



Millie-Christine McKoy and the American Freak Show:

RACE, GENDER, AND FREEDOM IN THE POSTBELLUM ERA, 1851-1912

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Recent historical research has focused on a few popular acts of late nineteenth-century American freak shows, such as the “Siamese Twins” Chang and Eng Bunker, in order to understand how notions of inherent racial and physical difference continued to be institutionalized in the absence of slavery. Although the conjoined twin sisters Millie-Christine McKoy enjoyed a similar level of celebrity and financial success as the Bunker twins, they have not received nearly the same amount of attention from historians. As black women born into slavery, Millie-Christine illuminates different aspects of nineteenth-century culture than Chang and Eng. Her life complicates our understanding of the intersections between race, gender, and the meaning of freedom in the post-Civil War period. In this paper, Millie-Christine’s life is reconstructed through a variety of primary sources, including contemporary circus pamphlets, medical journal studies, newspaper articles, and advertising broadsides, as well as the twins’ autobiography, letters, and will. Although Millie-Christine’s experience confirms some previous analyses of the American freak show, she ultimately departs from the assumptions that freak show performers were passive victims, that women were defined by their children and husbands, and that conjoined twins were physically and metaphorically unable to experience freedom. Millie-Christine McKoy’s unusual body lands her on the freak show’s often exploitative stage, but it also gives her the kind of wealth, success, and agency virtually unknown to black women in postbellum America.

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Introduction

Around 1868, Mark Twain wrote a very short story entitled “The Siamese Twins” that satirized the most famous conjoined twins of the era, Chang and Eng Bunker. In this story, Twain joked that “during the [Civil] War they were both strong partisans, and both fought gallantly all through the great struggle—Eng on the Union side and Chang on the Confederate.”¹ The physical impossibility of this statement is clearly meant to be humorous, but it also serves as an allegory for the United States during the Civil War. The image of two people fiercely opposed, yet inexorably tied to each other, mirrors the American North combating the seceded South.

Julia de Nooy argues that twins are frequently used in literature and the media to symbolize nations and divides among their people. More often than not, the twins represent not the inevitability of separation, but the possibility of overcoming division through an assertion of “sameness over difference.”² Conjoined twins in particular, therefore, represent national unity as a more powerful force than national strife, which is what makes Chang and Eng the perfect characters for Mark Twain’s Civil War story. On the other hand, conjoined twins also embody something of a “national nightmare.” Because their bodies are connected, they threaten the value of American individualism.³ Conjoined twins can thus serve as an important figure and a valuable symbol for examining greater aspects of a nation’s culture at large.

The Bunker brothers have been the subject of countless historical analyses and monographs, and typically serve as the canonical example for explaining the popularity of conjoined twins in nineteenth-century freak shows. However, no similar historical analysis has been conducted for Millie-Christine McKoy, another contemporary pair of conjoined twins who enjoyed a similar level of celebrity and financial success, and whose experience is just as important.⁴ When compared to Chang and Eng, Millie-Christine illuminates different anxieties of nineteenth-century American culture related to race, gender, and freedom.

¹ Mark Twain, “The Siamese Twins,” in *The Complete Humorous Sketches And Tales Of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider (New York: De Capo Press, 1996), 280–281.

² Juliana de Nooy, *Twins in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Look Twice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 115.

³ de Nooy 115, 120.; Allison Pingree, “The ‘Exception That Proves the Rule’: Daisy and Violet Hilton, the ‘New Woman,’ and the Bonds of Marriage,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 174.

⁴ The choice to refer to these sisters as Millie and Christine (two people) or Millie-Christine (one person) was one I struggled with immensely. My initial impulse, one influenced by my modern prejudices, was to assert the individuality of each sister by using the plural. After reading more and more about the twins, however, I realized that they thought of themselves as one person, and thus preferred to be called by the singular “she.” I have chosen to honor this feeling by doing the same. I hope the reader will recognize this choice as respectful to my subjects, rather than neglectful of the individuality of each woman. (The topic of identity will be discussed at length later in this

Born a slave on a North Carolina plantation in 1851, Millie-Christine's bodies were fused at the lower spine. Nevertheless, aside from slight spinal curvatures, both bodies were perfectly well-formed. For the majority of her life, Millie-Christine was presented to thousands of onlookers, including doctors, reporters, museum-goers, and even Queen Victoria, all of whom commended her for her "marvelous intelligence" and harmonious singing, often of songs she wrote herself. Millie-Christine became remarkably wealthy through these exhibitions, amassing thousands of dollars by the time of her death in 1912.⁵

Millie-Christine's life and career in the public eye must be understood in context of the social institution that facilitated her display: the freak show. The freak show is rooted in the eighteenth-century, when "human curiosities" were first displayed to the American public. Concurrent with these displays was the emergence of a new scientific field known as 'teratology' in which scientists studied "monsters," or plants and animals that deviated from the norm. Since science as a formal profession was still in its infancy, scientists and doctors hungry for specimens were attracted to "monsters" as a means to better understand normal bodies through an exploration of what made the "monsters" different. These scientists often engaged in a symbiotic relationship with showmen. Scientists would lend credibility to the "human curiosities" by writing "testimonies" of authenticity. In return, the showmen would provide the scientists with publicity and affirm their professional legitimacy. These early scientists also ran the country's first museums, which functioned more for the purpose of furthering scientific knowledge than for displaying the human body, although live "human curiosities" were included in even the earliest museums. As it became clear that the "monsters" drew more visitors than anything else on display, museum owners began presenting multiple curiosities together, thus creating and institutionalizing the modern concept of the freak show.⁶

The freak show was further revolutionized by P.T. Barnum, undoubtedly the most famous showman of the period, who transformed the early museum format into the modern "dime museum" when he opened the American Museum in New York City in 1841; unlike the early museums, which emphasized scientific knowledge, these dime museums focused on entertainment. By 1850, the American Museum was the city's premier attraction, and dime museums quickly sprung up by the dozens across New York City and other major urban centers. In both dime museums and three-ring circuses, which also became immensely popular in the second half of the nineteenth-century, the most popular attraction was the freak show.⁷ The human oddities displayed in these freak shows could be divided into two main categories: "made freaks" and "born freaks." "Made freaks" were people born with normally-formed bodies who had altered themselves in an unusual way. These included tattooed people, women with very long hair, and sword-swallowers. "Born freaks," by contrast, were the true "monsters," with

paper.) Please note that I will occasionally use terminology that seems incongruous, such as "she" in reference to "the twins"—this is intentional.

⁵ This brief summary is derived from Joanne Martel's biography *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair Publisher, 1999).

⁶ Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 25–29.; Thomas Fahy, *Freak Shows and the Modern American Imagination: Constructing the Damaged Body from Willa Cather to Truman Capote* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 7.; Robert Bogdan, forward to *Psychological Profiles of Conjoined Twins: Hereditary, Environment, and Identity*, by J. David Smith (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), xi. The word "freak" had supplanted "monster" by the 1840s.

