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The Shoemaker's Circus: Grizzly Adams and Nineteenth-Century Animal Entertainment

Abstract

Grizzly Adams rose to fame in partnership with bears. A wilderness celebrity, he actually grew up in Massachusetts, where he trained as a shoemaker. Shoemaking taught him how to instruct others including wild animals. His management ethos emerged from a nineteenth-century household manufacturing system coming undone by industrial capitalism. This article delves into Adams's shoemaking background to recover the entwined histories of industrial discipline and wild animal training. Grizzly Adams trained bears like human apprentices and apprentices like bears. They all belonged to his working family. Adams manipulated the social behavior of grizzly bears to bring a dying patriarchal labor tradition back to life. Immature animals followed his commands, but he struggled to control full-grown bears, a failure that led to the demise of his family and the end of his act.

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"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN . . ."

Perhaps a conventional midlife crisis is too much to ask of a man who rode into history on a bear's back. Born in Medway, Massachusetts, in 1812, Grizzly Adams traveled to California in 1849. Fiascos lay before and after him. A St. Louis warehouse fire consumed fifteen years of his savings in the form of six thousand dollars worth of shoes. In California, Adams farmed and ranched near Stockton. He purchased mining claims and real estate and made three fortunes and lost them all "through the villainy of others." Finally, in 1852, broke and disgusted, he turned his back on "schemes for the accumulation of wealth" and entered the Sierra Nevada. The wilderness became his "home;" "wild beasts" his "companions."[1]

Adams grew a luxurious beard, "hardened his frame" through vigorous exercise and temperate habits, and covered his body in the skins of animals. Bristling with whiskers and weapons, he communed with nature, delighting in the rocks, trees, and the "romantic scenes" he discovered in the "elevated regions." Failures forgotten, a new Adams sprouted from the alpine turf: "I seemed to be a part of the vast landscape, a kind of demigod in the glorious and magnificent creation."[2]

Still, while he considered the months in the high Sierras among his life's happiest, eating nuts and berries in a solitary camp with only squirrels and mice to witness his makeover did not satisfy. Adams yearned for a bigger audience, and he labored the rest of his life to cultivate one. The character of Grizzly Adams coalesced during performances in front of Indian and white apprentices, newspaper reporters, and San Francisco crowds.

Adams's celebrity reached its highest tide in the 1970s when the actor Dan Haggarty portrayed him in *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams*. Yet while a wilderness television drama hoisted him to B-list relevancy, Adams actually grew up in a hothouse of nineteenth-century industrialization. He trained as a cordwainer in Massachusetts, where shoemaking taught him how to instruct and discipline others. His methods for training animal and human subordinates came from his understanding of service in a household manufacturing tradition coming undone. The shift from home production to factories denied him a working human family, so Adams recreated the social structure of his youth with apprentices and animals. To revisit the past, he left a wife and two daughters behind in New England. They played no part in the invention of Grizzly Adams, and their absence indicated the character's hollowness and desperation. The spectacle of a bearded patriarch commanding nature's obedience hid the reality of an insolvent shoemaker who traded his own flesh and blood for a California dream.

Shoemaking equipped Adams with an assortment of fatherly poses. The cordwainers in Massachusetts responded to industrialization by

rejecting and pilfering bourgeois values. Some workers created their own temperance organizations while others drank early and often per the artisanal tradition. Workers promoted self-discipline and championed rebellion. Adams drew from a hodgepodge of republican and industrial values to create an amalgam—a working-class entertainment shot through with the rhetoric of wilderness rejuvenation and middle-class reform. Adams, argues one scholar, rejected "bourgeois respectability" when he entered the woods. Like John Muir, a fellow Sierra Nevada back-to-nature enthusiast, Adams sought wilderness to escape the "galling harness of civilization." Yet he harnessed grizzly bears and proclaimed his talent for civilizing them. By commanding wild people-eaters through fatherly suasion, Adams elevated reformed masculinity into the realm of the miraculous, and he and the bears stayed bourgeois until their act turned violent, which it often did, especially in later years. When the claws emerged and the cudgel swung, the show veered in two, equally entertaining, directions. If Adams subdued the bears with a beating, he resurrected a male authority of yore when patriarchs administered violence to discipline households. He harkened back to a civilization built on small-scale irruptions of domestic carnage. But if the bears grasped the upper paw and damaged Adams, then the audience could watch the old order fall apart before their eyes. The bears executed the transition to civilization by dismantling their brutish father.[3]

Adams could claim that he ruled bears through moral instruction because the animals responded to a mixture of kindness and thrashings. Cubs and adolescents bonded with him, huddled under his protection, and followed his lead. Their cooperation defined him: without the bears' acquiescence, Grizzly Adams was the master of nothing. Yet the terms of their working relationship changed as the bears matured. At different moments in the bears' lives and Adams's performing career, their partnership swerved from harmonious to belligerent. The possibilities included affection and decapitation, which partly explains why nineteenth-century audiences gathered to watch a failed shoemaker cavort with California grizzly bears. They attended so that they might see an array of human and animal interactions, everything from a peaceful kingdom to a beast-on-man melee. The menageries offered dramatic options, and Grizzly Adams and his bears proved adept at providing tableaus of cooperation as well as outbursts of bedlam.

