

## EDITORS' NOTE

What do circus performers; the Interstate Commerce Commission; voting reformers in New York City and Berlin; and a free-thinking judge and Orthodox Baptist in Waco, Texas, who killed one another have in common?

The *Gilded Age* and this journal, of course.

Charles Postel's "Murder on the Brazos" takes us to Waco, Texas, in the 1880s and 1890s. When they think of Waco—if they ever do—most Americans surely think of the city as one of the seats of conservative Baptist orthodoxy, embodied by Baylor University. Postel illuminates another side of Texas society, one that relentlessly critiqued and ridiculed the pillars of Waco's Baptist establishment. These skeptics were hardly marginal: not only did they publish *The Iconoclast* in that buckle of the Bible Belt, but they elected a county Judge, Bruce Gerald, who hosted weekly meetings of secular rationalists in his courtroom. Like the better-known heretics who perished in the siege of the Branch Davidian community in 1993 just outside Waco, Gerald met an early and unhappy end. Yet the disputes with which he was involved demonstrate the complicated relationship between religion, its critics, and the Populist cause that so convulsed the region and nation.

Perhaps circus days numbered among the frivolous debaucheries such as drinking and dancing of which Gerald's assassins sternly disapproved. Micah Childress argues that the labor history of circuses was anything but frivolous. At the turn of the century, this popular mass spectacle provided one of the few opportunities for travel and adventure available to African Americans. Yet the restrictive conditions and workplace supervision that they faced ultimately presaged their later treatment in steel mills, automobile factories, and other industrial workplaces. White women, in contrast, were able to use circus employment to escape some of the strictures of domesticity, sometimes to the degree that they out-earned their male colleagues. It was no coincidence that some of these women formed the hitherto unexamined organization "Suffragette Ladies of the Barnum & Bailey Circus."

If the first two articles center on the unexpected and zany, the next two examine more familiar subjects in the study of the period: the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and changes in voting regulation. Yet like Waco society and the circus, these institutions became the subject of disputes with lasting consequence.

Hiroshi Okayama argues for the centrality of the ICC in the development of the U.S. administrative state. The Commission, in his account, was not merely a national version of older state railroad commissions, but rather a court-like agency whose reliance on adversarial proceedings and the generation of hearing records colored later agencies. The more than 1,800 hearings conducted annually by the ICC in the 1920s are the direct antecedents of such practices as the 20,000 deportation proceedings per year conducted by the Department of Justice. Okayama thus reminds us of the importance of path dependency: the past development of the U.S. state is present in the way it operates today.

Hedwig Richter similarly revisits a development long recognized as central to the period: the secret-ballot electoral system. By studying electoral changes in New York

and Berlin, she argues for the emergence of a transatlantic consensus among elites and middle classes that connected state legitimacy to mass electoral participation by modern, rational individuals. This consensus had its antidemocratic aspects—in the United States, most notably the suppression of African American voting. Yet Richter insists that ideal of a national democratic community of rational and equal citizens was an expansion of democracy for which Progressives deserve more credit than they have received in the last generation of scholarship.

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