⁷ Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 32–40, 54.; Rosemarie Garland Thompson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 65. Near the turn of the century, the rise of amusement parks, like Coney Island, and world's fairs also contributed to the popularity of freak shows, but these developments fall beyond the time period of this essay.

bodies that deviated genetically from the norm. This category included armless and legless people, giants, dwarfs, bearded women, “half-and-halves” (hermaphrodites), and, of course, conjoined twins.⁸

A critical examination of Millie-Christine McKoy’s life highlights major themes that characterized postbellum American life. I begin this examination with a detailed history of Millie-Christine’s personal life and career. In the subsequent sections of my essay, I investigate how Millie-Christine’s experiences depict some of the most pressing issues of the era: (1) the perception and treatment of corporeal and racial minorities; (2) the expected gender roles for women; and (3) the meaning of freedom. My analysis of these themes shows how Millie-Christine both affirms and contradicts the arguments made by contemporaries and modern historians about conjoined twins, the freak show, and American society. Finally, my conclusion evaluates how Millie-Christine contributes to a fuller understanding of the cultural and social history of the United States, from the postbellum era down through the early twentieth-century.

The Life and Career of Millie-Christine

I love all things that God has done / Whether I’m created two or one
—Millie-Christine McKoy⁹

Millie-Christine McKoy was born on July 11, 1851 to parents Jacob and Monemia. The McKoys, who had produced seven children before Millie-Christine, were slaves owned by Jabez McKay on a plantation in Welches Creek, North Carolina.¹⁰ Onlookers claimed that Millie-Christine weighed seventeen pounds at birth: twelve pounds for Christine and just five pounds for Millie.¹¹ The twins were connected in a formation known as pygopagus, which occurs in 18 percent of conjoined twins, and were fused below the point at which the backbone connects to the pelvis.¹² When she was born, Millie was so small that Monemia said the only thing that indicated there were two babies—rather than one baby with a growth on her back—were Millie’s

⁸ Joe Nickell, *Secrets of the Sideshows* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), vii–viii, 141, and 178.; Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 241. Frederick Drimmer, *Very Special People: The Struggles, Loves, and Triumphs of Human Oddities* (New York: Amjon Publishers, 1973), 170.

⁹ Millie-Christine McKoy, *History and Medical Description of the Two-Headed Girl*, circus brochure (1869), North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 21. The epigraph for each of the following sections is couplet from a song that Millie-Christine wrote.

¹⁰ There is some confusion as to the correct spelling of Millie-Christine’s family and their owners’ last names, for both names are spelled in a variety of ways in the many of the sources I consulted. I ultimately decided to use “McKay” for the owners based on an 1857 deed of sale between Jabez and John Pervis. I chose “McKoy” for Millie-Christine and her parents because her will uses that spelling of their last name.

¹¹ *The Biographical Sketch of Millie-Christine, the Carolina Twin, Surnamed the Two-Headed Nightingale and the Eighth Wonder of the World*, circus brochure (1889), <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/carolinatwin/menu.html>, 4.; McKoy, 5–6.; Martel, 3–4.

¹² George A. Gould and Walter L. Pyle, *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine* (1896; repr., New York: Sydenham Publishers, 1937), 177.; Luigi Gedda, *Twins in History and Science*, trans. Marco Milani–Comparetti (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1961), 107–110.; Martin Howard, *Victorian Grotesque* (London: Jupiter Books, 1977), 28.; Nancy Segal, *Entwined Lives: Twins and What They Tell Us About Human Behavior* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999), 29. See Fig. 6 in the appendix to see possible conjoined twin configurations.

hands and feet.¹³ Millie would remain the smaller and weaker twin for her entire life, though according to Dr. William H. Pancoast, the physician who treated and examined the girls many times throughout their lives, Millie was able to grow “strong and hearty, owing to the support she has received from her connection with her more robust sister.”¹⁴ The twins’ strong connection and dependency on each other began as soon as they were born.

Unsurprisingly, Millie-Christine began attracting attention and visitors as early as infancy. An 1889 pamphlet about her life entitled *The Biographical Sketch of Millie-Christine the Carolina Twin, Surnamed the Two-Headed Nightingale and the Eighth Wonder of the World* (or *Sketch* for short) describes how “rumor flew about the township of Whiteville, and spread from thence over the whole country,” as “pilgrimages to visit her became all the rage in the country side.” The biography also provides the first example of how Millie-Christine’s unusual formation would ultimately change her life for the better, particularly relative to the inherent disadvantages she faced as a black disabled woman born into slavery: baby Millie-Christine was taken “from the cabin to the mansion” to receive the special care and attention she required.¹⁵ Though the physical labor most slaves performed was clearly beyond the capabilities of a body like hers, the only aspect of canonical antebellum slavery that Millie-Christine really ever experienced was ownership, and even that, arguably, was nearly the same arrangement created for other freak show exhibits of all races. For the first year of her life, however, Millie-Christine was not exhibited. The *Sketch* emphasizes her humanity and normality during these early months, describing how she “grew as other girls grow, learned to walk at twelve months old...and at fifteen months began to talk with both her mouths.”¹⁶ This period of normalcy, however, would quickly come to an end.

In early 1852, McKay began to tire of the “burden” and “frequent visits of strangers” that Millie-Christine created, and decided to “dispose” of her—this rhetoric highlights how, despite her unusual slave experience, Millie-Christine was nevertheless a possession.¹⁷ On May 18, 1852, McKay signed an agreement with a man named John C. Pervis, who paid McKay one-thousand dollars for the twins. McKay would receive one-fourth of the proceeds from any exhibition, as well as one-fourth of the money Pervis received if he ever sold the twins. Finally, Monemia was allowed to accompany the girls without charge, but had to be returned to McKay if Pervis sold Millie-Christine.¹⁸ Little else is known about Millie-Christine’s time with Pervis, but in late 1853 she was sold once more to a Mr. Brower, who paid between six- and ten-thousand dollars for her.¹⁹ Brower did not have enough money to outright purchase Millie-Christine, instead offering a promissory note backed by one Joseph Pearson Smith. Smith would later become a central figure in Millie-Christine’s life, but in 1853 he simply cosigned Brower’s note and left with the group for New Orleans, where the girls underwent “a scientific examination” at the “request [of] the medical faculty of that city.”²⁰ Only after this examination,

¹³ Martel, 4.

¹⁴ William H. Pancoast, “The Carolina Twins,” *Photographic Review of Medicine and Surgery* 1 (1870–1871), <http://books.google.com/books?id=aLARAAAYAAJ>, 45.

¹⁵ *Biographical Sketch*, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Biographical Sketch*, 5.; Martel, 6.

¹⁸ Deed of sale between Jabez McKay and John C. Pervis dated May 18, 1852, Millie-Christine Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.

¹⁹ *Biographical Sketch*, 5.; McKoy, 6. The *Biographical Sketch* states that Brower “offered \$10,000 for her,” while their autobiography listed “the sum of \$6,000.”

²⁰ *Biographical Sketch*, 5.; Martel, 7–8.

which included a close inspection of her genitalia, was Millie-Christine allowed to be displayed to the eager public. This pattern—medical examination then public exhibition—would become the framework for the next decade of Millie-Christine's life. Once Millie-Christine gained control over her own exhibition, she would put a stop to these intrusive medical examinations.

