, but the Society succumbed to the lure of displaying creatures that appeared exotic in Britain.¹⁴ Matthew Scott, a junior keeper assigned to Jumbo, noted his small stature and poor condition before transporting him to his new home by train and boat. Scott nursed Jumbo to health, but the elephant would have occasional rages, smashing the doors and windows of his enclosure and eventually damaging his tusks and shortening their length greatly.

The possibility that Jumbo may have been exercising some agency, possibly acting wilfully out of anger or loneliness at being held captive, did not occur to Abraham Bartlett, a former taxidermist and by then Superintendent at the London Zoo. Rather, he diagnosed the elephant's behaviour as "fits of temporary insanity."¹⁵ Consequently, Bartlett and Scott beat Jumbo into submission, with Bartlett recalling: "He [Jumbo] quickly recognized that he was mastered by lying down and uttering a cry of submission. We coaxed him and fed him with a few tempting morsels, and after this time he appeared to recognize that we were his best friends, and he continued on best terms with both of us."¹⁶ The diagnosis and treatment of Jumbo's behaviour paralleled the medicalization of black slaves' resistance to slavery. Slaves who tried to escape were depicted as wilful runaway savages and were said to suffer from "Drapetomania" or "Dysthesis Ethiopica," mental health afflictions that could be remedied by enforcing the runaway's submission to his or her master.¹⁷

Over the next two decades Jumbo grew to the impressive proportions of 11 feet in height and 7 tons in weight, achieving international renown as the world's largest land animal in captivity. As a resident of the city at the heart of the vast British Empire, he became a fixture at the London Zoo. Visitors fed him buns, and even the royal family was said to be a fan of the pachyderm. Trained by Scott to give children rides on his back, Jumbo

was fitted with a *howdah*, a canopy seat in which Indian maharajahs and British sahibs participated in tiger hunts and ceremonial processions in India.¹⁸ Despite his African origins and his Indian trappings, Jumbo evolved into a quintessential British icon, reinforcing colonial tropes about the positive value of white civilizing missions that tamed beastly human and nonhuman animal life from the tropics.¹⁹

Yet Jumbo was hardly docile; his ongoing nightly destruction of his quarters encouraged Bartlett's belief that African elephants were too savage to be domesticated. A more sympathetic Scott called Jumbo "the most intelligent animal the world has ever seen," and acknowledged that "like all other creatures, [he] prefers his liberty."²⁰ He attempted to calm Jumbo by plying him with beer and whisky, but Jumbo's acting out increased as he became sexually mature at approximately age twenty. During the period known as "musth," bull elephants, possibly because of heightened levels of testosterone, become extremely aggressive, posing a grave danger to other human and nonhuman animals. Rampaging elephants and the forceful steps taken to quell them have been used as literary vehicles by authors such as George Orwell to express the power and the powerlessness of imperial rule.²¹ Elephants are not, however, empty metaphors. When fractious behaviour was observed in Chuny, an Indian elephant exhibited on the London stage, he was executed in 1826 – shot with volley upon volley of bullets then stabbed to death with a sword. Members of the public paid to see him dissected.²²

Jumbo's hormone-fuelled conduct ensured his disposability: morphing from an avuncular noble savage beloved by children into an uncontrollable priapic beast that was the stuff of colonial nightmares about restless natives and dark-skinned rapists. Anticipating that he would have to shoot the elephant, Bartlett welcomed the timely offer P.T. Barnum made to purchase Jumbo for £2,000 and ship him to the United States.²³ Barnum was a well-known American showman who made a career and a fortune out of dime museums, often exhibiting individuals who were, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson puts it, "physically disabled" or "exotic ethnics."²⁴ Early success emerged in the form of Joice Heth, an old, blind African-American woman he advertised as the 161-year-old nursemaid to George Washington and later as a ventriloquist's dummy. William Henry Jackson, a young African-American with microcephaly, proved to be another crowd pleaser. Nicknamed Zip or "What's It?," Jackson played the role of a monkey-like simpleton. It is speculated that Heth and Jackson

drew large audiences because of white “nostalgia for degrading images of blacks” in popular literature, plays, and blackface minstrel shows, and because of the belief that Africa was a mysterious continent “inhabited by savages and wild men, creatures only marginally human.”²⁵

In the 1870s Barnum entered the circus business, soon turning a handsome profit. The circus has its origins in the travelling equestrian and acrobatic performances of Englishman John B. Ricketts. He and his American assistant, John Durang, came to Montreal and Quebec City in the late eighteenth century. They presented a variety of acts that included a pantomime featuring Captain James Cook and Hawaiian natives. In the nineteenth century, visits from members of the British Royal Family, replete with Aborigines performing sports and dances for the overseas guests, were popular occasions for spectacle. So too was the circus, along with other forms of entertainment, such as melodrama, burlesque, and animal menageries.²⁶

Elephants, newspapers, and railways were crucial to the success of the American circus in its “golden age” (1870–1920).²⁷ Elephants were a critical source of circus labour. Some were also conditioned to perform tricks for audiences with a growing appetite for variety, novelty, and mastery over the natural world. Trainers used an elephant hook – a pointed baton intended to prick sensitive spots on the elephant’s body – as well as a system of commands and rewards to generate the learned memory responses they required in these nonhuman animals. Newspapers published circus stories, articles, announcements, images, and schedules that circulated widely, and journalists were often invited to attend circus performances. Railways, which were built primarily by nonwhite immigrants, fashioned cities out of wilderness, a process indicative of both industrialization and modernity. Rail transport brought human and nonhuman animal circus labourers and performers, and elaborate equipment and costumes to rural and urban locations. By the time Barnum made his offer to purchase Jumbo, the elephant had distinguished itself as the “quintessential entertainment industry animal,” even serving as the advertisement for travelling circuses.²⁸