The biography Adams crafted with Theodore Hittell, a reporter for San Francisco's *Daily Evening Bulletin*, hid the turmoil in his working family (not to mention the existence of his wife and children). Every relationship in the book supported Adams's wilderness reinvention. His Indian and white assistants admired his courage and soaked up his wisdom, his hunting partners deferred to his expertise and acknowledged his superiority, and his bears followed his instructions and

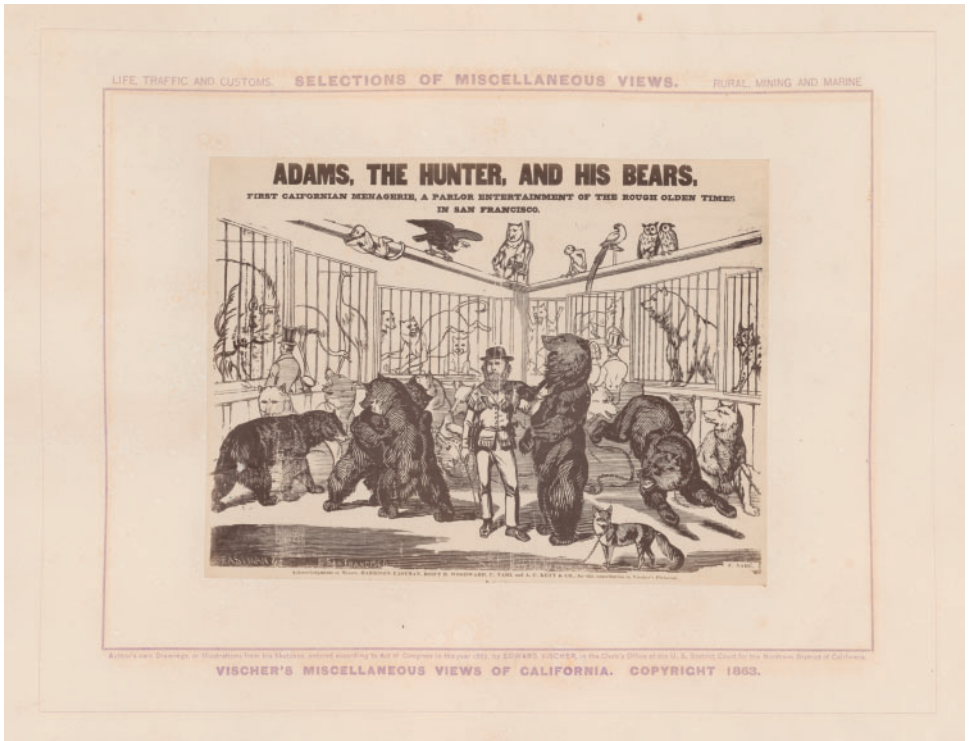

Figure 1. A fanciful portrait of Adams's San Francisco menagerie, the master tamer at the center of a well-organized and educational show. Credit: Edward Vischer's *Pictorial California* (J. Winterburn, 1870). Reprinted with permission from the Bancroft Library.

welcomed his fatherly discipline. The book was a fabrication by a reporter out to sell copy and a showman looking to unload tickets. Yet given the range of drama types available to them, Adams and Hittell chose to frame their story in the language of perfectionist reform that animated many nineteenth-century movements from temperance to abolitionism to the humane treatment of animals. In print, Grizzly Adams gathered a wilderness family and ruled them through love.

Off the page, the scene darkened. He kidnapped performers while they were cubs, broke their wills through beatings and the withholding of food and water, and punished them frequently to maintain his dominance. Adams punched and wrestled his star grizzlies. He rode Ben Franklin like a horse, rewarded the bears for performing desired behaviors with plugs of tobacco, and served Samson steaming bowls of whiskey before packed houses to see how he would behave under the influence. He pummeled Lady Washington with a club until she wore a packsaddle and starved Samson for weeks in a cage until he accepted confinement. Such antics were emblematic of nineteenth-century animal menageries that toed the line between respectability and corruption. Christian reformers and sober capitalists fought to shut them down. The entertainments, they said, preyed on the gullible. They parodied morality, promulgated cruelty toward animals, and encouraged customers to imbibe intoxicants. When Grizzly Adams served alcohol to his bears or beat them with a club, he lampooned the middle-class values he brandished elsewhere.[4]

In California, Adams entered venues—the wilderness, the frontier, and the menagerie cage—where Victorian Americans were supposed to be able to drink whiskey, manhandle bears, administer beatings, and stay respectable. Violent men were the moral reformers in the Wild West. Likewise, the tamers of large and ferocious animals were at liberty to apply lethal force. They stood between audiences and people-eaters. Their whips, chairs, and starter's pistols preserved the natural order, and the press applauded their manly courage. The media also praised trainers as preservers of civilization when they destroyed elephants or big cats that had "gone bad."[5]

Grizzly Adams gathered firearms and sharp implements and entered western forests to collect wild animals for display in menageries. Yet at no time did he escape to a wilderness or a frontier or an animal cage that exempted him from being kind. He carried a shoemakers' version of reformed masculinity along with his pistols and blades, and he sought the wilderness and wild animals not to break from his past or to wreak havoc in a reverted state of savagery but to resuscitate the family relationships industrialization had killed.

Industrialization ruined home production and the moral authority patriarchs obtained from commanding family labor. Massachusetts shoemakers responded to economic and social change by stretching the terms of masculine power to include middle-class reform notions

of self-mastery and benevolence. This background prepared Grizzly Adams for training wild animals. He disciplined bears with a mixture of compassion and violence. Shoemaking turned Grizzly Adams into a remarkably prescient trainer and entertainer. Middle-class values filtered into animal training manuals and circuses later in the nineteenth century. Adams manipulated bears with "kindness" decades before the practice became commonplace. He also performed a middle-class masculinity in a frontier setting decades before Buffalo Bill Cody rode the concept to international stardom. Adams died broke and broken and posterity has treated him like kitsch, but the strange combination of bears and shoemaking placed him at the cutting edge of nineteenth-century industrial morality, animal rights, and popular culture.[6]