However, at the time, New Orleans's most prominent physicians were able to examine Millie-Christine and endorse her as the real deal. This was a virtual requirement for a successful show, since fake freaks, known as "humbug," had created a skeptical public. Nevertheless, Brower's first few exhibitions "succeeded indifferently," a failure blamed on his lack of "proper management."²¹ When a wealthy landowner offered to buy the twins in exchange for forty-five thousand dollars worth of land in Texas, Brower was more than happy to oblige, and even handed over Millie-Christine a day before he was to receive the deeds. The Texan then disappeared with Millie-Christine without making good on his offer, covering his tracks so well that "no clue to her, or even the direction she had been carried, could be gained."²² Brower soon gave up searching for the girls, and returned to tell McKay and Monemia about the kidnapping. Smith dutifully paid the ten-thousand dollars Brower had promised McKay, thus becoming sole legal owner of Millie-Christine, whenever she was found. He also purchased Jacob, Monemia, and their other seven children, so that the recovery of Millie-Christine would also mean the reunion of her entire family.²³ The next task, of course, was to find her.

Smith hired detective T.A. Vestal, described as "one of the shrewdest detectives in the country," to track the twins' whereabouts.²⁴ The influence of print culture in the nineteenth century was evident in the *Sketch's* description of how Vestal tracked Millie-Christine: through the newspaper. Vestal watched the papers carefully to find that "no account of the death of any one answering her description had been noticed, which certainly would have been the case had she died."²⁵ The detective traveled across the country for two years without any luck, during which time Millie-Christine changed hands a few more times, eventually ending up with showmen named W.J.L. Millar and William Thompson.

Exactly how Millar and Thompson gained custody of Millie-Christine varies by source. The twins' 1889 autobiography *History and Medical Description of the Two-Headed Girl* states that, while on exhibition at a Philadelphia museum, a concerned citizen told the authorities that "we were slaves, brought into a free State, where we were unjustly deprived of our liberty," and lobbied the court to appoint a legal guardian for her.²⁶ Millar elaborated on this story in publicity broadsides printed for Millie-Christine's Canadian and European tours in the mid-1850s. On these broadsides, he claimed that he and Thompson were the very guardians appointed by the Philadelphia courts when Millie-Christine's previous owner passed away. By contrast, in an 1860s article entitled "How I Found and Lost Her," Millar stated that he purchased Millie-

²¹ *Biographical Sketch*, 5.

²² *Ibid.*, 5–6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁶ Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 274.; McKoy, 8–9. Millie-Christine was still a minor at this time, so she required guardianship because of her age, not her race. A note on the use of her autobiography as a major source: Leslie Fiedler argues that freak autobiographies were "invariably ghost-written, a part of the act rather than a way of seeing beyond it." I acknowledge that the very nature of this text (which was sold at shows to promote Millie-Christine) predisposes it to hyperbole and fabrication. However, based on clues from this text and from Millie-Christine's personality, I found no indication that this autobiography was not authentic.

Christine from “a spotted woman” in Boston who claimed she was their mother.²⁷ However they gained ownership, Millar and Thompson continued to tell the story from the broadsides as the took their prize to Scotland and England, even adding the sympathy-inducing claim that the “helpless infants” were on display to make enough money to free their parents from slavery.²⁸

Of course, Millie-Christine was not working to save her family. Millar originally pursued possession of the twins because he had heard she would “secure a fortune to the proprietor,” and that is exactly what happened.²⁹ Certified by top British physicians, Millar and Thompson exhibited Millie-Christine in Liverpool, London, Stamford, Sheffield, Leeds, and Birmingham, much to the delight of the audiences and newspaper reporters who clamored to see her.³⁰ In August 1855, Millar suddenly split from Thompson and took the twins to Dundee, Scotland. Thompson retaliated by hiring four “prizefighters” to snatch her back. Millar’s description of Millie-Christine’s encounter with the prizefighters is alarmingly violent: a man grabs Millie-Christine, Millar knocks him to the floor and grabs her back, then three men pile on top of Millar and wrestle the “two sobbing children” away and out the door. Thompson contended that a London judge had deemed him Millie-Christine’s legal guardian, and had permitted him any means necessary, including “forcible possession,” to get her back.³¹ Millar began looking for the girls’ mother, the best strategy for determining Millie-Christine’s true guardianship, and soon started corresponding with Joseph Pearson Smith in North Carolina. In September 1855, Smith wrote a letter to Millar’s brother Kennedy Millar, W.J.L. Millar’s stateside agent, in which he declined to sell Millie-Christine nor her parents to W.J.L. Millar, and requested that he come to Britain to reunite the family as soon as possible. Smith and W. J. L. Millar negotiated the matter for nearly fourteen months, and finally arranged for Smith, Monemia, and Kennedy Millar to sail to Britain to join W.J.L. Millar in claiming the twins.³²

The rescue party surreptitiously attended Millie-Christine’s next exhibition, following the American consul’s advice that Smith find out if Millie-Christine could recognize her mother, which would be strong evidence in court for her guardianship. Monemia was told to maintain a low profile, but as soon as she saw her daughter, “she uttered a scream of such heart-rending pathos that the audience simultaneously rose to their feet, wondering and astonished.”³³ The audience soon learned the “true state of affairs” from the Chief of Police, and helped keep Millie-Christine in the room after Thompson tried to sneak her out. The following day, Thompson called Smith and Monemia to appear before the Court of Admiralty to prove their right to custody. The American consul who had advised Smith and Monemia the day before spoke to the court on their behalf, declaring Millie-Christine to be “an American citizen, and requiring it, as a minor, to be placed in charge of the mother.”³⁴ Ultimately, though, the judge hardly required any hard “proof” of Millie-Christine’s parentage, for “the resemblance between

²⁷ W.J.L. Millar, “Two-Headed Nightingale: How I found and lost her: Part I,” *Dundee Advertiser* (Scotland), 1864.; *The Greatest Wonder Ever Seen, the African Twins, United by Nature, Accompanied by Their Mother, Who has Recently been Liberating From Slavery*, advertising broadside (1857), Millie-Christine Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.

²⁸ *The Greatest Wonder of the Age! The African Twins, United by Nature*, advertising broadside (1855), Millie-Christine Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.

²⁹ W.J.L. Millar.

³⁰ Martel, 36–37, 52.

³¹ Martel, 39–44.; W.J.L. Millar.; *The Greatest Wonder of the Age!*

³² Joseph Pearson Smith to Kennedy Millar, September 16, 1855, Millie-Christine Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.

