

happiness, as “the *idea* of happiness was lacking” (p. 157). This began to change in western societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the influence of the Enlightenment before a true commitment to children’s happiness emerged in the United States during the 1920s. Stearns admits that it is difficult to identify what caused this change, but he suggests lower death rates, attacks on child labor, consumerism, and new beliefs about adulthood contributed to the notion that children should be happy. What is clear is that, over the past twenty years, countries such as China and India, and areas in the Middle East and Latin America, have placed a new emphasis on children’s happiness.

Although this survey addresses broad themes such as tradition, war and violence, modernity, globalization, communism, and play, I would have liked to see Stearns pay more attention to the roles dolls and toys played in the history of childhood. Barbie, alone, with her contemporaries in the Moslem world and her myriad costumes, would have been a perfect illustration of a western cultural icon gone global. For example, Stearns discusses the evolving nature of play and its importance from training children to be adults to pure fun and recreation. But he discusses toys in only about eleven pages scattered through his book, and there is no reference to dolls the book’s index.

Overall, the book contributes to existing scholarship by integrating childhood into world history. As such, his work is relevant to studies of postmodernism, childhood and family dynamics, and marketing aimed toward young consumers. Scholars researching the history of play and childhood will find Stearns’ work an interesting

survey of how attitudes towards children and child rearing have evolved over time and very valuable to those who study the nature of play.

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Circus and the City: New York, 1793–2010

Matthew Wittmann

New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2012. Appendix, bibliography, index, images. 208 pp. \$40.00 paper. ISBN: 9780300187472

The American Circus

Susan Weber, Kenneth L. Ames, and Matthew Wittmann, eds.

New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2012. Bibliography, index, images. 460 pp. \$65.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780300185393

Though its reputation is greatly diminished today, the circus was one of the most popular forms of public amusement in the United States from the early nineteenth century until the dawn of the television era. During the circus’s so-called “golden age” (from about 1870–1910), circus performers were household names, circus posters blanketed city walls, and traveling exhibitions by the likes of P. T. Barnum, James Bailey, and Wisconsin’s Ringling Brothers attracted millions of spectators a year. The appeal of what Barnum deemed “The Greatest Show on Earth” is not difficult to understand. Cheap to attend and considered safe for the entire family, the circus incorporated a wide array of popular and exotic entertainments, from acro-

batics and equestrian displays to “freak shows” and animal menageries. The result was a dazzling and often bewildering feast for the senses.

Over the past few decades, scholars from multiple disciplines have turned their attention to the circus as a lens through which to examine such topics as race, gender, imperialism, human-animal relations, and disability. Matthew Wittmann’s *Circus and the City: New York, 1793–2010* and *The American Circle*, its companion volume edited by Susan Weber, Kenneth K. Ames, and Matthew Wittman, epitomize the strengths of this new scholarship and point toward new approaches for analyzing the circus as well as other forms of popular amusement. *Circus and the City* is the catalogue of an exhibition of the same name held at the Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture from September 2012 to February 2013. Much of the text takes the form of an extended essay tracing the “rise, apogee, and fragmentation of the American circus in New York City” from the late eighteenth century to the present day (p. 11). Opening with the establishment of John Bill Rickards’ equestrian amphitheater in 1793, Wittmann charts the evolution of the circus “from its European roots into an innovative and thoroughly Americanized cultural form,” characterized by itinerancy, technological efficiency, and incorporation (p. 33). Along the way, he draws explicit parallels between New York City and the circus as “icons of modernity undergoing a constant process of change and reinvention” (p. 54). In addition to the historical essay, *Circus and the City* contains a chronology of major events in New York City and the circus, detailed

descriptions of selected artifacts from the exhibition, and a brief appendix of primary sources.

Comprised of seventeen essays, *The American Circus* has a more expansive vision, moving beyond New York City to examine the circus in a variety of contexts. The first essay, Janet Davis’s “The Circus Americanized,” offers a broad historical framework for understanding the “Americanization” of the circus, connecting the rise of the circus in the United States to national expansion and industrialization. It is the best article-length history of the circus I have ever read, and it is a touchstone for the essays that follow, many of which examine key features of the American circus, including the circus poster, circus music, the circus parade, and the circus tent. Scholars of children’s culture will be especially interested in Ellen Butler Donovan’s essay on the circus in nineteenth-century children’s literature, and Eugene W. Metcalf’s piece on circus toys in the Gilded Age, both of which speak to lingering ambivalence about the status of circuses (and of play in general) in Victorian America. Other standouts include Brett Mizelle’s essay on horse and big-cat shows and Susan Nance’s essay on circus elephants. As both authors make clear, circus animals were never willing participants in their acts; rather, in Mizelle’s words, “The circus was an important site where the natural world was tamed, trained, and partially brought under human control” (p. 251). *The American Circus* concludes with disability scholar Rachel Adams’s essay on historical and contemporary “freak shows,” providing us with a powerful reminder of the circus’s long tradition of exploiting physical and cultural

deviance in the name of entertainment.

While many academic anthologies are simply a hodge-podge of seemingly random articles, the seventeen essays assembled in *The American Circus* are connected by several themes. The first, and by far most prominent, is an insistence upon the circus—and popular culture in general—as an important prism for studying the intersections of power, identity, and economics in U.S. history. Many of the essays also share the belief that there is something peculiarly “American” about the circus and the cultural practices that surround it. Early in the introduction, Kenneth L. Ames proclaims the circus a “major manifestation of American cultural values,” noting that “there are few significant stands of American life that the circus did not touch or reference in some way” (p. 11–12). This argument is generally persuasive, although I imagine other nations could make similar claims. In fact, it would have been surprising if the American circus did *not* reference “significant strands” of American cultural life.

Still, this is a minor concern. Both of these books represent important additions to the historical study of circuses in the United States. Combining insights from the fields of material culture, animal studies, visual culture, and disability studies (among others), *The American Circus* in particular is a model interdisciplinary study of mass culture, one that scholars of other public amusements (e.g., zoos, amusement parks, world’s fairs) would be wise to emulate.

My only concern stems from the two volumes’ format. Both are gorgeous to behold, and each has slick paper and beautiful full-color illustrations. Indeed,

at first glance, *Circus and the City* and *The American Circus* resemble “coffee-table” books—which makes it somewhat difficult to determine what to do with them. They are probably too expensive and bulky for regular classroom use (in hardcover, the edited volume weighs in at more than four pounds). However, given their top-notch scholarship, they are more than vehicles for reprinting pretty pictures. Ultimately, I would recommend both of these books (but especially *The American Circus*) for scholars’ personal collections and for all libraries collecting books on the history of American popular culture, American visual art, and the history of human-animal relations.

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Jane Austin, Game Theorist

Michael Suk-Young Chwe

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013. Preface, references, preface, index, images. 272 pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 978-0691155760

There remains much confusion between discussions of “game theory” and “game studies,” depending on the disciplinary company you keep. Of course, they sound like similar pursuits. The emerging field of game studies, little more than a decade old, tends to build on anthropological studies of play where the focus lies on the sociological and cultural implications of games and play practices. This group is particularly interested in digital games. *Game studies* emerged quite apart from