A TRAINER IN TRAINING

Adams most likely learned to make shoes from his father, Eleazer. Born in 1776, Eleazer Adams spent his youth in Medway, a rural village of 912 souls, located thirty miles southwest of Boston. Eleazer's 1849 death certificate listed his occupation as "farmer," a common designation for a New England property owner who also made shoes. Farmsteads around Boston often contained a backyard shack, known as a ten-footer, where families and apprentices labored together to produce shoes for market when they weren't planting corn, picking apples, or milking cows. Shoemaking supplemented household incomes, and this ubiquitous side business gained in economic importance when the turmoil surrounding the Revolution interrupted Boston's overseas supply of footwear. After the war, protective tariffs boosted the industry further. Manufacturers invested capital in shoemaking, centralizing the production of shoe bottoms in store workshops and ramping up their supplies by putting out the work of binding uppers to women in rural households in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Lynn, Massachusetts, became a shoe manufacturing hub with capitalists contracting thousands of male binders and female stitchers. The shoemakers in Lynn plied their craft full time, but on the outer rims of Lynn's economic orbit, farmers continued to make shoes, especially simple work boots for the southern slave market, while Lynn's artisans concentrated on finer soles for ladies and gentlemen.[7]

Household production flavored the values of shoemaking both in the manufacturing center and on the peripheries. Fathers not only taught children the craft, they embedded the craft within the larger framework of republican independence. Households were supposed to operate like republics writ small. Husbands and fathers ruled over dependents including spouses, children, and, often, young

journeymen shoemakers and farm laborers who hired their services to a senior craftsman for room and board. Journeymen would leave for jobs in manufacturing centers or set up their own farms. At marriage, they would launch a new laboring household, establishing themselves at the head of a multitasking family. New Englanders never formed guilds, the institutions that managed the journeyman-to-master transition in Europe. Instead the craft bumped along ideologically in conjunction with agriculture and republicanism, and shoemakers followed both the farmer's and the artisan's route to political rights. Authority came from owning property, laboring, or both. Even when workshops and factories replaced homes as sites of work, shoemakers clung to the vision of household production when fathers gathered family and servants together in ten-footers to churn out an order of boots. Patriarchy was at the core of their power and being.

Grizzly Adams learned to make shoes, and he imbibed the ideology of republican independence, but his chances for recreating his father's microcosmic mastery grew slim as the shoe business matured. When manufacturers financed workshops and spread the putting-out system, they drew young journeymen into a different labor arrangement. Focusing on one set of tasks—cutting bottoms and stitching them to uppers—in a workspace controlled by an investor, Grizzly Adams's generation of shoemakers increasingly became employees rather than independent yeoman artisans. Bosses set the time and the pace of work, which might explain why Adams left shoemaking as soon as he reached the age of majority (twenty-one) and hired himself to a "company of showmen."[8]

Adams hunted panthers, bears, and wolves in Vermont and New Hampshire for an outfit that supplied area circuses as well as stocked its own traveling menagerie. The company's collection included all sorts of New England wildlife sprinkled with a few exotic purchases, most notably a Bengal tiger. The tiger ended Adams's early show business career. The feline proved surly and uncooperative. Adams's employers "requested" that he enter the tiger's cage to "reclaim him." Adams doesn't say what he did to the tiger, but the animal responded poorly. The tiger mauled him, and the massive injuries "shattered" his "constitution." He returned to making shoes.[9]

BOYS TO MEN

Adams skipped past the tiger episode quickly in his biography. He noted his good fortune at having a trade to fall back on and continued the narrative march to California. But no one escapes a tiger attack without lingering issues, especially when they decide to reenter the animal capture and display business following a midlife

correction. Buckskinned and bewhiskered, Adams left his solitary camp in 1853 and accepted an offer from his brother William, who had profited from the gold rush, to form a partnership. William Adams would advance the funds to equip a Grizzly Adams–led expedition to collect wild animals from northern California and eastern Washington Territory (to become Montana) and ship them to Boston for sale to circuses and menageries. Grizzly Adams hired a young local, William Sykesey, and "procured the services" of two "Indian boys" he renamed Tuolumne and Stanislaus. The company traveled north, established a camp, built several log traps, and proceeded to shoot, skin, eat, or incarcerate every animal they could find. The collecting expedition provided the setting for Adams and Hittell to construct a working family out of a white hunter, untutored savages, and giant bears.[10]

Grizzly Adams was constantly teaching his underlings lessons. Sykesey received an education in pluck after he refused to follow an injured bear into a thicket of chaparral: "In his opinion, it was mere foolhardiness thus to rush into the jaws of peril." Adams knew better than to fear the animal. He could tell by the color of the blood trail that the bear "would be too week [*sic*] to do much injury," and he lectured Sykesey "never to commence a thing and then back out." Taking the boy by the arm, he dragged him into the bear's den and shot the animal point blank to reassure him. The bear, dead for hours, did not flinch.[11]

Many of Adams's teachable encounters followed this pattern. He used his knowledge of animals and nature to correctly measure the risk of a situation while his "boys" misread the signs and acted timidly. In the biography, Adams never actually taught them the woodcraft that shaped his judgments and instead offered aphorisms like "Bravery fronts danger, and repels it; but it is character of a coward to run, though he drag after him, not only disgrace, but danger too." Or, "To be a good hunter, you must be a thousand things besides a good shot." He preached character and courage even as he admitted that "common sense enabled me to reason a result in the future." So keen was his foresight, he worried that "it would have been easy to set up and sustain a reputation as a prophet" if his "lot [had] been cast among a numerous people, much my inferiors in intellect," a strange admission, given that was precisely the situation he fostered between himself and his servants. He played the sage to their ignoramuses.[12]