Public outcry in London over the sale of Jumbo and a lawsuit attempting to block his release delayed his shipment to New York. So too did Jumbo’s fierce refusals to enter the crate in which he would cross the Atlantic Ocean. The news resulted in an uptick in zoo visitors and a slate of sympathetic correspondence from adults and children addressed to the

elephant.²⁹ A patriotic public interpreted Jumbo's resistance as his disapproval of the United States, a vulgar nation tainted by its history of slavery, while a more sympathetic crowd attributed it to Jumbo's affection for the African cow elephant, Alice, routinely cast as his "wife."³⁰ Narratives that anthropomorphized nonhuman animals as monogamous and heteronormative were standard fodder for adults and children; even James Joyce wrote famously: "Love loves to love . . . Jumbo, the elephant, loves Alice, the elephant."³¹ However, Scott racialized the pair as slave siblings, possibly to enhance the pathos of Jumbo's departure for public consumption or to empathize with the elephant's distress. Recounting Jumbo's parting from Alice, Scott positioned himself as the heartbroken slave father and the elephants as his slave offspring sold to two different masters.³²

From Zoo to Circus Elephant

Elephant and keeper arrived finally in New York City on 8 April 1882 after crossing the ocean on a ship filled with other migrants. The next day a team of eight horses and two elephants pulled and pushed Jumbo's crate in a parade followed by gawking crowds along Broadway Avenue to the Madison Square Garden circus grounds.³³ Alluding to imperial victory – this time of the New World over the Old – Barnum crowed that Queen Victoria, along with "every child in Great Britain," was mourning the loss of "the colossus of elephant."³⁴ The origin of Jumbo's name remains unclear. But thanks to the sensational publicity surrounding Barnum's purchase, the word "jumbo" came to refer to an object of gargantuan dimensions, and "Jumbomania" inspired advertisements, songs, toys, plates, poems, cartoons, cards, and jewellery.³⁵ Even Charles Edenshaw (1839–1920), a respected Haida artist from the remote settlement of Masset in Haida Gwaii (then the Queen Charlotte Islands), was influenced enough by Jumbomania to carve the elephant's likeness into a walking stick.³⁶

Barnum's approach to circus entertainment combined elements of dime museums and freak shows with human and nonhuman animal acts Orientalized as exotic.³⁷ Jumbo, who joined thirty other performing elephants in the Barnum and Bailey circus, was also represented in freakish terms. One circus worker compared him to Nelse Seymour, a tall black-face minstrel performer.³⁸ Another broadcast: "his trunk is the size of an adult crocodile, his tail is as big as a cow's leg, and he made footprints in

the sands of time resembling an indentation as if a very fat man had fallen off a very high building.”³⁹ At other points, he was portrayed as a gentle giant. Barnum averred that Jumbo was “perfectly lamb-like.”⁴⁰ Scott also insisted that Jumbo had never hurt him except by accident and once had even saved his life.⁴¹ Yet his American elephant trainers used an elephant hook on his ears, chains to secure his feet, and whips to lash his hide in order to mould Jumbo from zoo pet to travelling circus figurehead.⁴² When circus elephants resisted such conditioning they were punished severely. Pilot, a large Asian bull elephant in the same circus as Jumbo, was isolated, chained, and immobilized after injuring circus workers. One of Jumbo’s trainers, Col. George Arstingstall, then shot the “ferocious monster” to death. Pilot’s carcass was used to make glue and buttons and his tusks were fashioned into billiard balls.⁴³

A few months after Jumbo’s arrival in New York City, Barnum sent a letter to American consulates asking for their assistance in preparing a new circus spectacle. He wished to locate “not only human beings of different races, but also where practicable, those who possess extraordinary peculiarities such as giants, dwarfs, singular disfigurements of the person, dexterity in the use of weapons, dancing, singing, juggling, unusual feats of strength or agility etc. [emphasis in original].” Barnum requested that the respondent provide descriptions and photographs of as many as these “specimens” as possible.⁴⁴ A decade earlier, Barnum had concocted a “Congress of Nations,” composed mainly of working-class whites of Irish descent who played sumptuously costumed potentates, kings, and queens from Eastern and Western civilizations. In contrast to this “racial masquerade,” his new “Ethnological Congress” was based squarely upon the precepts of scientific racism, entertaining primarily white audiences with displays of yellow, brown, and black performers from around the world and reflecting the notion of American exceptionalism.⁴⁵ Some “professional savages” performing in the Ethnological Congress were itinerant African-American workers who were the most easily exploited because they stood at the bottom of the circus labour hierarchy. Black men were more likely to be assigned dangerous work like feeding and grooming elephants and cleaning their quarters. As performers, they were expected to display their blackness as the phylogenetic “missing link” between human and nonhuman animals under the big top.⁴⁶ Some of these performers came from as far away as Australia. One of Barnum’s recruiters, Robert A.

