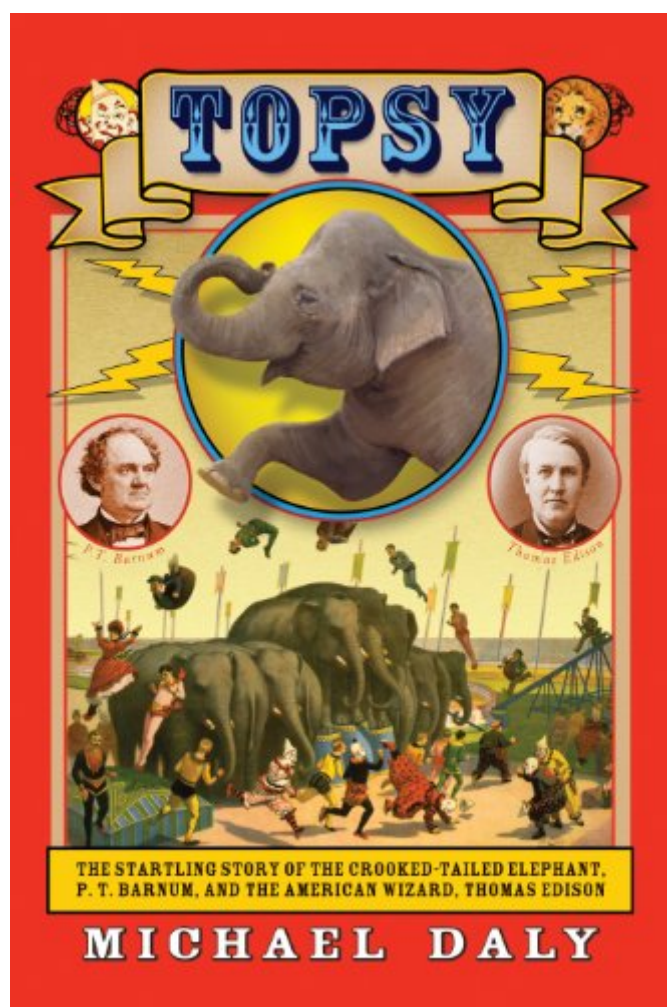


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Topsy: The Startling Story Of The Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, And The American Wizard, Thomas Edison



Synopsis

In 1903, on Coney Island, an elephant named Topsy was electrocuted, and over the past century, this bizarre, ghoulish execution has reverberated through popular culture with the whiff of urban legend. But it really happened, and many historical forces conspired to bring Topsy, Thomas Edison, and those 6600 volts of alternating current together that day. Tracing them all in *Topsy The Startling Story of the Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard, Thomas Edison*, journalist Michael Daly weaves together a fascinating popular history, the first book on this astonishing tale. At the turn of the century, the circus in America was at its apex with the circuses of P.T. Barnum and Adam Forepaugh (or 4-Paw) competing in a War of the Elephants, with declarations of whose pachyderms were younger, bigger, or more sacred. This brought Topsy to America, fraudulently billed as the first native-born, and caught between the circus disputes and the War of the Currents, in which Edison and George Westinghouse (and Nikola Tesla) battled over alternating versus direct current. Rich in period Americana, and full of circus tidbits and larger than life characters; both human and elephant; Topsy is a touching tale and an entertaining read.

Book Information

File Size: 4445 KB

Print Length: 394 pages

Publisher: Atlantic Monthly Press (July 2, 2013)

Publication Date: July 2, 2013

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00B77A11G

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #185,250 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #5 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Arts & Photography > Theater > Circus #16 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Theater > Circus #696 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Americas > United States > 20th Century

Customer Reviews

It was difficult to get through this book, because the author did such a good job vividly portraying the human arrogance and cruelty toward elephants, which are intelligent, empathetic animals. It broke my heart as they were torn from their mothers as calves and "trained" through beatings and deprivation. What makes me sadder is the uncomfortable thought that we still may not have learned to be better one hundred-plus years later. We still have instances of confining intelligent animals - whether they be elephants, orcas, or apes - in the name of profit or scientific research. This is a well-written book that makes us ponder whether we truly have progressed as human beings.

I knew about Topsy, the elephant who met a sad end at Coney Island. What I didn't know before reading this book was the incredible history of elephants in America and how it intersected with the equally amazing story of old-time circuses and, surprisingly, a fierce rivalry between the fathers of modern electricity. Meticulously researched and grippingly told, this book is full of indelible characters -- most of all, the elephants themselves.

A better title would have been something about how captive elephants have given their all to make the circus what it is, today. The book is not about Topsy, only, so the title was a little misleading for me. The circus, the competition between circus owners to acquire elephants, the general acquiring of elephants, and the story of Topsy make up the full book. The first chapter is a little wanting with page, after page, after page, after page after page . . . of the phrase "would have" to describe how Topsy "would have" been born and captured. After Chapter 1, the book is interesting. I finished reading it, but felt the book could have been more aptly titled about circus elephants in general. The story of Topsy is the caper, but there were just as many other interesting stories in the book about other captive elephants. A good read and a book that should be on the list for anyone unaware of the treatment of captive elephants, and also, the chosen methods by circuses to put some of these elephants, not just Topsy, to death, those deemed to have become psychotic due to capture or dangerous amongst humans (becoming so due to the mistreatment of the elephants by their trainers, such as with Topsy). You'll learn more about circus elephants in this book, than you would from Wikipedia.

LOVED this book! The story was told in much detail with a minute look at circus life , as well as the history of elephants in the circus. Sometimes, it was a little hared to read about the horrific acts of cruelty towards the elephants, but important to know. I will never go to a circus again that has an

animal "act".

A historical account not only about the life of one elephant (Topsy) but how the American circus came into existence starting with the pre-civil period. It is a great read and is a good example of why there is a need for the ASPCA and other organizations like it. I watched the movie "Water for Elephants" and after reading this book the movie proved to be more factual in its portrayal of circus life during the Great Depression than I believed at the time.

Engaging account of the importation and exploitation of the circus elephant in the US, but alarming in its documentation of the extent to which they were subject to routine abuse to 'control' behavior.

A story of the history of elephants in America, circuses, and the dawning age of electricity. This book was thoroughly researched and well written. The treatment the elephants and some of the humans received, was so brutal that I have a queasy stomach days after reading it.

Really dealt more with the bitter rivalry between Edison and Tesla, and the extreme lengths that the former would go to try to discredit the latter. Edison also electrocuted dogs and a few human condemned criminals. All to try to prove that his method of producing electricity was better than Tesla's. Cruelty that would never be allowed today, thank goodness. The animal rights people will be appalled by this book. With good reason. Topsy suffered years of serious abuse before her awful end.

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