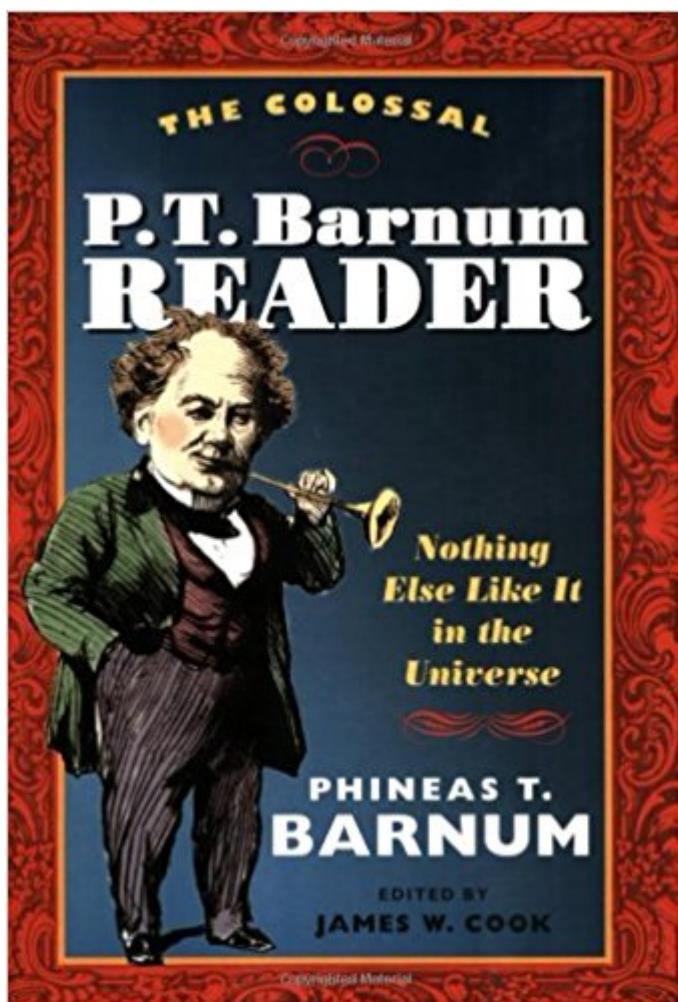


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# The Colossal P. T. Barnum Reader: NOTHING ELSE LIKE IT IN THE UNIVERSE



## Synopsis

The P. T. Barnum Reader reveals the trailblazing American showman P. T. Barnum as, by turns, a moral reformer, a habitual hoaxter, an insightful critic, a savvy puffer, a master of images, a sparkling writer, a relentless provocateur, and an early advocate of family entertainments. Taken together, these selections paint a new and more complete portrait of this complex man than has ever been seen before. James W. Cook's *The Colossal P. T. Barnum Reader* is the largest collection of Barnum's works ever produced. Included are excerpts from his pseudo-autobiographical novel *The Adventures of an Adventurer* (1841), his European letters from 1844-46 informing readers of the New York Atlas of his regal reception overseas, and a large selection from his *Ancient and Modern Humbugs of the World*, Barnum's 1864-65 insider's look into the frauds of nineteenth-century American culture.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Barnum - arguably more than any other nineteenth-century impresario - transcended local cultural markets to cultivate a powerful and pro-table presence on the national and global stage under the guise of providing educational entertainment for diverse audiences of all ages. Using fascinating, funny, and informative sources, Cook offers an excellent showcase of the central role that nineteenth-century showman P. T. Barnum played in laying the foundations of the modern culture industry." Janet M..Davis, author of *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top*

James W. Cook is an associate professor of history and American culture at the University of Michigan. He is the author of *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum*.

I ordered this book to read for a class. Though I only read a couple sections for the class, I plan on reading the rest of the book simply because it was so interesting. The book is entirely composed of primary sources- either written by Barnum or his contemporaries. The introductions to each section give some nice background information on the sources and what readers can hope to learn from them. I wish there had been more to the individual introductions before each source. As someone who was unfamiliar with many of his acts, I often found myself searching for background information about the characters/acts online so I could compare what the primary source said with accepted fact. This seems especially pertinent since Barnum was known for "humbug" (aka over-exaggeration and flat out lies). Yet, at the same time, the lack of commentary allows readers to really interact with the material on their own. The content matter of the book was very thought-provoking. It's easy to draw parallels between the strategies P.T. Barnum used to sell his products and current businessmen and politicians. Personally, I found this book helped me understand the current political climate better. The book also sheds light on the pervasiveness of racism in 19th century America, as well as the adversity faced by those with disabilities.

Great book!

Contemporary article by and about Barnum

fascinating stuff, recommended. quick delivery.

Varied writings of P. T. Barnum that gives the reader an insight into his life and business thinking and strategies for success

Let me preface this review by saying that it will center entirely on the using the book in a college-level course. I used this as an assigned text in U.S. history survey in 2007. Frankly, I did not know how students would react to or engage with Barnum. They enjoyed the book and the sparks flew in our classroom discussion. I think this text works much better than Barnum's autobiography as an introduction to Barnum's historical significance. The only small criticism I will make of the book

is that it would be even better (for classroom use) with a longer introduction that expands on Barnum's life, career, and historical context. James Cook has written brilliantly on these points, so perhaps a second edition will include a longer introduction. I prepared one lecture to fill in some of these gaps. Also, the first selection, "Adventures of an Adventurer" is very difficult for undergraduates to grasp, so I just omitted it from the assigned reading.

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