Cunningham, born in Godmanchester, Quebec, even abducted and transported two groups of Queensland aborigines to the circus. Tambo, one of the young aborigine boys in the first group, took sick and died in the winter of 1883. His remains were exhibited in a Cleveland, Ohio, dime museum, only to be rediscovered in a funeral home in that city in the 1990s.⁴⁷

Audiences attending the Ethnological Congress circus performance thrilled to an introductory pageant of horses and riders dressed in gold and purple, accompanied by drums, cymbals, and horns. After the pageant left the ring, a journalist recorded:

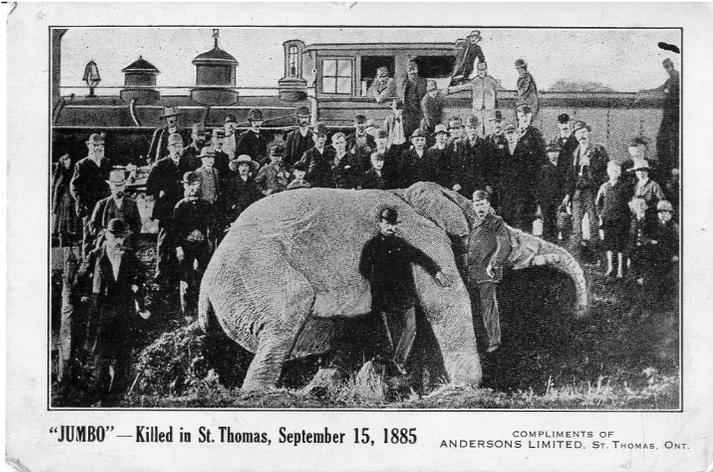
Jumbo came forth in all his modern magnificence, with a troop of children on his back. At his heels was the baby elephant and at his side a trainer in full evening dress. Following was a band of Sioux Indians and cowboys from the plains. Then came the curiosities from the museum. There were the giant and bearded lady, the long-haired wonder, and the fat boy, and the female white Moor and the tattooed man, and bringing up the rear was the Hindu serpent sorceress with a necklace of snakes.⁴⁸

Barnum was able to transport this parade of racialized human and non-human animal oddities to border communities in the United States and Canada by virtue of the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR). During the 1860s, lines operated by the GTR linked together Toronto, Montreal, Sarnia, and Kingston, as well as Portland, Maine, and Port Huron, Michigan. Several railway lines, including the GTR, were built in southern Ontario, with St. Thomas serving as their hub. St. Thomas, incorporated as a city in 1881, came to be known as “Railway City,” boasting one of the largest and most impressive railway stations in the province. As a result of rail traffic, the population increased to over eight thousand in the early 1880s.⁴⁹ St. Thomas was also notable as one of the border settlements for thousands of bonded and free blacks using the Underground Railroad to flee slavery in the United States. When the Civil War south of the border ended, many of these black settlers went back to the United States. Others put down roots in the area. With the expansion of transcontinental railway routes, black men from Canada, the United States, and from overseas found employment as track sleeping car porters and dining room attendants, albeit experiencing serious racism on the job.⁵⁰

Each year Barnum's circus journeyed thousands of miles by rail, decamping in New York, Pennsylvania, New England, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario.⁵¹ When he visited the city of Hamilton, Ontario, in the summer of 1883, the streets were packed with adults and children eager for a glimpse of a creature described in hyperbolic terms as "the Pride of the British Heart. The biggest Elephant, or Mastodon, or whatever he is, in or out of captivity. His uplifted trunk reaches upward of 26 feet. His weight is near ten tons. His height is beyond belief. His giant stride is over one rod!"⁵² Scott claimed that Jumbo did not like travelling by train because the noise and movement kept him in a "constant ferment of nervous excitement."⁵³ Nevertheless, Jumbo persevered in his specially built railway Palace Car, winning many fans along the way. Two weeks before his death, Jumbo and the Ethnological Congress captivated audiences in Quebec City; five thousand people eager to see "many strange people, animals and birds" were turned away from the full house.⁵⁴

He arrived in Chatham, Ontario, on 14 September 1885 to announcements trumpeting the "Ethnological Congress of Savage Tribes," "JUMBO, THE WONDER, AND CHILDREN'S GIANT PET," "JO-JO, the Marvelous Dog-Faced Boy," "NALA DAMAJANTI, The Heroic Hindu Snake Charmer," "TRAINED ANIMALS, Horses, Dogs, Pigs, Ponies, Bears, Lions, Tigers, Hyenas, Goats etc.," as well as a street parade and excursion rates on all railways.⁵⁵ The next evening, circus workers including Scott tore down a fence, creating a shortcut over train tracks to herd the animals to their tents. An unscheduled freight train bore down the track just as the elephants Tom Thumb and Jumbo were crossing the rails. Unable to stop in time, the train hurtled into the procession, tossing Tom Thumb into a ditch with a broken leg and smashing into Jumbo, driving one of his tusks into his brain. The *New York Times* reported on his demise:

There were deep gashes in his flank, his feet were torn, and the blood ran out of his mouth, but Jumbo looked more majestic than ever before. The great beast gave one groan after being struck. Then he assumed an attitude of determination, which he maintained until the sands of his life ran out. Long after his life was extinct his keeper [Matthew Scott], who brought him from the Zoological Gardens in London, laid on his body and wept.⁵⁶



1.1 Photographer T. H. Scott's iconic 1885 photo of Jumbo's dead body circulated as a postcard for a local St. Thomas business. Courtesy of Elgin County Archives.

