

## Berlin Women “Crazed” by Nubian Visitors (1878)

### Abstract

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Carl Hagenbeck (1844–1913) was a merchant who dealt in wild animals, which he brought back mainly from Africa to Germany and which he displayed in the first modern zoos in Germany (his zoos had animal enclosures without bars). But Hagenbeck exhibited humans as well as animals. He did so in “ethnographic displays” of non-white peoples known as *Völkerschauen*, a term that can also be translated as “human zoos.” Between 1876 and 1879, Hagenbeck organized three shows of Nubians—peoples from the African region now part of Egypt and Sudan. They were extremely popular. That some Berlin women became “Nubian crazed” [*Nubiertoll*] did not please everyone. Members of the German Colonial Society, later, warned against “racially unfaithful behavior.” As the historian Eric Ames has written, “they worried that such displays tacitly invited spectators and performers to shed their inhibitions, literally embracing interracial desire and engaging in physical contact.” These concerns contributed to the genesis of regulations after 1890 outlawing miscegenation and interracial marriage in Germany’s colonies. This excerpt is from the unpublished memoir of Carl Hagenbeck’s recruiter and employee, Johan Adrian Jacobsen (1853–1947).

### Source

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Here I want to mention a phenomenon that we as showmen frequently encountered with southern peoples—namely, the sudden lovesickness that these brown fellows inspired in quite a lot of young girls and also women. It was particularly the years 1877–78, when Hagenbeck’s great Nubian troupes came to the big cities in Germany. My colleagues, who traveled with these troupes, told me the most amazing stories about them. At the time, these troupes were in fact the first from the south to appear in Europe, and since one had yet to notice it with other peoples, the women who were struck by this lovesickness were called “Nubian-crazed” [*Nubiertoll*]. Later, when Indians and especially the Sinhalese came to Europe, one heard similar stories, if not to such a marked degree as with the Nubians. With their lean figures and bronze skin, the barely clothed Nubians excited the young girls most of all. Every day one could see a love-struck little woman stroking and feeling the hand or arm of a brown Adonis for half an hour at a time. It went so far that in the summer of 1878, the troupe was in Berlin’s zoological garden, and every black man had found his sweetheart, so to speak, the troupe was preparing to depart, when suddenly the blacks refused to obey, probably goaded by their new girlfriends, and did not want to leave the zoological garden. A group of well-armed policemen had to be summoned, who, with swords and revolvers drawn, separated the pairs, the Nubians being armed with shields and lances, so that the troupe could finally depart Berlin. In Dresden [once again] a few young girls made themselves ready for travel, to accompany the troupe when the Nubians departed. Fortunately, someone informed the parents of one girl, so this little sprout was picked up at the last minute in the train station.

Source of English translation: Ames, Eric. *Carl Hagenbeck’s Empire of Entertainments*. pp. 97. © 2009. Reprinted with permission of the University of Washington Press.

Source of original German text: Hilke Thode-Arora, *Für fünfzig Pfennig um die Welt: Die Hagenbeckschen Völkerschauen*. Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 1989, pp. 117–18. Republished with permission.

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