³³ *Biographical Sketch*, 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

Christina [sic] and her mother was convincing. One of the gentlemen on the bench said he did not require any further proof, as he was sure Mrs M'Cay [sic] was the mother of at least one of the children, which remark caused considerable amusement in the Court."³⁵ After the court made its decision, W.J.L. Millar offered Monemia ten thousand dollars and an "elegant house" if she would stay in England and let him continue to show Millie-Christine until she was eighteen, but Monemia declined, preferring "to return and live, as she had done, in the land of her birth...among her kindred and her friends." The twins' autobiography also mentions that a three-year contract was at first signed between Monemia and Millar, but after Millar "tried to vitiate the contract, so as to get things his own way, and thus deprive us of our rights...[and also] abused our mother, and applied the most revolting epithets," Smith quickly broke the contract and brought the family back to the United States.³⁶

Safely back home in the South, Smith began exhibiting Millie-Christine at the "earnest solicitations of friends who knew him to be possessed of the world's greatest marvel"—Smith's humble humanity is starkly contrasted with the showmen Millar and Thompson, whom the *Sketch* characterized as motivated only by fiscal gain.³⁷ Smith, his wife, and Detective Vestal—brought along just in case there was any more trouble—took the twins to South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, showing them in exhibition rooms and even on Mississippi River steamboats.³⁸ During this period, Millie-Christine began to speak less of Monemia than of Mrs. Smith, whom she called her "white ma." Mrs. Smith taught the twins to read, write, dance, and sing—talents that would become paramount to her later acts—and about Christianity.³⁹ However, when the Civil War began in 1861—deemed simply "the domestic political troubles" by the autobiography—Mr. Smith "was obliged to withdraw us from public life and take us home." The Smiths hid Millie-Christine in Spartanburg, South Carolina, their new home town, for the duration of the war. Millie-Christine's great-great nephew Lloyd Inman claims that she had to be hidden because "it was rumored that Sherman's army was going to try to find and free the Carolina Twins."⁴⁰ On November 5, 1862, Mr. Smith died of an illness, leaving his wife and family to grieve, and Millie-Christine to "mourn the loss of our good master, who seemed to us as a father."⁴¹ When the war ended in 1865, the twins were freed from slavery, but decided instead to stay with the woman who had nearly raised them, declaring, "none can mistake our determination in remaining under the guardianship of Mrs. Smith."⁴²

Her decision to stay with Mrs. Smith provided Millie-Christine the chance to help the family in a time of financial crisis, for Mr. Smith's estate had suffered great losses in the war. In 1865, at the great moment of unprecedented legal emancipation and freedom, Millie-Christine was able to make perhaps the first truly independent decision of her life: "to retrieve the fallen fortunes of the family[,] she, now free, consented to place herself on exhibition." (Smith's son,

³⁵ W.J.L. Millar.

³⁶ *Biographical Sketch*, 9.; McKoy, 11.

³⁷ Mary Wilson, "The slaves who sang for the queen," *Sunday Star-Times*, January 15, 1984.

³⁸ *Biographical Sketch* 10.; Martel 83–84, 94. The *Sketch* mentions that a second kidnapping occurred during this tour, but biographer Joanne Martel makes no mention of it in her thoroughly-researched biography *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, so its truthfulness is in doubt.

³⁹ McKoy, 14.

⁴⁰ Wilson.

⁴¹ McKoy, 15.

⁴² *Biographical Sketch*, 11.; McKoy, 15–16. A taste of their burgeoning agency was displayed in the *Sketch*'s explanation of Smith's death: "Indeed, it is only due to Mr. Smith and his wife to state, and *Christine Millie desires particularly that it be inserted in this sketch of her life*, [emphasis mine] that she experienced at his death rather the affliction of one who had lost a beloved father rather than a master."

Joseph Pearson Smith Jr., would take his father's place as their manager.) Millie-Christine further asserted her independence by stipulating two changes to her display: she would keep the money she earned, and there would be no more examinations of her genitalia. As biographer Joanne Martel wrote, after being examined so many times in so many cities, "surely, there was nothing new to see or feel that countless doctors hadn't already reported in graphic detail."⁴³ At the young age of fourteen, Millie-Christine decided that she would continue to be exhibited to the public, but that she would do it on her own terms.

With her newly-learned dancing and singing skills, Millie-Christine—now known as the "Two-Headed Nightingale"—was able to make a sizeable sum with her exhibitions, earning upwards of six-thousand dollars a week.⁴⁴ Christine was a soprano and Millie a contralto, and audiences were as delighted by their duets as by their dance performances of the schottische, polka, and waltz. Millie-Christine even took to writing verse about her condition.

Some persons say I must be two,
The doctors say this is not true;
Some cry out humbug til they see,
When they say—great mystery!

I'm happy, quite, because content;
For some wise purpose I was sent;
My maker knows what he has done,
Whether I'm created *two* or *one*.⁴⁵

Millie-Christine danced and sang at countless venues for the next few decades, but one unexpected performance occurred at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, where the girls danced, sang "Sweet Spirit, Hear My Prayer," and chatted with each other and audience members. Her purpose at the college was, of course, medical, and not musical. Virtually the only doctor allowed an intimate examination after 1865 was Dr. William H. Pancoast, who was treating Millie-Christine for an abscess that day. He also tested other aspects of her body, such as whether a touch to an arm or leg could be felt by both women. Pancoast was then allowed to take the only known photograph of Millie-Christine partially unclothed, which was published alongside his article in the *Photographic Review of Medicine and Surgery* in 1871. The article also included a far more intimate woodcutting of the intricacies of her conjoined genitalia. Even Pancoast noticed the obvious discontent the twins felt towards these invasions, mentioning how "the expression of their countenances shows their displeasure, as their features ordinarily express great amiability of character."⁴⁶

Millie-Christine continued to travel around the United States and even Europe, garnering favorable reviews and massive audiences wherever she went; a single day in New York, for example, netted ten-thousand visitors. Newspapers printed glowing reviews, praising the twins as being able to "sing well, in fact excellent" and "dance divinely;" and for being "pleasing and

⁴³ Martel, 199.; Quigley, 116.

⁴⁴ *Biographical Sketch*, 11.; J. David Smith, *Psychological Profiles of Conjoined Twins; Hereditary, Environment, and Identity* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 63.

⁴⁵ *Biographical Sketch*, 12–13.

⁴⁶ *Biographical Sketch*, 14.; Pancoast, 42–47. Pancoast was perhaps allowed more access than others because he examined the girls multiple times, and helped them with serious medical problems, particularly the aforementioned abscess.

gentle in her manner.”⁴⁷ On June 24, 1871, Millie-Christine even performed for Queen Victoria, who wrote in her journal that “it is one of the most remarkable phenomena possible... They sang duets with clear, fine voices.” Her seven years of European travels took Millie-Christine to Russia, France, Germany, Belgium, Hungary, Austria, Holland, England, and Italy, during which time she studied with language tutors to learn Spanish, French, German, and Italian. One of her audiences’ favorite acts was when Millie-Christine carried on two conversations at once; her multilingualism surely made this bit all the more interesting.⁴⁸

From 1878 through 1881, Millie-Christine traveled the Americas once more, even showing in Cuba, where her Spanish skills made her a popular attraction. In 1881, just as she began settling down and building a retirement home, John Doris induced Millie-Christine to join Doris’s Great Inter-Ocean Railroad Show, her first American circus, for two thirty-five week seasons.⁴⁹ During her run with Doris, Millie-Christine was the victim of a slanderous attack posted on a rat sheet (a broadside printed by circuses to discredit their rival’s acts) most likely created by Doris’s rival, the Great Forepaugh Show.