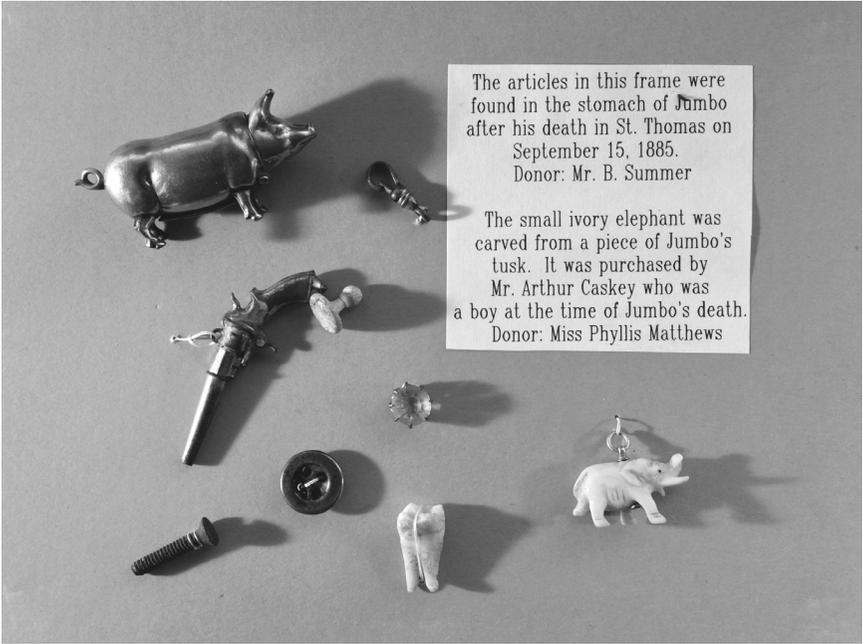
The Circus of the Afterlife

It is estimated that the amount Barnum paid the London Zoo for Jumbo was multiplied many times over in circus revenues during the elephant's short three-year tenure in the United States.⁵⁷ A remunerative circus attraction in life, Jumbo remained so in death and beyond. In Jumbo's afterlife, his dead body was rendered into a posthumous spectacle for consumption. After learning of the collision, Barnum supplied stories to a hungry press about Jumbo's heroism, claiming that the elephant tried to save Tom Thumb but was killed in doing so. Those at the scene in St. Thomas would later deny this version of events.⁵⁸ Barnum also requested local photographer T.H. Scott (no relation to Jumbo's keeper) to capture the corpse on film. In Scott's iconic photograph, the elephant's enormous bulk rests at the centre of the frame, surrounded by a semicircle of white men and boys. Only one woman is discernible at the far left edge of the crowd. Jumbo's keeper stands near his massive head; a railway official leans against the lifeless elephant, his left arm resting proprietarily on Jumbo's hide.⁵⁹ A locomotive, which the photographer asked to be positioned in the background for pictorial interest, looms above the carcass.

The photographer's son later divulged, "some wiseacre in New York copyrighted the picture and made a fortune," turning it into a souvenir postcard for public distribution.⁶⁰

The souvenir postcard's Gulliveresque image replicates several other staged visual representations of large African animals shot dead; a hunter, most often male and white, posing triumphantly atop or beside a dead animal-turned-trophy yet dwarfed by the size of the fresh kill.⁶¹ Many such animals were taxidermied for private or public display, and Jumbo was no exception. His death occurred in the same year in which rival European powers concluded the Berlin Conference. Although they agreed to suppress the slave trade, they severed Africa arbitrarily amongst themselves, scrambling for a share in the continent's natural resources. Notable was the trade in ivory, leading to the slaughter of thousands of elephants and the exploitation of villagers.⁶² Jumbo's African body was also partitioned into a number of fetish objects. Out of self-interest or a desire for respectability, Barnum had donated both money and animal specimens to American natural history institutions. Boston's Tufts University was a recipient of his largesse, even building a museum named in his honour on campus. Suspecting that Jumbo might be ill, Barnum had pre-arranged the donation of Jumbo's hide to the university and his skeleton to the Smithsonian Museum, and hired Henry Ward, a leading American natural historian and taxidermist, to dismember Jumbo and stuff him.⁶³

Across the Atlantic, the *London Daily News* opined upon the news of Jumbo's death: "Shall England have no relic of an elephant over whose parting from far shores so many English boys and girls, and elderly men and women for that matter, were understood to have shed tears?"⁶⁴ On the scene, St. Thomas residents were quick to seize their own spoils. While waiting for Ward and nearby butchers to arrive, throngs were charged an admission fee to view the body. A few enterprising citizens hacked off their own souvenirs – a sliver of an ear, a clipping from the trunk, a bristle from the tail, a slice of a tusk. One individual, moved by the "delicious aroma" that arose as Jumbo's remnants were burned, reportedly ate a slice of his roasted flank. A paste made out of his fat was sold in local apothecaries, purportedly as a remedy for men's erectile difficulties.⁶⁵ Small items like a screw, a button, and a matchstick holder found in his stomach were preserved for posterity. Similar game hunting behaviour was also observable among white mobs attending the lynching of African-Americans. They



1.2 Some of the contents of Jumbo's stomach remain on display at the Elgin County Museum. Courtesy of Elgin County Museum.

seized body parts from the victims and photographed dead bodies to create fetish souvenir objects and postcards, marking the lynching as a “performance spectacle.”⁶⁶

In contrast to the feeding frenzy surrounding Jumbo, the local press was respectful, even reverential, but it also attempted to cash in on the elephant's passing. For five cents, mourners could purchase from the *St. Thomas Weekly Times* a printed memorial tablet honouring “THE PET OF THOUSANDS AND FRIEND OF ALL.” The tablet bore a solemn verse:

If the tomb's secrets may not
be confessed,

The nature of thy private
life unfold.

