



January 18, 2018

Kathy Maher
Executive Director
The Barnum Museum

Via e-mail: info@barnum-museum.org

Dear Ms. Maher,

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide regarding your plans to modernize The Barnum Museum. Given the well-documented evidence of P.T. Barnum's deplorable exploitation of both humans and animals, we'd like to offer \$10,000 toward the renovation and modernization of the museum if it will include the important stories of exploitation.

In order to give an accurate historical account, the museum must acknowledge that Barnum launched his career by exploiting not only African Americans and people with disabilities but also, until the bitter end, animals. He's responsible for a century and a half of chaining, caging, and beating animals in order to force them to perform. Minimizing his monstrous behavior—and the culture of abuse and exploitation that it created—would do visitors a disservice. Instead, your master plan should include exhibits featuring eyewitness testimony and [historical images](#) showing how the now-defunct Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus carried on his legacy by binding baby elephants and torturing them into submission in order to force them to perform demeaning and often painful tricks.

Displaying the weapon used on the elephants that Barnum's circus exploited—the bullhook, a heavy baton with a sharp hook on one end, which is still being used to hurt and terrorize elephants in circuses today—is important, as is detailing the "burning method" that his circus used to handle elephants, which consisted of sticking a hot poker up their trunks. Including a pile of heavy steel tethering chains, which visitors could attempt to lift, would afford a stark hands-on representation of the suffering that captive elephants endure for most of their lives.

We'd gladly provide your museum with an interactive immersive experience called "I, Elephant," which offers participants a virtual reality snapshot depicting what life is like in the circus. This display would show people all that animals in circuses have to endure—from wild capture to abusive training to premature death—and would be a good addition to an exhibit on the history of the animal slave trade. It would be fitting as well to erect a memorial to the animals who died at the hands of American circuses, perhaps highlighting a few individuals—such as Tyke, the elephant used by the Hawthorn Corporation who snapped and went on a rampage before being shot to death in Hawaii; Prince and Munia, tigers used by Hawthorn who both died on the road within just over one month;

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and Clyde, a lion who essentially baked to death in a Ringling boxcar. You could also feature images of animals who suffered in Barnum's early exhibits, including the beluga whales who died within two days of being confined to tanks in the basement of Barnum's American Museum in New York or Jumbo, the elephant who was struck and killed by a passing freight train.

We hope you'll agree that the fundamental mission of The Barnum Museum is to showcase history honestly and that the whole story must be told. May I please hear from you? Thank you for your time.

Very truly yours,

John Di Leonardo, M.S.
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