Adams lied to apprentices for their own good. During one hunt, he caught Tuolumne snoozing when he was supposed to be guarding a cache of antelopes. Adams grabbed the bearskin he slept on and hid beneath it in the tall grass near Tuolumne's napping spot. He growled; Tuolumne sprang up and ran away. Adams grabbed the boy's discarded rifle and followed him back to the main camp. He

found a breathless Tuolumne telling the others about being chased by a bear. Adams stayed quiet until later that evening when he terrified the boy further by telling him that the bear would probably come eat him in the night. Tuolumne became "so violently excited" that Adams finally had to give up the prank. He confessed, but he didn't apologize. Instead, he "reproached him for his cowardice." The boy, however, refused to learn his lesson. He remained convinced that he had seen a bear and "what he saw with his eyes he must believe." An exasperated Adams concludes the anecdote with a comment on fear and human psychology: "To such an extent will imagination sometimes take possession of the senses, and, on small foundation, conjure up terrors which have no existence!"[13]

Adams and Hittell ventured onto treacherous ground when they told stories like this. The Grizzly Adams character achieved mastery through his immersion in the California wilderness. He knew how the natural world worked and could manipulate God's creation for his own ends. Examples of trickery raised questions about those ends. What kept Adams from using his superior knowledge to fool his reading and museum audiences? How could they be sure that he wasn't exciting their imaginations to conjure up wonders—like a man so in tune with nature that he could make giant bears behave like kittens—which had no existence?

There were plenty of reasons to mistrust Grizzly Adams. The vital records of Massachusetts, for example, raise questions about who he was. Baptismal records from Medway list a James Capen, son of Eleazer, along with siblings Francis Drake, Albert, and Zilpha, all being christened on July 3, 1828. In 1947 historian Francis Farquhar, citing a "family genealogist," stated that Eleazer and Sybil Adams (née Capen) had eight children: "Susan, Almy, John, Charles, James Capen, Zilpha, Francis D. and Albert." Perhaps Sybil and Eleazer returned to Medway in 1828 to baptize the second half of their brood in Eleazer's home church. In 1828 the family resided in Charlton, Massachusetts, a town just outside Wooster and near Spencer, Sybil's family home. The family burial plot is in the Bay Path Cemetery in Charlton. Eleazer and Sybil are buried there, alongside daughter Zilpha, daughter-in-law Cylena, and grandchildren Seymour and Arathusa. A famous son's grave is also there, but the marker and all the death records name the resident as John, not James. John's death was registered in three jurisdictions—the town of Charlton, the county of Norfolk, and city of Dorchester. The registries listed John C. Adams's occupation as "hunter," "huntsman," and "showman." One claimed he died from cancer; the other two from wounds received by grizzly bears. We know Grizzly Adams molds in that grave, but we don't know why he told Theodore Hittell first that his name was William and then James Capen.[14]

None of the Massachusetts records of the Adams family mention a brother William, the Gold Rush tycoon who supposedly financed

Grizzly Adams's hunting expeditions and menagerie. In the first two *Daily Evening Bulletin* articles Hittell wrote about Adams in 1856, the reporter called John "William." An advertisement ran in the *Daily Alta California* newspaper in January 1857 proclaiming that "William Adams" the "renowned Bear Tamer" would be entertaining audiences with his "living collection." It is unclear why Grizzly Adams went by three different first names. An accomplished showman, did he bamboozle Hittell and his audiences?[15]

Gleaning the thoughts of Adams's audiences is next to impossible, but Theodore Hittel's gullibility can be weighed by the facts of his life. Hittell died in 1897 a celebrity in San Francisco known for his quirky intellect and prodigious literary output. After a stint as a reporter for his brother's newspaper and seven other San Francisco rags, Hittell turned to a career in law. In his spare time, he wrote the Adams biography, several legal tomes, and multivolume histories of California and Hawaii. His obituary in the *San Francisco Chronicle* labeled him "eccentric" but universally "loved and admired." According to the *Chronicle*, Hittell was "a genius," not a fool.[16]

Hittell seemed more like a snooty intellectual than huckster promoter. Why did he partner with Adams, a serial business failure with a disordered identity? He obviously knew a good story when he saw one, and he did check his sources at least once, although his background research came decades after the first edition of *The Adventures of James Capen Adams*. In 1899, in preparation for a revised edition, he sent a copy of the book to John Muir, a San Francisco acquaintance with whom Hittell, now a lawyer, enjoyed climbing mountains. Muir confirmed that Adams's Sierra Nevada camp could have been where he said it was, but he took issue with many of the book's other claims about mountain sheep, bear caves, and wolf dens. "There is so much of this obscurity," he wrote, "& so many errors the book has an unreal air." Muir closes the letter by noting that his wife "says she saw Adams & his grand bears in Martinez." So many Californians had observed Adams in action that Hittell "should be able to find a great many to collaborate his story and make it lively and real." Seeing Adams handle the bears gave substance to a presentation that an abundance of impossible natural details made appear unreal. The truth of the bear act witnessed by Louie Strentzel Muir and so many others scrubbed away the doubts raised by the text. For sure, these truths were carefully staged. The bears performed certain behaviors in accordance with specific prompts, and their cooperation led people to believe that an obedient relationship extended beyond those moments. Still, for the illusion to work at all, Adams had to get the bears to act their parts with regularity, because when they refused, as they sometimes did, he not only lost control of them but his story as well.[17]

After delving into Grizzly Adams's confused background, Francis Farquhar arrived at a similar level of credulity as the Muirs. The bear

Figure 2. Artist Charles Nahl's engraving from *The Adventures of James Capen Adams* captures the shared affection and clear chain of command between Adams and Ben. Credit: Theodore H. Hittell, *The Adventures of James Capen Adams* (San Francisco, 1860), facing 178. Reprinted with permission from the Bancroft Library.

act provided a bedrock veracity to a story that might not survive a fact check: That Hittell's "straightforward and convincing narrative . . . is in substance genuine is demonstrated by the very existence of the menagerie of wild animals and by the known facts of Adams' mastery over them." The bears' submission confirmed Adams's sincerity. He may have been delusional, but he was not alone. He convinced both the bears and his human audiences to join him.[18]