A heart has throbb'd 'neath
that leathern breast,

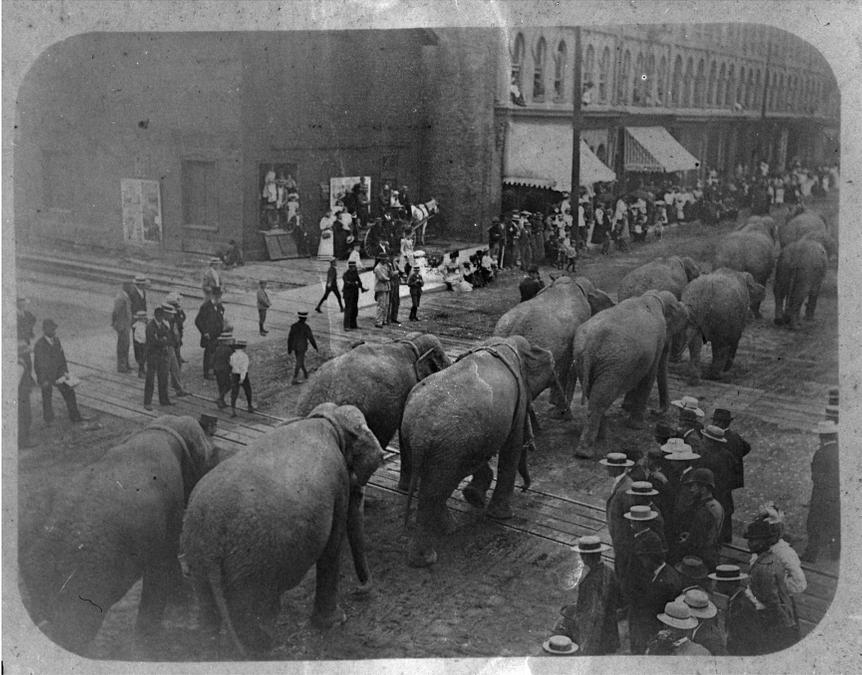
And tears adown that dusky cheek
have rolled;

Have children climbed upon
that back, and kissed
that face?

What was thy name, and
station, age and race?⁶⁷

This curious verse belonged to a well-known poem, "Address to the Mummy at Belzoni's Exhibition," by Horace Smith. Smith penned the poem after attending an exhibit on Egyptian antiquities that Giovanni Battista Belzoni held in London in 1821. A one-time circus performer and amateur archaeologist, Belzoni plundered tombs in Egypt and sold their contents to collectors. His exploits galvanized widespread interest in Egyptology and in mummies in particular. The use of a verse about a dusky Egyptian mummy to memorialize a dead pachyderm reinforced the notion that Orientalized creatures remained spectacles for consumption long after their deaths.⁶⁸

The newspaper additionally proposed building a local monument to the elephant,⁶⁹ but Barnum, who had benefited years earlier from "mummy fever," exhibiting mummies and sarcophagi in the 1830s, had other ideas. He breathed new life into Jumbo's remains, adding them to his traveling show.⁷⁰ He toured the preserved hide and skeleton internationally, sometimes positioning them alongside the newly purchased Alice, now anthropomorphized as Jumbo's grieving "widow."⁷¹ Barnum eventually donated Jumbo's heart to Cornell University, his skeleton to New York's Museum of Natural History, and his hide, which had been padded and stuffed to increase its dimensions as per Barnum's instructions, went to Tufts University. Jumbo, taxidermied as a natural history specimen and a wonder of nature, devolved into a popular mascot for the university's sports teams. In 1975 a fire destroyed the Barnum Museum and, with it, Jumbo's hide. A university employee scooped up the hide's ashes and



1.3 Ringling Brothers Circus Parade in St. Thomas, 1895. Courtesy of Elgin County Archives.

stored them in a peanut butter jar. The jar continues to be used “to inspire the college athletic teams that bear his name.”⁷²

St. Thomas residents likewise prided themselves on a fetishistic connection – however remote – to a piece of the elephant – however small – because his death “had brought a measure of fame” to their city, vaulting it most unexpectedly onto the international stage.⁷³ E.H. Flach, at the time a young boy who witnessed the collision, found one of Jumbo’s toenails on the tracks and exhibited it in the window of his family business for decades.⁷⁴ Other residents who were present at the spot where Jumbo died later recounted their interpretation of events and had their photos taken “for posterity.”⁷⁵ One resident penned a children’s storybook about Jumbo.⁷⁶ Various plastic, cardboard, and papier maché versions of Jumbo appeared in the city’s parade floats, school assignments, and annual shiva-rees. These bore a suspicious resemblance to the large-eared “Dumbo” and