The one great feature [Doris]... extensively advertises is a horribly repulsive Negro monstrosity. No lady would knowingly ever look upon it, little Children cover their faces with their hands when encountering this frightful malformation, and the sooner this hideous human deformity is hid from public view the better it will be for the community.⁵⁰

For women so often praised as not only intelligent and entertaining, but also a family-friendly marvel “entirely devoid of any monstrosity in their appearance,” this was a particularly vicious and unfounded accusation. Millie-Christine filed a libel suit against Mr. Forepaugh, which, owing to the transient nature of circus folks, hung in limbo until 1884, when Forepaugh settled the suit and paid a fee.⁵¹

Millie-Christine spent one year in England and one season with Barnum’s circus, then spent a few months on the dime-museum circuit.⁵² She had become so wealthy in her forty years in show business that she was able to purchase, as a gift to her parents, the very same plantation on which they had formerly toiled as slaves. When he later passed away, Jacob’s will split the plantation between his wife, children, and grandchildren, so that Millie-Christine and her siblings, nieces, and nephews were able to live comfortably together on their family’s North Carolina land.⁵³ The children that grew up around “Aunt Millie-Christine” remembered her fondly. Her great-nephew Fred McKoy called her “the best Christian-hearted person I ever saw... I often wish I could live the life she lived.”⁵⁴ Retirement, however, was not without its

⁴⁷ Martel, 155.; McKoy, 17. *The double-headed girl is now presented before you by C.B. Brestle who is traveling in company with Forepaugh’s gigantic menagerie and circus combined*, advertising broadside (1868), North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁴⁸ Martel, 177.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 205. After Millie-Christine refused his initial offer, John Doris persisted, and asked Millie-Christine for the lowest salary she would demand. Perhaps in reference to her 1862 appraisal, she answered twenty-five thousand dollars, which, much to her surprise, Doris accepted.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 225.

⁵¹ *Dundee Advertiser* (Scotland), “The United African Twins,” 1855.; Martell, 224–228, 242.

⁵² Martell, 240, 246, and 251.

⁵³ *Biographical Sketch*, 11.; “McKoy, Jacob, 1891,” Columbus County Estates Records, 1812–1969, private collection, Raleigh, NC.

⁵⁴ Columbus County Historical Society, *Millie-Christine: Columbus County’s Siamese Twins*, 1969.

problems. A 1909 fire burned down Millie-Christine's cherished house, taking with it many of her mementos and souvenirs from years of traveling. Relatives have since hypothesized that Millie may have caught her terminal tuberculosis that night as she and Christine sat outside in the cold while their house burned to the ground.⁵⁵ Millie's condition only worsened over the next few years, and on October 8, 1912, she passed away. It was Christine who alerted the doctor of her passing, for she was "able to express the feelings and thoughts of her other self through death." She said of Millie's death, "she passed away in a dream, a peaceful dream." Christine stayed alive for eight more hours, singing and praying for release, then finally passed herself.⁵⁶

Millie-Christine had requested her bodies be cremated, for she was horrified by Chang and Eng's autopsy, and was afraid someone might rob her grave. The McKoy family instead buried her in a family graveyard, and stationed someone to guard her grave for months afterward.⁵⁷ It remained undisturbed until 1969, when the Columbus County Historical Society exhumed the remains, lost under overgrown weeds and a melted metal headstone. The Society transferred Millie-Christine's few remaining possessions—dentures, a hairpin, a button, and three rings—to a community cemetery in her birthtown of Welches Creek, North Carolina. Two poignant aphorisms of Millie-Christine's life remain after her death: a gold ring found at her gravesite is inscribed, "As God decreed, We agreed;" and her new headstone still reads as it originally did in 1912: "A soul with two thoughts, Two hearts that beat as one."⁵⁸

Freak Shows and the Creation of 'The Other'

Two heads, four arms, four feet / All in one perfect body meet
—Millie-Christine McKoy

Millie-Christine lived for sixty-one years, making her one of the longest-living conjoined twins in modern history.⁵⁹ Her long life, however, was not the only reason why she was able to become so prosperous and wealthy. Rather, Millie-Christine's success as a public figure was contingent on the particular time period in which she lived. Although the freak show would fall from public approval in the early twentieth-century, it was a major institution of American popular culture in the second half of the nineteenth-century. As the United States experienced unprecedented immigration and increased threats to the established racial hierarchy during this time period, freak shows provided a means for the white majority to reinforce the physical and cultural differences between themselves and the non-white, inferior "other."⁶⁰ Visible race-based cues

⁵⁵ Louise Lamica, "Twins' story banded down," *Wilmington (NC) Star*, February 9, 1974.

⁵⁶ Minnie McIver Brown, "Story of Millie-Christine," *Whiteville (NC) News Reporter*, December 10, 1925.

⁵⁷ Quigley, 122.

⁵⁸ William G. Faulk, Jr., "The Disinterment of the Remains of Millie-Christine, African, 'Siamese Twins' in Columbus County, North Carolina," North Carolina Department of Archives and History, November 22, 1969, private collection, Raleigh, NC. See Fig. 7 in the appendix for a photograph of the modern headstone.

⁵⁹ Christine Quigley's 2006 book *Conjoined Twins* is an exhaustive and cross-cultural encyclopedia of nearly ever known case of conjoined twins throughout history. This book indicates that only a few other conjoined twins lived for more than sixty-one years.

⁶⁰ For more on freak shows and "the other," see, for example, Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies*, Bogdan's *Freak Show*, and Fahy's *Freak Shows and the Modern American Imagination*.

had signaled the racial hierarchy for decades; white equaled prestige and power, and black equaled servitude and powerlessness. However, with new immigrants from Ireland, the German states, Scandinavia, and the United Kingdom—more than 2.5 million arrived in the 1850s alone—having light-colored skin no longer meant a person was a “white” Anglo-Saxon.⁶¹ In addition, increased miscegenation made it harder for an onlooker to tell if a person was white or black from simply looking at his skin.⁶² The freak show, then, served as a visible and visceral way to preserve the notion of inherent difference.

Just as increased immigration and miscegenation chipped away at a system of visible racial cues, the abolition of slavery in 1865 eliminated the legal institution that had reinforced and perpetuated black inferiority since the nation’s inception. However, the abolition of slavery by no means resulted in a dramatic power reversal. Few former slaves were actually able to amass economic and political resources in the last decades of the nineteenth-century. Nevertheless, the United States suddenly lacked an *institution* to justify its social and racial hierarchies. The freak show’s parade of bodies, then, allayed its audience’s fears on multiple levels. Disabled white bodies reassured viewers of their corporeal superiority, grounded in what Rosemarie Garland Thomson calls the United States’ “social hierarchy based on ability.” Such an idea was entwined with the “Jeffersonian idea of natural leadership,” in which an “aristocracy of the body” replaced class or feudal distinctions.⁶³ Non-white bodies of all abilities did more significant “cultural work,” for they created solidarity among their diverse viewers, and reassured them of their “claim to citizenship.”⁶⁴ The freak show was therefore strikingly similar to the slave market and public lynchings, two sites where racial display also served to build community among its white audience. Walter Johnson argues that “at no site was race more readily given daily shape than in the slave market,” for it allowed white men to create relationships and cement the racial hierarchy through the “inspection and evaluation” of black bodies.⁶⁵ In addition, Thomas Fahy claims that lynchings were community events that forged a sense of white safety and solidarity through the “destruction of the black body.”⁶⁶ While the freak show was not a literal human marketplace and did not culminate in violence and death, it still used bodily spectacle and unequal power dynamics to cement cultural and racial disparity. Millie-Christine’s display exemplified some of the major techniques of non-white freak exhibitions, but it also departed from the norm in significant ways. As I will demonstrate, outward presentation had the power to influence the audience’s perception of racial identity and their own cultural distance from the person on display.