The appearance of Adams's mastery may have convinced Hittell to go along with him, but why did Adams go along with Hittell? The bear tamer withheld his real identity from the newspaperman; why did he trust him with any of his story? An incident from Hittell's past might explain the attraction between the two men. Born in Pennsylvania, Hittell moved to Ohio in 1832. At fifteen, Hittell enrolled at the University of Miami (Ohio). He was kicked out three years later for his involvement in the "snowball rebellion" of 1848.[19] Following a severe winter storm, students barricaded the main entrance to the university and pelted officials with ice and snow to protest the banning of secret societies on campus, especially fraternities. After his expulsion, Hittell spent a semester at a college in Kentucky and then moved on for a year at Yale where he participated in an assortment of hijinks including the ritual burial of Euclid. After finishing a volume of Euclid's *Elements*, the seniors built a coffin and interred the book. The faculty sent an undercover tutor to monitor the parade. When the students discovered the mole, they assaulted him and chased him back to the dormitory. While Hittell graduated Yale in 1849, one of his fellow pallbearers, a student who actually kicked the tutor's backside, was invited to leave early without a degree. The bear trainer and newspaper reporter came from very different backgrounds, but they shared an ambivalence about middle-class authority. They endorsed benevolence and self-discipline even as one chucked snowballs and the other turned his back on his family.[20]

Both Grizzly Adams and Theodore Hittell were veterans of the nineteenth-century culture wars. They had tangled with the ethos of industrial discipline from opposing sides of the class spectrum. The Massachusetts shoemakers taught Adams to borrow ideas from the middle-class reform movements while maintaining a vision of fatherly independence more appropriate to the revolutionary era. Adams insisted on playing the role of the lesson giver to his children. Hittell was equally convinced of his own judgment. The snowball rebellion, the pranks he pulled at Yale, the clubs, societies, and fraternities he joined with zeal, all point toward his comfort with the idea of students teaching themselves how to become scholars and men. Professors and administrators could be a help or a hindrance to a college education, but they certainly weren't the bosses of young men who often outpaced them in wealth and outranked them in social class. Middle-class reformers empowered teachers across the country

to battle truancy, counteract lax home discipline, and prevent classroom upheavals led by violent male adolescents. Hittell and Adams had no quarrel with the imposition of values as long as they were the ones doing the imposing. The authority figure in the Adams biography—the stern, loving father whose uprightness crossed species boundaries—emerged from their selective appreciation of reformist morality.

ANIMAL FAMILIES

A Yalie erudite, Theodore Hittell gave Grizzly Adams and his animal act another gift: intellectual pretentions. Nineteenth-century menageries sold themselves as scientific and educational. Exotic species collected from across the globe turned hayseed ticket buyers into cosmopolitans. Visitors could learn about South Africa by viewing a "Gnoo," absorb Arabia through a camel, and sample the jungles of Java by way of a tiger. Ladies could ride Siam the elephant, pet a boa constrictor, and feed peanuts to a monkey. Schools that refused to let their pupils out to view the menagerie's procession through town ran the risk of a scolding like the one administered by the *Cleveland Daily Herald* in 1856. What kind of educators would deny their young scholars the chance to see an elephant? "We beg, in behalf of these children, that such a ridiculous rule as forbids children from looking at a procession of animals with music . . . never again be enforced." Menageries opened "the book of nature" and rewarded those who possessed "the natural instinct of curiosity." In his San Francisco newspaper ad, Grizzly Adams promised that his "famous collection of living animals" would not fail to "amuse and instruct" ladies and gentlemen. In their press materials, Adams and his fellow menagerie entrepreneurs went out of their way to mention women and children. They populated ads, articles, and reviews with ladies, students, and families, making their "museums," "collections," and "caravans" appear broadly wholesome.[21]

Coeducational and multigenerational propriety was important because menageries, circuses, and other road shows had unsavory reputations. Wicked scandals popped up in the news coverage as routinely as glowing endorsements. The *Cleveland Daily Herald* reprinted an article from the *Cincinnati Gazette* warning the attendees of "Raymond and Co's" touring menagerie to watch their valuables. Pickpockets had invaded a show "crowded to suffocation" and lifted a wallet, cut $133 from someone's pants, and absconded with a gold watch from the vest of a steamboat clerk. In Vermont, the Bellows Falls newspaper encouraged readers to attend a menagerie to "study" the animals but to avoid the "Jim Crow" show playing alongside the "exhibition." "It is of immense importance to public morals," wrote

the editor, "that all public exhibitions and festivities be clear and kept clear of whatever is immoral, or degrading in any respect." Vigilant citizens called out menageries for promoting vice with games of chance like "three Card Monte, Sweat Cloth, Forty One, etc" and for perpetrating the "scurvy trick" of skipping town without paying their bills. One "Mammoth Menagerie" departed in the middle of the night after a performance outside Boston. The owners took the animals and left sixty "performers, equestrians, musicians, etc." stranded with three months back salary owed them. Even worse, according to the newspaper, they fled without paying the paper for the advertisement it had run trumpeting the menagerie's scientific respectability.[22]

Menageries put misbehavior on display. Yet for all the hand wringing caused by cardsharps, pickpockets, and crooked operators, no human indiscretion compared to the havoc wreaked by the animals. One New York menagerie had multiple rhinoceroses drop dead and its Bengal tiger escape. Employees buried the rhinos and shot the tiger. In 1848 Columbus the elephant attacked keeper William Kelly in a menagerie outside Philadelphia. Columbus raised Kelly high into the air with his trunk and smashed the man to the ground twice, breaking a leg "in a most shocking manner." Workers pulled Kelly out of harm's way while Columbus "commenced a demolition of everything in his reach." Several small animals died in the bedlam. Back in New York, an elephant belonging to Raymond and Waring's Menagerie broke the shackles of the company's "huge Rhinoceros." The animals fought; the rhino gored the elephant and then escaped to a nearby pasture. He found a marsh and wallowed in it while the neighboring cows and horses looked on nervously. The menagerie keepers sounded a general alarm and recruited local farmers to help them recover the animal. The posse fired muskets at him that "might as well have [been] fired against a stone wall." Five hundred people pursued the rhinoceros, and they eventually managed to capture him alive. However tough, the rhino's hide was not stone, and the newspapers expected the animal to die from his many wounds.[23]