“Elmer,” two cartoon elephants that were popular entertainment and educational figures for children in the postwar period.⁷⁷ A local dry cleaning business took Jumbo’s name as its own.⁷⁸ And when Hollywood produced a musical about a circus elephant called *Jumbo*, starring Doris Day and Stephen Boyd as the star-crossed singing sweethearts, the manager of the local Capitol cinema lobbied, albeit unsuccessfully, to host the Canadian premiere in St. Thomas.⁷⁹

Remembering Jumbo

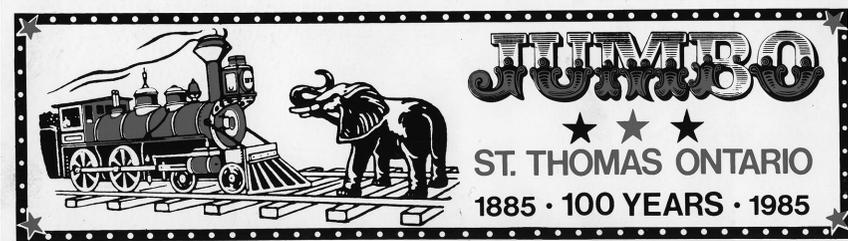
In 1977, a simple plaque commemorating Jumbo was installed near the site of the collision that killed him. However, as the centenary of his death approached, the city swung into action to capitalize on the occasion with the spectacle of a holus-bolus resurrection of the elephant, sparking another round of Jumbomania. By the early 1980s, St. Thomas had lost its status as a major railway hub. The automobile, which was introduced for the first time in Germany the year Jumbo was killed, rapidly supplanted flesh-and-blood and then iron horses as *the* modern means of ground transportation, ushering in an era of “automobility” that changed drastically both lives and landscapes.⁸⁰ Ontario had the largest number of registered passenger vehicles in the country; in 1904 that number topped off at 535, but by 1930 it had jumped to 490,906.⁸¹ Automobile manufacturing sprang up in the cities of Windsor and Oshawa. The provincial government pumped money into a road network that included a superhighway inspired by the German *autobahn*. It was inaugurated in 1939 as the “Queen Elizabeth Way” (QEW). The QEW and the province’s rapidly growing network of highways, which extended south into the United States, contributed to urban growth and automobile tourism.⁸² During the Second World War, the volume of railway traffic through St. Thomas spiked temporarily but declined thereafter. Passenger rail and freight service to the city ended in 1957 and 1965, respectively, and railway workers began working for nearby manufacturing plants connected to the Ford Motor Company.⁸³

A Jumbo Centennial Committee (JCC) was struck after Mayor Doug Tarry floated the idea of building a larger than life-sized statue of Jumbo. Tarry was well aware of oversized roadside attractions marking small towns and cities in the province. Such monuments have been interpreted as “a system of totemic representation” signalling the vitality of

a community and a distinctive sense of place in order to put a town or city “on the map.”⁸⁴ Tarry noted that a Canada goose (27 ft., 150,000 lbs.) represented Wawa; Dryden was branded by Max the Moose (18 ft., 4,000 lbs.) and Kenora by Huskie the Muskie (40 ft., 2.5 tonnes). “Every town wants its own thing,” Tarry told a television reporter, “this [statue of Jumbo] is our thing.”⁸⁵ The choice of an African elephant killed in a freak accident was far more incongruous a totem for a small southern Ontario city than indigenous creatures such as a Canada goose, a moose, and a muskie. However, the image of a large elephant, whether Asian or African, had by now metamorphosed into a generic communication device advertising abundance, greatness, and affluence.⁸⁶

The JCC certainly had Jumbo-sized ambitions. Members hoped that a grandiose statue of Jumbo would become a recognizable tourist attraction, boost a local economy battered by the recession of the early 1980s, and draw international attention once again to a city that lay within easy driving distance of the United States.⁸⁷ In effect, the JCC would invoke the spectacle of Jumbo to brand St. Thomas as a still-spectacular city. Some St. Thomas residents were unconvinced of the benefits of associating themselves with Jumbo’s tragic death; one voiced her opposition to the scheme only when she realized that the proposed statue was not an April Fool’s joke.⁸⁸ Yet others were convinced that it would work wonders. A St. Thomas lawyer told the city council that if “a big rock” (Ayer’s Rock) in Australia could attract international tourists so too would Jumbo’s statue with a wallop of “promotion, promotion, promotion. That’s what does it. Jumbo ice-cream, Jumbo hot dogs, Jumbo this, Jumbo that. Everyone in every language knows what Jumbo is. Jumbo means big.”⁸⁹

Still, opposition erupted over the Jumbo-sized cost of the statue. Winston Bronnum,⁹⁰ the New Brunswick artist who had already dotted Maritime Canada with large roadside attractions such as a moose, an old racehorse, and a potato, was selected to sculpt Jumbo’s likeness. Estimates of the cost ballooned quickly from \$50,000 to \$75,000.⁹¹ Robert Stollery, JCC chair and owner of a Ford Motor Company dealership, headed the fundraising campaign with the help of the Kiwanis Club. Courted by big city media seeking interviews, Stollery remarked cheerfully: “We think the exposure St. Thomas will get all over North America will make the worry, the blood, sweat and tears all worthwhile.”⁹² Residents pitched in to raise the money, selling Jumbo-related paraphernalia such as gold and silver



