

Criticism of the “Human Exhibition” in Berlin (October 21, 1880)

Abstract

Signed “J. K.,” this article in a Magdeburg newspaper criticizes the decision to put Abraham Ulrikab and his family on display in the Zoological Gardens of Berlin. The author lays waste to the argument that such blatant exploitation had any sort of scientific benefit—a charge that Berlin professor Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902) felt compelled to reject at a special meeting two weeks later.

Source

“The Eskimos in the Zoological Gardens of Berlin,” *Magdeburgische Zeitung*, no. 493, morning edition from Thursday, October 21, 1880.

[...] Just look at the little people a little more carefully, a little more in the proper sense of “anthropological,” and you will realize immediately that there is a melancholy expression especially on the faces of the Eskimo^[1] women. They know fully well that they are being exhibited, exposed to the curious, prying glances of old and young. Who knows what these children of the roughest North may be thinking about their highly educated European fellow humans! [...] And it is beyond telling how “interesting” they are! Because those Northerners walk around just as we do. However, in their sealskin clothes they may seem a little clumsy to us, and a bit like bears. [...] Now we would maintain that nothing is gained by the most meticulous observation of all these “interesting details,” even when seen from the so called anthropological point of view. Neither our education nor our knowledge have been expanded or deepened in any way. We cannot, however, and nor can many others, suppress a feeling of embarrassment about these recently proliferating “human exhibitions” [*Menschenausstellungen*], and especially about “human exhibitions” in zoological gardens! [...]

NOTES

^[1] Please note, the term “Eskimo” has been carried over from the original German article from 1880. The term has been used historically to denote Inuits (as in the present text) as well as Yup’iks, indigenous people from Alaska. The term is considered derogatory in current usage and is preserved here only because it was included in the original historical source—GHDI.

Source of English translation: *The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab. Text and Context*, translated (from the German) by Hartmut Lutz and students from the University of Greifswald, Germany. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005, pp. 23–25. Reproduced with permission from the University of Ottawa Press.

Source of original German text: J. K., “Die Eskimos im Zoologischen Garten zu Berlin,” *Magdeburgische Zeitung*, no. 493, morning edition from Thursday, October 21, 1880; reprinted in Hartmut Lutz with Kathrin Grollmuß and Greifswald students, eds., *Abraham Ulrikab im Zoo. Tagebuch eines Inuk 1880/1881*. Wesel: VdL Verlag, 2007, p. 60.

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