And the carnage rolled on, season after season, as the menageries toured the United States. Lions escaped and ate Shetland ponies; grandstands and tents collapsed, pinning women and children in the crush; caravans dropped through bridges, wrecking wagons and drowning specimens. Stories of pandemonium traveled farther and faster than the menageries. Newspapers recycled each other's most spectacular stories. Menagerie mishaps went viral. Accounts of Raymond and Waring's rogue rhinoceros, for example, appeared in papers in New York, South Carolina, Vermont, Wisconsin, Washington, D.C., Ohio, and Florida. Local news gatherers collected menageries-gone-wild stories from across America and Europe. Audiences expected chaos. By 1853 the animal exhibits had become

so attached to the idea of uproar that Frederick Douglass, the black abolitionist, could criticize politicians in his Rochester, New York, newspaper by comparing "public men of high reputation" to "lions in a menagerie" who "continually stirred up, that the crowd may see their size and hear their roar." Americans turned up at menageries expecting to be thrilled. The prospect of mayhem was essential to their appeal.[24]

The danger elevated the figure of the tamer, who not only subdued individual animals but also symbolized the tipping point between order and bloodshed. Herr Driesbach, a performer for New York City menageries and Raymond and Waring's, as well as an owner-operator of his own touring animal exhibit, epitomized American tamers. According to one account, his "maneuvers and feats with his animals are not less remarkable than they are picturesque and beautiful." He moved the lions and tigers into tableaus that exhibited the "instinct and grandeur of the brute" but also "the power of man." The reporter described watching Driesbach, "living in fear" that he might witness a "catastrophe involving the extinction of a magnificent fellow." And this "anticipation" kept people coming to the "exhibition every night, for though nothing had happened, he was sure an attack would finally be made, and Herr would be torn to pieces!" But Driesbach kept it together. The "wild tenants of the forest" followed his orders "like obedient children."[25]

Jacob Driesbach grew up on a farm outside Sharon, New York. His parents died when he was eleven, and his Uncle Phillip took charge of his upbringing. In his early twenties, Driesbach left Sharon for New York City where he worked first as a policeman and then became an employee of one of the several menageries in the Bowery. He learned to tame lions, but animal training was not his first craft. Soon after his parents died, Driesbach's uncle had apprenticed Jacob to Christian Keyser, a local artisan.

Keyser was a shoemaker.[26]

THE FAMILY MAKING BUSINESS

Grizzly Adams and Herr Driesbach grew up in one of the more hotly contested and closely studied trades in the nineteenth-century United States. The shoemakers in Lynn, Massachusetts, became historiographic rock stars in the 1970s and 1980s as New Labor historians Paul Faler, Alan Dawley, and Mary Blewett, among others, chronicled their struggle. Between 1790 and 1830, household artisans expanded the scale and scope of their production. They built separate workshops, crafted ready-to-wear shoes, and divided their labor force to meet higher demands. First, daughters and wives, and then contracted female stitchers and binders, performed the labor of sewing

together shoe uppers. Male shoemakers, organized into the ranks of master, journeyman, and apprentice, assembled the parts that came to them through the putting-out system. As merchants and manufacturers moved into the expanding market, artisans fought to maintain control over production. They refused to allow male apprentices to specialize in sewing uppers; they formed political organizations like the Cordwainers' Mutual Benefit Society and the Washington Temperance Society; and they resisted the introduction of leather sewing machines.

The sewing machines would eventually lead to factories and the decline of household production. Grizzly Adams was in California by the time this happened. He came of age in an artisanal household stretching to meet the demands of an emerging market. The increased production altered who worked and how they worked, but it also changed how masters and apprentices dealt with one another. Faler argued that while the craftsmen rejected industrial relations, they welcomed industrial morality as a spur to production and as a prophylactic against capitalist social meddling. They began preaching diligence, temperance, and frugality to their apprentices. To prove themselves worthy of the secrets of the trade, apprentices had to first demonstrate their moral turpitude.[27]

Grizzly Adams expected his Indian and white apprentices to be good as well as productive. He emphasized character over skill. Without courage—his preeminent value—woodcraft was empty tricks. Adams patiently disciplined Sykesey, Tuolumne, and Stanislaus over many months, rewarding desired behaviors and punishing cowardice, sloth, and intemperance. Sykesey left Adams's employ on good terms in 1853. Tuolumne and Stanislaus stayed with him for another year. When they departed, Adams presented each with "a horse, complete suits of buckskin clothes, and one hundred dollars in gold coin." Mirror images of their boss, the "excellent boys" proved that with close supervision and constant instruction, Indians might advance beyond their status as an "inferior race."[28]

Adams's underlings certified the goodness of his mastery. He molded their behavior to his ethical standards and through their example he communicated to literary and museum audiences the uprightness of his intentions. He conscripted audiences into the educational mission of his "museum." Neither the boys, who remained unbelievably naive in Adams's and Hittell's portrayal, nor the bears understood the pedagogical endgame, but Adams, his readers, and his menagerie crowds could see it. The training was as much a spectacle as the tricks. Adams raised his bears, like his boys, in an artisanal household. He held to the "right course" so that "their natural characters may be modified and improved to such a degree as to be a subject of wonder." To improve the bears, Adams grabbed them young. He caught Lady Washington and Ben Franklin as cubs after

killing their mothers. Franklin's eyes weren't even open. He forced a lactating greyhound to suckle Franklin, destroying all but one of her litter to ensure enough milk for the bear. The lone survivor, a pup named Rambler, became Franklin's "step-brother." The two animals played together and learned to hunt. Ben Franklin helped Adams track, corner, and kill other grizzly bears.[29]