Robert Bogdan, a prominent expert on freak shows, delineates two specific presentation styles that showmen employed to display their freaks: the aggrandized mode and the exotic

⁶¹ Jon Gjerde, *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 96. The changing definition of who was “white,” known today as whiteness studies, is, in and of itself, a very interesting topic, though not one I will attempt to tackle in this paper.

⁶² Fahy, 20.

⁶³ Thomson, 64. I just mention disabled white performers because the only able-bodied whites at a freak show were the working acts, or performers who demonstrated a skill, such as magic tricks or sword-swallowing.

⁶⁴ Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 31; Thomson, 16. Another appeal of the freak show was that it was a form of entertainment that did not require its audience speak English, making it ideal for immigrants.

⁶⁵ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Trade* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 136–137.

⁶⁶ Fahy, 21–22. Thomas Fahy also suggests that freak shows offered a sense of safety-through-distance, which was absent from lynchings.

mode. In the aggrandized mode, a showman presented the freak as socially-superior to the audience by exaggerating or outright fabricating the details of his origin and lifestyle.

Freaks in the aggrandized mode were given high-status titles such as “Captain,” “Major,” “General,” “Prince,” “King,” “Princess,” or “Queen”... the public was told that the freak was highly educated, spoke many languages, and had snobbish hobbies such as writing poetry or painting. In addition, the exhibits were linked with well-known and high-status people in Europe and the United States. Having an audience with royalty or with the president was commonly fabricated... some exhibits [wore] expensive jewelry and stylish clothes—top hats and tails, evening gowns, [and] furs... [Performances] included such talents as singing, dancing, and playing a musical instrument.⁶⁷

A famous example of an aggrandized freak is Charles Sherman Stratton, a dwarf born in Connecticut. As part of Barnum’s show, Stratton was refashioned as “General Tom Thumb” from London, complete with a royal attitude and style of dress.⁶⁸

In the exotic mode, by contrast, a showman displayed the freak in such a way as to appeal to the audience’s fascination with the primitive and strange.

Promoters told the audience that the exhibit came from a mysterious part of the world—darkest Africa, the wilds of Borneo, a Turkish harem... Dressed in a style that was compatible with the story, the exhibit would behave consistently with the front. “Wild men” or “savages” might grunt or pace the stage, snarling, growling, and letting off warrior screams. Dress might include a loincloth, [or] a string of bones around the neck... Freaks displayed in the exotic mode appeared in their photos in front of a painted backdrop depicting jungle scenes or exotic lands... The stories used in presenting exhibits were created to maximize interest... the “savage African” was a popular motif.⁶⁹

The exotic mode could be used to display white Americans with a marked physical difference, such as a dwarf or albino, accompanied by a falsified story placing their origins in faraway lands. More often, though, it was the non-white freaks that were seen in the exotic mode. Early images of Chang and Eng Bunker depict them in exotic “Siamese” caps, tunics, and loose pants to emphasize their foreign roots. Barnum’s infamous “What Is It?”—portrayed by a New Jersey-born black man with microcephaly⁷⁰ named William Henry Johnson—was advertised as a “man-monkey” from Africa who exhibited a mixture of human and animal qualities. Johnson was depicted, accordingly, with a shaved head, wearing fur suits, holding a stick, and crouching in the wilderness.⁷¹ Many factors, such as the freak’s personality and specific anomaly, influenced

⁶⁷ Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 108–109.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 149–150.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 105–106.

⁷⁰ National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, “Microencephaly,” <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/microcephaly/microcephaly.htm>. Microencephaly is a medical condition that results in an unusually small head circumference and a small brain. Before the medical terminology was available, microencephalics were often known as “pinheads.”

⁷¹ Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 134–139. Another technique to emphasize freaks in the exotic mode was to pose them next to “normal- looking” white people to further emphasize their unusual appearance. See Fig. 10 in the appendix for an

the showman's decision to use the exotic or aggrandized mode. Nonetheless, Bogdan asserts that skin color played an undeniable role, for "blacks tended to be cast as missing links or savages."⁷²

Because Millie-Christine was a black woman, her logical presentation style would have been the exotic mode. Indeed, in the few years that Millar and Thompson had custody of her, this is exactly what happened. Though Millie-Christine had been born in North Carolina, Millar and Thompson alternately branded her as the "African Twins" or the "United Twins of Africa." An 1855 broadside printed in Dundee, Scotland claims the twins were "born in Africa, and when only a Year old, were dragged off together, with both their parents, three brothers, and two sisters, and sold into slavery at Cuba."⁷³ Two years later, a broadside from Edinburgh lists her correct birthplace, but spells her last name as the exotic "Makoi."⁷⁴ It also includes an illustration of Millie-Christine and Monemia posed next to palm trees and jungle flowers, ostensibly to emphasize her African roots.⁷⁵ However, with the exception of these tales spun by Millar and Thompson, Millie-Christine was generally displayed to the public in a normalized, respectable way. She wore formal knee- or floor-length dresses, often trimmed with lace or embroidery, and her hair was styled in a neat fashion. Occasionally, she was seen wearing crowns or jeweled hairpins that echoed the aggrandized mode's interest in royal ties. Nonetheless, the overall effect of her appearance suggested not grandeur, but normalcy.⁷⁶

Although the aggrandized mode is mainly classified by its aristocratic and prestigious manifestations, Bogdan also describes one version in which the performers are shown as simply "conventional," excepting, of course, a single malfunction that makes them a freak. Bogdan also stresses that some showmen displayed aggrandized freaks, whether aristocratic or conventional, with a sense of mockery or satire. He lists obese white women with stage names like "Baby Ruth" and "Tiny Brown" as examples, but there was also an implicit sense of ridicule in the aggrandized presentations of non-white freaks like Julia Pastrana, a Mexican-Indian woman covered in hair, who was exhibited in formal gowns despite being billed as the "Ugliest Woman in the World."⁷⁷ What made Millie-Christine unique among her fellow nineteenth-century exhibitions is that she was a non-white person shown in the aggrandized mode without a sense of ridicule or farce. It is impossible to know the presentation style of every single freak shown in the United States in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, but a survey of the surviving images of famous freak exhibitions reinforces the claim that Millie-Christine existed outside of the traditional framework of freak portrayal. It is possible that this anomaly occurred because the Smiths were not freak exhibitors by vocation, but rather by avocation. As a result, they did not have the same calculated, strategic showmanship skills of many of their contemporaries, such as Barnum. However, Millie-Christine's exhibits still drew on many canonical aggrandizing

image of Chang and Eng, Fig. 11 for the "What Is It?", and Fig. 12 and 13 for two examples of "exotic" black people posed next to whites.

⁷² Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 134–139, 112.

⁷³ *Extraordinary and Most Wonderful Curiosity! The United Twins of Africa!*, advertising broadside (1855), Millie-Christine Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC ; *The Greatest Wonder Ever Seen, the African Twins, United by Nature, Accompanied by Their Mother, Who has Recently been Liberating From Slavery*.

⁷⁴ *The Greatest Wonder Ever Seen*

⁷⁵ *The Greatest Wonder Ever Seen*; Martel, 65. See Fig. 12 and 13 in the appendix for images of these broadsides. Biographer Joanne Martel hypothesizes that Millar's 1857 revision of their birthplace was due to Monemia "setting him straight."

