

## “Hagenbeck’s Great India Exhibit” (1926)

### Abstract

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This newsreel clip advertises the 1926 “Indian Show,” an exhibition of people and animals organized by John Hagenbeck, Germany’s most famous impresario of “exoticism,” whose extended family had traded wild animals and designed zoos, circuses, and ethnographic displays since the 1870s. Hagenbeck’s “exhibit” brought together nine elephants and a hundred people from the Indian subcontinent, and this segment shows how Hagenbeck generated publicity for his exhibition by parading elaborately ornamented elephants through the center of Berlin and by arranging remarkable demonstrations of human balance and agility. The Hagenbeck company, begun by Carl Hagenbeck to supply wild animals to menageries and circuses across Europe, quickly branched out in the 1880s into a new form of entertainment that capitalized on audiences’ fascination with the peoples of Africa and the Orient: *Völkerschauen* [“ethnographic exhibits” or “human zoos”] that displayed people in constructed villages purporting to illustrate how they dressed, cooked, interacted, danced, and marked ceremonial occasions in the faraway homes where they were from. At various times, the Hagenbeck company found and hired performers from the Oglala-Sioux in South Dakota, the Sami in Norway, and various groups from Morocco and Egypt, often under misleading pretexts and exploitative conditions. The *Völkerschauen* propagated an understanding of ethnicity as a fixed and clearly defined unit with easily identifiable physical features and rigidly determined cultural norms. By the 1920s, such exhibitions had begun to illicit more and more opposition, and this 1926 Berlin show drew criticism from a number of quarters, including Indian students and intellectuals living in the city at the time.

### Source

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Source: *Deulig-Woche* No. 28 (clip), Deulig-Film Ag, 1926. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 433.  
<https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/433/683627>

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