Lady Washington also got a job. Adams taught her to wear a pack-saddle and carry animal carcasses and other loads. She was a yearling when Adams captured her. Far less tractable than Ben Franklin, Lady Washington refused "to acknowledge a master" and would jump and snap at Adams. She eventually bit him. He responded by cutting a "good stout cudgel" and began "vigorously warming her jacket." He beat her until "she lay down exhausted." Adams walked her on a chain leash every morning, "rapping" her whenever she balked. Soon she followed him off lead. Adams pondered teaching her other behaviors. He roped a flour sack on her back. She rolled and bit at the sack. Adams wore down her resistance over many practice sessions. Lady Washington learned to shoulder heavy burdens with alacrity and devotion. Next Adams taught her to curl up next to him at night to keep him warm.[30]

Co-sleeping with a grizzly bear represented the apex of Adams's benevolent dictatorship. Lady Washington and Ben Franklin showed how a courageous and wise master might capitalize on the authority God had appointed man over creation to achieve wondrous transformations. The bears went from ferocious man-eating lords of the forest to "faithful and devoted" companions. Adams considered the animals his friends. They stayed by his side, shared his "dangers and privations," bore his burdens, and partook of his meals.[31]

THE END

They also bankrupted and eventually killed him. Grizzly Adams's story doesn't end well. Ben Franklin died from disease in 1858. By 1859 Adams owed back rent on the Museum. He sold interests in the menagerie to P. T. Barnum and others, loaded the animals on a boat, and sailed with them to New York City. When Barnum spotted Adams with his beard and buckskins, he immediately understood that "Old Adams was quite as much of the show as the bears," and he hired him as an attraction. Adams traveled with animals, but no one mistook him for a dashing or dominant figure. He was "used-up," feeble and hurt. During the three-and-a-half month voyage around Cape Horn, he had a run-in with Fremont, a grizzly he had raised from a cub. The bear clawed open his head. Adams took off his cap and showed Barnum the wound: "His skull," Barnum reported, "was literally broken in." The workings of his brain "were plainly visible."[32]

Figure 3. Charles Nahl's brutally honest illustration of the animal families Adams destroyed to create his own. Credit: Thomas Hittel, *The Adventures of James Capen Adams* (San Francisco, 1861), facing 19. Reprinted with permission from the Bancroft Library.

Fremont's surgical strike was not an isolated incident. In a newspaper account of Adams's final months, Barnum points out that bears' gentleness on stage hid a history of violence. "The training of these animals," he wrote, "was no fool's play, as Old Adams learned to his

cost; for the terrific blows he received from time to time, while teaching them 'docility,' cost him his life." Adams declared his mastery of the animals both on and off stage, describing how he rode Ben Franklin for hundreds of miles and trained Lady Washington to "carry his cooking and hunting apparatus." But the bears continually undermined his persona: "there was not one among them that would not occasionally give even Adams a sly blow or a sly bite when a good chance offered." Adams "was but a wreck of his former self," and he admitted as much to Barnum. "Mr. Barnum, I am not the man I was five years ago. Then I felt able to stand the hug of any grizzly living, and was glad to encounter, single-handed, any sort of animal that dared present himself. But I have been beaten to jelly, torn almost limb from limb, and nearly chawed up and spit out by these treacherous grizzly bears." Adams performed in New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. He died at home in Neponset, a small burg outside Boston, in the company of his wife Cylena and one of his daughters.[33]

Grizzly Adams executed a midlife correction that blotted out his family and the traditions of household production that produced him. But despite his best efforts at reinvention, he couldn't shake his past completely. He remained devoted to the artisanal vision of paternal authority. At night in camp, he gathered his animal children close. In eastern Washington, he taught two black bear cubs to sleep next to him under his blanket. He drove a stake in the ground near his feet and tied them to it. He positioned them side by side, and "boxed their ears" several times during the night when they got troublesome. The memory of that "comfortable night" roused fatherly affections: "I . . . felt as responsible and proud as any *pater familias* in the abodes of civilization."[34]

Missing from this homey reflection is the fact that Adams had killed these cubs' mother a few days earlier. Violence marred Adams's affectionate relationships with animals and people. He attributed his mastery to his moral character and natural intelligence, but the cudgel always lay handy. Adams beat his animals into performers. The menagerie cage was one of the few places left in Victorian society where patriarchs could commit personal violence and protect rather than disrupt civilized society. Tamers sauntered forth to break iconic people-eaters and quiet rogue giants. The conventions of the menagerie entertainment allowed Grizzly Adams to publicly abuse his animal children and remain a good father.

Captured at a young age, the bears displayed subordinate behaviors that seemed freely given. Size and violence organized many bear social interactions. Boars competed with each other for food, territory, and mating partners. This competition put cubs at risk as boars frequently killed cubs. Small animals depended on their mothers for protection against other bears. This protection was so critical that

cubs latched on to any adult that would foster them if an accident befell their biological parent. Grizzly Adams triggered this social response when he captured cubs. They attached to him for protection and appeared to respect Adams's paternal authority. But his injuries proved the limits of his power and their cooperation. When the bears, especially males, reached adulthood, Adams became an irritant instead of a maternal stand-in. In the wild, large boars like Samson roamed huge territories by themselves for most of the year. Being chained to the floor in a cage in a basement surrounded by other bears, elk, cougars, anteaters, rattlesnakes, numerous small animals, and chattering crowds of people was a scenario right out of ursine hell. It was little wonder that Grizzly Adams's second family ended up as dysfunctional as his first.[35]

Grizzly Adams mouthed industrial values, but like many of the rebel shoemakers he mimicked, he never learned to fully operate in industrial America. He kept marching into the danger zone, thinking he could master nature through courage, guile, and righteousness. Truly effective animal entrepreneurs removed themselves from their animal property. They hired employees to establish human dominance. The owners of the traveling animal show taught this lesson to young Adams. They sent him into the tiger's cage to rebuke their balky star. But the shoemaker in him rejected their business model. He wanted to exploit his underlings for sure, but he also wanted their love. He could not do otherwise. To become a new person, to become Grizzly Adams, James (or John or William) Adams had to stay close to nature and thus close to animals. He had to embrace lethal megafauna and pretend that he was holding family, not wild animals that might kill him. The animals proved him true.