⁷⁶ Articles and advertisements in Millie-Christine's later life often mentioned that Queen Victoria had given her diamond hairclips. See Fig. 14–19 in the appendix for additional images of Millie-Christine.

⁷⁷ Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 114, 147, 200.; Thompson, 72–73. See Fig. 20 in the appendix for a photograph of Julia Pastrana.

techniques: the twins sang and danced, and her advertisements boasted that she could speak four languages and had “appeared before Kings, Queens, and Emperors.”⁷⁸ As such, it is more likely that certain aspects of her personality, such as her oft-praised intelligence and pleasing nature, overrode the connotations of her skin color. Millie-Christine was therefore shown as a talented, engaging, intelligent woman, who just happened to be conjoined twins.

Millie-Christine’s unique presentation style is emphasized by the way that contemporary publications discussed her race, for many newspapers and journal articles seemed to downplay the fact that she was black. Some publications were straight-forward in describing her race, such as Dr. H.V.M Miller’s reference to her “African parentage,” Dr. F.H. Ramsbotham’s article about “two African girls,” and Dr. Charles A. Lee’s description of “two negroes united.” Dr. Pancoast called Millie-Christine “negresses,” and said that “their complexion was of the dusky brown of the American negro.” By contrast, Dr. Lee said that the twins have “splendid Caucasian heads,” even though he claimed that both Monemia and Jacob were “full blooded Africans.” Dr. G.J. Fisher believed that “their complexion is that of the fair mulatto”—the same race recorded for Millie-Christine in the 1910 census—and an article from the *Liverpool Daily Courier* described their “fair Creole complexion.” A French doctor even claimed that she had “light skin” and “curly hair”—as opposed to the “bushy” hair of most Africans—because she had some Native American ancestry.⁷⁹ Millie-Christine, for one, believed her true lineage was African, for she refers to herself as a “young African” in her autobiography.⁸⁰

While it is possible that confusion over Millie-Christine’s race stemmed from her ambiguous hair texture and complexion, it is also quite likely that her eloquence, intelligence, personality, and sartorial presentation—so different from the commonly-held stereotypes about African-Americans during the time period—made people assume she must be something other than simply black. Nineteenth-century naturalists believed that races could be ranked along a continuum, with black skin at one end and white skin at the other, and that certain physical and cultural attributes attached to points along the spectrum. Physician James Pritchard even proposed that the “physical [and] mental perfection” of white Europeans had evolved over time from black people.⁸¹ When considered in this context, the disconnect between Millie-Christine’s race and personality must have struck some contemporary observers as evidence that she belonged to a different spot on the continuum. Her great-great nephew Lloyd Inman would probably agree. He believes that “white folks treated her like an exception, not as a black woman in the South was treated then.”⁸² Millie-Christine’s aggrandized presentation style was not only unusual among non-white freak show performers, but it also had the potential to influence the way audiences perceived her race.

Millie-Christine was able to become a famous and successful performer because she lived during an era when the freak show was a staple of American culture. The freak show became so popular in the nineteenth-century because it not only provided audiences with an inexpensive amusement to satiate their fascination with the strange and unusual, but it also reinforced the

⁷⁸ *The Millie-Christine Concert and Exhibition Co.: Headed in Person by the Famous Living Two-Headed Woman! Better known as the Carolina Twins*, advertising brochure (n.d.), North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁷⁹ H.V.M Miller, “Account of a Case of a Double Monstrosity,” *Southern Medical and Surgical Journal* 16 (1860), 79.; G.J. Fisher, “Article XXIV: Diploteratology,” *Transactions of the Medical Society of the State of New York*, 1866, 227–231.; Pancoast, 44. *Biographical Sketch*, 16.; Quigley, 119 and 121.

⁸⁰ McKoy, 6.

⁸¹ Joan Rothschild, *The Dream of the Perfect Child* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 18.

⁸² Rothschild, 18.; *Raleigh News and Observer*, “Diaries help keep alive memories of Siamese twins,” May 8, 1984.

power imbalance between “normal” white audiences and the abnormal, often non-white, people on exhibition. Physicians George Gould and Walter Pyle explained in 1896 that the fascination with corporeal curiosities stemmed from the fact that they allowed people “to catch forbidden sight of the secret work-room of Nature, and drag out into the light the evidence of her clumsiness, and proofs of her lapses in skill.”⁸³ Leslie Fiedler claimed that humans feared freaks “as threats to what we cannot help feeling is, or ought to be, the end of the evolutionary line: a final adjustment so effective and elegant that any change would be a regression.”⁸⁴ Freak shows, then, allowed this threatening physical deficiency to be conflated with the non-white bodies on display, thus reinforcing and justifying the racial hierarchy that the “peculiar institution” had previously entrenched.

Millie-Christine, however, was not portrayed as a threatening, subjugated, or deficient human being. Even at the age of four, she was lauded by the *Liverpool Daily Post* as inspiring “in the minds of the beholders, a feeling of awe at the inscrutable ways of Him, who had, in these ‘little ones,’ left the reaches of human intellect and science so far behind.”⁸⁵ Millie-Christine also defies Thomas Fahy’s characterization of the freak show as an instrument of white power, used to maintain control over black identity and culture in the absence of slavery.⁸⁶ Millie-Christine demonstrated that she would not allow herself to be disempowered when a slanderous ad appeared in the *New York Clipper*, calling her “repulsive.”⁸⁷ She responded by penning a sharply sarcastic response to the showman responsible. As biographer Joanne Martell stated, “Millie-Christine thus made it clear that no one was going to disparage her in public and get away with it.”⁸⁸ Although the freak show functioned as an instrument of white solidarity and racial oppression, Millie-Christine provides an example of a famous, successful, and well-traveled freak who simply refused to allow herself to be controlled.

Womanhood, Pregnancy, and Partnership

None like me, since days of Eve / None such perhaps will ever live
—Millie-Christine McKoy

The postbellum period saw radical upheavals to accepted norms and hierarchies across the United States, most obviously in the realm of race and servitude, but also, importantly, in regards to gender. The nation's first feminist movement, the nineteenth-century women's suffrage movement, began in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention, as leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott challenged the existing inequality of women, and their relegation to the domestic sphere. The suffrage movement was closely tied—and, in many ways, indebted—to the abolition movement, for many of its leaders had begun as antislavery activists who later used

⁸³ Gould and Pyle, 1.

⁸⁴ Fiedler, 203.

⁸⁵ *Liverpool Daily Post*, “The United African Twins,” July 1855.

⁸⁶ Fahy, 27.

⁸⁷ Martell, 197–198.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

the rhetoric and ideology of abolition to express their desire for equality between the sexes.⁸⁹ The quarter-century that followed the Convention saw the rise of what historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg calls the “New Woman.” This term describes a group of women who rejected conventional female roles and expectations, and affirmed their right to attend college, have a career, and eschew marriage.⁹⁰ Although the ultimate culmination of the suffrage movement, the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, would not occur until 1920, by the postbellum period many women had already begun to question and challenge accepted notions of femaleness, and what it meant to be a woman. In many ways, the very formation of Millie-Christine’s unusual body also challenged the established expectations for women in the nineteenth century.