1.4 A Jumbo Days bumper sticker, 1985. Courtesy of Elgin County Archives.

commemorative coins as well as mugs, plates, posters, bumper stickers, hats, T-shirts, bags, buttons, and children's colouring books emblazoned with his image. Safari-style hats for men and women were a pricier item. These were modelled after the fedora worn by "Indiana Jones," the lead character in a popular action-adventure Hollywood film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). Significantly, the fictional Jones was based on the real life Belzoni.⁹³ In this cinematic account of Belzoni's adventures, actor Harrison Ford portrays Jones, a white American archaeologist who uses brains and brawn to triumph over rough-and-tumble savage tribes, murderous Arabs, and thuggish Nazis in Egypt. His facility with fists, pistols, and whips remains a staple of popular narratives of white male heroics in colonial lands. Local newspaper advertisements capitalized on this Orientalized plotline; advertising copy flaunted "Indiana Jones and the JUMBO HATS," depicting Jones "crashing through the forest with a trail of wild savages behind"⁹⁴ in a desperate quest for a fedora.

Just where to erect the statue also emerged as a cause for concern. The actual site of Jumbo's death was not an option. With the construction of new manufacturing plants to the east of the city, the downtown core had become destabilized despite attempts at its revitalization. Tarry and the JCC made a case for the west entrance of the city, proposing that a concrete Jumbo could anchor an urban complex of appealing art shops, tea houses, cafés, an artist's gallery, and a museum spotlighting the city's automotive, railway, and natural histories.⁹⁵ Further controversy erupted over the direction the statue should face. Stollery opted for an eastward-facing Jumbo because passing motorists would be able to see "an exciting profile of the beast" for over a mile. However, local administrator Bob Barrett was sensitive to the fact that the statue would be located on public land



1.5 Crowds celebrating Jumbo Days surround the unveiled statue of Jumbo, 1985. Courtesy of Elgin County Archives.

adjacent to a residential street, admonishing that homeowners driving up Talbot St. would be exposed to “an obscene view” of the elephant’s enormous rear end.⁹⁶ One homeowner complained to the City Council that the statue would stand directly opposite her private residence, while an engineer worried that a full frontal vision of a massive pachyderm might distract motorists on Highway 3.⁹⁷

Despite objections to cost and location, a spectacle planned for the elephant’s “HOMECOMING WEEKEND” during “JUMBO DAYS” proceeded apace. In early June, after a three-day journey from Bronnum’s Maritime studio, the concrete rendition of Jumbo rolled into St. Thomas in several pieces chained to a flatbed truck.⁹⁸ Security guards hired to protect the statue from potential vandals led a pleased Stollery to remark cheerfully, “This one of the first of many ways Jumbo is helping fight unemployment in St. Thomas.”⁹⁹ The timing of the spectacle – 27 June to 1 July 1985 – had no relation to the date of Jumbo’s death. The dates coincided with the annual Canada Day holiday weekend that celebrates the anniversary of the enactment of the British North American Act, virtually guaranteeing the attendance of large crowds. The local newspaper did its

bit, recycling an interview with the late George Robbins, a resident who had witnessed Jumbo's death in his youth. Robbins proposed that the elephant had committed suicide and recalled that his keeper had moaned in anguish over dead Jumbo's body.¹⁰⁰ These touching details were sandwiched between fun-filled advertisements and announcements. The local mall took advantage of JUMBO DAYS with an advertisement for a "JUMBO SAFARI SIDEWALK SALE" and a "JUMBO DOLLAR PROMOTION" on aluminum foil, toilet tissue, tropical fish, cat food, and flea collars. Announcements for the HOMECOMING WEEKEND betrayed hints of the city's decline, calling upon residents to "write to your loved ones who have left St. Thomas and invite them home for this historic occasion" with the promise not of employment but of an antique car parade, a musical band, a 100-gun firecracker salute and, last but not least, performing elephants from the Canada's Super Circus International.¹⁰¹

JUMBO DAYS publicity turned out to be so spectacularly compelling that a decision was made to reveal the reconstituted statue prematurely. On 28 June, 106-year-old Ruby Copeman, a local luminary who was a young girl at the time of Jumbo's death, unveiled the monument in front of a crowd estimated at 800 persons. The artist had sculpted Jumbo's trunk curled back upon his forehead in a friendly salute. But he also endowed his creation with freakishly long and pointed tusks, a feature the elephant did not possess in life because he had worn them down in captivity. A dairy farmer gazing at the monument noted that in contrast to other roadside attractions in Ontario, Jumbo was not an indigenous but an "international" symbol for St. Thomas.¹⁰² A few days later, two circus elephants identified as Sahib and Judy were photographed flanking the statue, each raising a foreleg in honour of Jumbo.¹⁰³ It was estimated that in the month following the unveiling 30,000 visitors came to see the statue from all the Canadian provinces and some American states, with other visitors dropping in from Australia and New Zealand. In contrast only 15–20 individuals attended the actual centennial anniversary of Jumbo's death at the plaque erected near the location of the collision, with Mayor Tarry commenting: "Nothing else has put St. Thomas on the map like Jumbo's death and it is still doing so today, although not quite like it did 100 years ago."¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Tarry's statement was nothing if not poignant. The statue of a friendly but powerfully tusked bull elephant resurrected from the dead a century after Jumbo's ill-fated encounter with the Grand Trunk Railway's iron horse mirrored the well-meaning, albeit exaggerated hopes of politicians and residents to jolt St. Thomas back to economic life. Yet Jumbo was hardly the vehicle to turn this small city into an international automobile tourist destination. Today, the statue remains at the west end of St. Thomas with a reproduction of a small locomotive and a decorative flowerbed for company. The automobile industry and manufacturing sector are in tatters, storefronts on the main streets are boarded up, and unemployment runs high, but a local craft brewery has produced a Railway City Dead Elephant Pale Ale in a cheeky nod to Jumbo's memory and the city's history.¹⁰⁵