In many ways, Grizzly Adams was a buffoon. He staged moments of cross-species cooperation to assert a benevolent mastery he never possessed. His fakery was pretty apparent. When P. T. Barnum writes your eulogy, you have an obvious credibility problem. Yet beneath all the flimflam and atrocious violence, Adams adhered to some alluring social and environmental ideas. He thought humans could mingle with creation and rebuild their lives through an appreciation of nature. He thought people could learn from and improve themselves through the sincere engagement with wild things. He thought workers deserved to set their own rules and live by their own values. However messed up the before and after, the scenes of cooperation he fashioned with the bears offered glimmers of hope that are hard not to believe completely. We all want to reside in peaceable kingdoms—or republics or households.

The cordwainers in Massachusetts organized a stunning exhibition of mutual cooperation in the winter of 1860, the year of Grizzly Adams's death and the publication of Hittell's biography. Thousands of male shoebinders walked off the job to protest falling wages. The

Figure 4. Image from P. T. Barnum's memoir demonstrates, or maybe ridicules, the bourgeois vibe that emanated even from a late-stage Adams bear show. Credit: P. T. Barnum, *The Humbugs of the World* (New York: Carleton, 1866). Reprinted with permission of the Bancroft Library.

economic depression of 1857 and the introduction of sewing machines cut into the economic and political independence of the shoemakers. Mounting what historian Mary Blewitt has labeled "the largest American demonstration of labor protest prior to the Civil War," the binders shut down the New England shoe trade. After a violent incident between strikers and "expressmen," teamsters hired by shoe bosses to transport materials to rural female stitchers and bring finished uppers back to workshops, the organizers made a point of enlisting women in the protests. By 1860 women constituted 40 percent of the shoe industry workforce, but the cordwainers included women not as fellow workers but as paragons of virtue. Like the menagerie operators, the shoemakers relied on women and families to preserve their respectability in the midst of embarrassing outbursts of violence.[36]

The shoemakers framed their protest around the preindustrial household. They looked back to small-scale male authority and independence instead of forward to the factory system and the thousands of women machine operators who would form the new core of the industry workforce. Though he missed it, Grizzly Adams's extended family lived the transition. In 1846 Grizzly Adams's younger brother, Francis, married Miriam Drake in Spencer, Massachusetts. The town recorder listed his occupation as "shoemaker." The 1855 census had him working as a "bootmaker." In 1880 Francis and his family still resided in Spencer, but the census declared him a "farmer" and Miriam a "house-keeper." Their son Walter "work[ed] in the boot factory." In 1900 Francis continued to farm, and Miriam continued to keep house. The couple had one child at home, a daughter named Clara. Her occupation? "Shoe stitcher." Instead of defining the male head of the household, shoemaking by the late nineteenth century had become a job for young people, especially women, as they moved out and away from parents. Instead of framing the productive family, shoe factories broke them apart.[37]

Grizzly Adams's older brother and sometime alternative identity, James Capen, married Augusta Foster in 1840 in Andover, Massachusetts. In the 1850 US Census, James and Augusta were living in Bridgeport, Connecticut, with their four children. James was working as a "woolen mill hand." In the 1860 census, the family lived in Norfolk, Connecticut. The recorder listed James's occupation as "manufacturer." By the 1870 and 1880 censuses, James and Augusta had moved to Hammonton, New Jersey, to take up farming. Like Francis and their father Eleazer, James went to ground in his later life. After dabbling in factories, he returned to the profession that retained a semblance of household production and paternal authority. Did any of the Adams men find happiness tilling the soil instead of cutting bottoms or tending looms? Eleazer seems to have struggled. On June 5, 1849, about the time his son John set out for the goldfields,

the patriarch of the Adams clan hung himself from the rafters of his Charlton farmhouse.[38]

Human and animal solidarity based in the household fared no better than the craft and class varieties. Hittell and Adams wrote the biography to convince menagerie-goers that the spectacle of cooperation extended behind the scenes of the basement museum. They wanted audiences to imagine Grizzly Adams in the California wilderness, directing his animal family and his Indian apprentices with a firm-yet-loving hand. Lady Washington carried his stuff while Ben Franklin helped him chase down quarry. When Adams sold the menagerie, Barnum reframed the spectacle. The peaceable backstage became a terror dome, with "Old Adams" beaten to mush by his animal servants. Hittell and Adams downplayed interspecies violence to make Grizzly Adams a natural father; Barnum hyped the discord to attract audiences excited by the prospect of wild animals sinking their teeth into someone onstage. Eighteenth-century households could stretch to contain work, family, apprentices, and grizzly bears, but primordial wildernesses and preindustrial shoe republics were no match for the mayhem of industrial relations. Crowds gathered around the cages to feel nostalgic about sweet homes and stern fathers as well as see the past torn apart by the future.

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Notes

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8 Hittell, *The Adventures of James Capen Adams* (San Francisco: Towne and Bacon, 1860), 9. See also Mizelle, "'A Man Quite as Much of a Show as His Beasts,'" 31.

9 Hittell, *The Adventures of James Capen Adams*, 10.

10 Ibid., 22.

11 Ibid., 62.

12 Ibid., 60, 92.

13 Ibid., 50–51.

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