



Women of the American Circus, 1880-1940

Katherine H. Adams, Michael L. Keene

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In the years from 1880 to 1940, considered the glory days of the American circus, between a third and a half of the cast members were women, a large group of very visible American workers whose story has never been told. In this book, drawing on diverse sources such as diaries, autobiographies, newspaper accounts, films, posters, and route books, the authors first consider the popular media's presentation of these performers as unnatural and scandalous--as well as romantic and thrilling. The book next moves to the stories told by circus women, which contradict and complicate other versions of their lives. Across America in those years an array of acts featured women, such as tableaux, freak shows, girlie shows, tiger acts, and aerial performance, all involving special skills and means of communication with an audience. By beginning with representations of women as circus performers and then moving to the performances themselves, this book offers a unique and fascinating view of what it meant to be an American woman at work.

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