Jumbo's metamorphosis from African captive to British icon to American celebrity to Canadian roadside attraction masks a colonial journey from a putative state of savagery to civilization to spectacle. This journey was punctuated by the violence of abduction, captivity, and commodification, and not by the joyful abundance, greatness, and affluence that generic images of large elephants have come to communicate. Jumbo's fate was common not just to other charismatic megafauna transported to zoos and circuses in cities in Europe and the New World but also to many human animals designated slaves and freaks, establishing how closely racialization and animalization are intertwined. Still, had Jumbo eluded his original abductors he may not have fared any better given the partition of Africa by colonial powers and the rapacious trade in ivory. Similarly, with or without Jumbo as its roadside attraction, St. Thomas would surely have experienced the same economic blight that has only intensified its grip on small urban centres in southern Ontario with the advent of globalization, often said to be a modern-day manifestation of colonialism.

Notes

- 1 Neel Ahuja, "Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World," *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009): 556–63. For their background research I thank my research assistants Sarah Mackenzie, Cathrine Chambers, Simone Parniak and Emma Burgess. I am also grateful to Donna Hanson, St. Thomas Public Library; Archivists Gina Coady and Stephen Francom and assistant Meineke Kulasinghe, Elgin County Archives; Michael Baker, Elgin County Railway Museum; and my colleagues William Jenkins, Louis Patrick Leroux, Andrew McClellan and Amani Whitfield. Joanna Dean, Cameron Glennon, Darcy Ingram, Nigel Rothfels, and Christine Waechter were encouraging from the start.
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- 3 Shefali Rajamannar, *Reading the Animal in the Literature of the British Raj* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 6; and Ahuja, "Postcolonial Critique," 55–59.
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- Henninger-Voss (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 182–230.
- 10 Chambers, *Jumbo*, 10.
- 11 A. D. Bartlett, *Wild Animals in Captivity* (London and Bungay: Richard Clay and Sons, 1899), 61–62.
- 12 Georges Cuvier, quoted in Bernth Lindfors, “Circus Africans,” *Journal of American Culture* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 10.
- 13 Bernth Lindfors, “Ethnological Show Business: Footlighting the Dark Continent,” in Thomson, *Freakery*, 210; and Lydie Moudileno, “Returning Remains: Saartjie Baartman, or the ‘Hottentot Venus’ as Transnational Postcolonial Icon,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 45, no. 2 (2009): 200–212.
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- 15 Bartlett, *Wild Animals in Captivity*, 47. On animal resistance, agency and injury, see Jason Hribal, *Fear of an Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance* (Petrolia, CA: CounterPunch and AK Press, 2010).
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- 29 A. H. Saxon, *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 292–93.
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- 33 "Jumbo Landed in Safety," *New York Times*, 10 April 1882.
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- 97 ECA, ECVF, box 90, file 5, St. Thomas History–Jumbo “Council ignores late complaints about Jumbo,” *London Free Press*, 6 March 1985.
- 98 ECA, Scrapbook, “JUMBO – Finally Here,” *St. Thomas Times-Journal*, 6 June 1985 [?].
- 99 ECA, Scrapbook, “Mammoth Security for Jumbo Statue,” *St. Thomas Times-Journal*, 11 June 1985.
- 100 ECA, Scrapbook, Commemorative foldout from the *St. Thomas Times-Journal*, June 28, 1985.
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- 102 ECA, Scrapbook, Alex Horkay, “Our Jumbo home at last!” *St. Thomas Times-Journal*, 29 June 1985 [?]. See also Auckland, “Urban Symbols,” 20.
- 103 ECA, Scrapbook, clipping of newspaper photo dated 2 July 1985.
- 104 ECA, Scrapbook, “Moment of silence Sunday in city pays tribute to Jumbo anniversary,” *St. Thomas Times-Journal*, 18 September 1985.
- 105 Greg Keenan, “How the Economic Storm Battered St. Thomas, Ont.’s Factories,” *Globe and Mail*, 9 July 2011. In 2015 a second life-sized statue of Jumbo was unveiled, this time at Tufts University. Depicted comparably to the St. Thomas version, but this time with Jumbo’s true-to-life shortened tusks, Tufts’ bronze mascot commemorates the 125th anniversary of the taxidermied elephant’s arrival on campus. Big things are still expected of Jumbo, with one of the donors remarking that “a new Jumbo [will] lead to enhanced enthusiasm for Tufts and thus over the years to more involvement and contributions to the university.” See Gail Bambrick, “Big Man on Campus,” *TuftsNow*, 21 April 2015, <http://now.tufts.edu/articles/big-man-campus> (accessed 12 November 2015). An art exhibit featuring materials from Canada and the United States preceded the statue’s unveiling. See also Andrew McClellan, *Jumbo: Marvel, Myth, and Mascot* (Woburn, MA: Hanaford and Dumas, 2015)