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Faculty Research: Dr. Janet Davis pens NYTimes editorial on elephants in the circus

by Carrie Andersen

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We're pleased to share with you all the news that **Dr. Janet Davis**, one of our core faculty members, published an editorial in the *New York Times* this past Sunday. She describes the history of elephants in the circus in light of Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus's announcement that their traveling elephant performers would be retiring by 2018.

See an excerpt below; the full editorial can be found [here](#).

Elephants have been wildly popular in this country since 1796, when the first one arrived on American soil. Jacob Crowninshield, a ship's captain from Salem, Mass., landed in New York City with a two-year-old Asian female from Calcutta. He sold the "Crowninshield Elephant" to an enterprising showman for

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\$10,000. Thousands of eager Americans, including President John Adams, flocked to see the animal in taverns and courtyards, where audiences, fascinated by her trunk's dexterity, plied her with gingerbread and wine. She and her keeper plodded from Rhode Island to New Orleans under cover of darkness for the next nine years because her owner was fearful of giving spectators a "free" look.

Americans at the time were particularly receptive to the Crowninshield Elephant and the many others who followed her, in part, because of nationalistic myth: Thomas Jefferson believed that flesh-eating elephantine mammoths roamed the American West, and he expressly ordered Lewis and Clark to look for one on their trans-Mississippi expedition. Performing elephants gave live, physical form to Jefferson's notion of the American mammoth.

But that's not all! Janet also contributed her expertise to this recent CNN piece on the circus's decision. See that article [here](#).

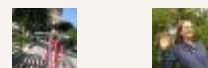
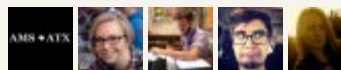
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