



The Showman and the Slave

Benjamin Reiss

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Reiss uses P. T. Barnum's Joice Heth hoax to examine the contours of race relations in the antebellum North. Barnum's first exhibit as a showman, Heth was an elderly enslaved woman said to be the 161-year-old former nurse of the infant George Washington. Seizing upon the novelty, the newly emerging commercial press turned her act--and especially her death--into one of the first media spectacles in American history.

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