In both medical journals and advertising circulars, descriptions of Millie-Christine’s physicality tended to focus heavily on the number of sexual organs she had, revealing not only a prurient interest in the intimacies and intricacies of sexuality, but also a seeming preoccupation with defining femininity in terms of childbearing and marriage. Dr. Miller’s 1854 article states that Millie-Christine had one vulva, two vaginas, and two urethras; Dr. Ramsbotham listed in 1855 two joined vulvas, two vaginas, two urethras, two clitorides, and two uteruses; and Dr. Pancoast asserted in 1871 that there were two joined vulvas, one vagina, two urethras, two clitorides, and just one uterus.⁹¹ These inconsistencies were perhaps due to the fact that both Millie-Christine and Mrs. Smith were diligent about limiting the number of doctors permitted to physically examine her genitalia, much to the doctors’ frustration. Dr. Pancoast expressed this sentiment in his article “The Carolina Twins,” for it was only “after great persuasion...(owing to the modesty of the twins and the natural reluctance of Mrs. Smith), [that] the accompanying photograph...was taken.”⁹²

Such a fixation with the sexual organs was not limited to Millie-Christine, nor to female conjoined twins, even though the incidence of female conjoined twins far outnumbers that of male.⁹³ The exhaustive 1896 tome *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine*, by George Gould and Walter Pyle, describes many cases of conjoined twins, labeled “Double Monsters,” including Millie-Christine. In each case that involved a connection of the pelvic region, one of the first qualities that Gould and Pyle describe are the character and number of genitalia. The “Hungarian Twins” Helen and Judith, to whom many people compared Millie-Christine, “had all their parts separate except the anus between the right thigh of Helen and the left of Judith and a single vulva.”⁹⁴ The Tocci brothers of Italy, one of the few male conjoined twins highlighted, “had a common abdomen, a single anus, two legs, two sacra, two vertebral columns, [and] one penis.”⁹⁵ These descriptions make clear that it was the prurient, sexual aspects of deformed bodies that both medical and lay audiences found so fascinating. Gould and Pyle even admit in their introduction that, “in the beginning, the organs and functions of generation, the mysteries of sex,

⁸⁹ Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 15–23.

⁹⁰ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, quoted in Pingree, 175.

⁹¹ Most advertising circulars would cite a medical journal such as these, so the figures would be the same in both print media types. H.V.N. Miller 79–80. Pancoast 48.; Fisher 228.

⁹² Pancoast 44. See Fig. 1 in the appendix.

⁹³ Lawrence Wright, *Twins, and what they tell us about who we are* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1997), 90. Segal 297–298. An examination of five-hundred years of medical publications revealed that seventy percent of conjoined twins were female, twenty-two percent were male, and eight percent had an unidentified gender. This imbalance has been blamed on the fact that, in general and in the case of twins, male fetuses are more likely to miscarry than female.

⁹⁴ Gould and Pyle 178.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

not the routine of digestion or of locomotion, stimulated [Man's] curiosity" about these anomalies and "monstrosities."⁹⁶

Modern readers might be surprised to discover that such frank descriptions of conjoined twins' anatomy occurred during the notoriously prudent Victorian era, but as Alice Domurat Dreger has pointed out, because such descriptions were "presented in the form of a straightforward quotation[s] from... medical doctors," they "could be included in pamphlet[s] sold to the public."⁹⁷ Freak shows, of course, frequently used testimonies from scientists and doctors to legitimize their exhibits to a humbug-weary public, but Dreger's theory also illuminates the fact that the public used these testimonials to make socially acceptable a fascination that might otherwise be deemed improper.

More than just an exercise in exposing postbellum society's fascination with the lascivious, the lists of Millie-Christine's genitalia in medical journals give insight into how contemporary society defined what qualified as "female." Dr. Pancoast emphasized that Millie and Christine "menstruate regularly and naturally at the same time," yet that they had "but one vagina, but one womb."⁹⁸ The question of whether Millie-Christine was one person or two is a debate that continues to this day, but insofar as her sexuality was concerned, the general consensus among the doctors that examined her was quite clear. As articulated by Dr. T.H. Andrews, doctors believed that while "intellectually, they are separate and distinct, sexually [they are] but one."⁹⁹ Drs. Pancoast and Andrews' statements that Millie and Christine lacked their own separate reproductive organs had two implications: that these women were each, in fact, half-women; and that neither was physically capable of carrying her own child. These two aspects of identity, femaleness and giving birth, are thus conflated, making the ability to bear children requisite for being a "true" woman—a logic that was very much in line with contemporary beliefs about the role of women in the nineteenth century. As late as 1928, Henry Carey wrote in *Harper's* that "women's chief function on this planet...[is to] attract and hold a man, with the object of reproducing...children."¹⁰⁰ This notion was clearly at odds with the goals of the "New Women," who proclaimed ownership of their own decisions, future, and—crucially—their own bodies: married or unmarried, pregnant or not. Conjoined twins' malformed bodies challenged many core ideals of traditional American society, but without the ability to control their own, independent bodies, Millie and Christine's unusual genitalia did not fit a feminist's accepted definition of womanhood, either.

The issue of conjoined twins' sexuality interested the public in more ways than a simple catalog of their sexual organs could satiate. It was their sex lives and marital beds about which audiences were truly curious. Unlike some other conjoined twins, Millie-Christine never married, nor had any public love affairs, so debates about such matters existed only in the hypothetical. This did not, however, prevent doctors from giving their opinions about whether it would be acceptable for the sisters to ever marry. Dr. Pancoast mentions that a 1709 examination of the Hungarian twins prompted their examiner to question whether Helen and Judith should marry.

⁹⁶ Gould and Pyle, 1.

⁹⁷ Alice Domurat Dreger, "Jarring Bodies: Thoughts on the Display of Unusual Anatomies," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 23, no. 2, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/perspectives_in_biology_and_medicine/v043/43.2dreger.html, 168.

⁹⁸ Pancoast, 46, 49.

⁹⁹ *The Millie-Christine Concert and Exhibition Co.*

¹⁰⁰ Henry Carey, "This Two-Headed Monster—The Family," *Harper's*, January 1928, <http://www.harpers.org/archive/1928/01/0013530>, 167.

He answers that physically there are no serious objections, but morally there are insuperable ones, most particularly on account of the extreme liability of propagating monsters. I agree with him, in reference to the Carolina twins, that physically there are no serious objections, but that morally there are insuperable ones; but I do not believe with him that such marital union would necessarily produce monsters.¹⁰¹

Dr. Pancoast never elaborates upon these “moral objections,” but since he and his contemporaries no longer believed that conjoined twins produced more conjoined twins, the most likely answer is that allowing such a marriage implicitly condoned group sex. While this possibility may have been officially immoral, it nevertheless titillated audiences and “evoked erotic fantasies...[about] the possibility of multiple fornication.”¹⁰² The *Sketch* certainly capitalized on this fantasy in its description of what a visitor would find at one of Millie-Christine’s exhibitions: “The spectator is rewarded not by one smile, as in the case of ordinary young ladies, but by two distinct smiles, winked at you by two pairs of sparkling and roguish eyes.”¹⁰³ The Parisian journal *Le Trombinoscope par Touchatout* even printed a fanciful, invented tale about such a scandalous affair, in which a man fell in love with and proposed to Millie, but in the process inadvertently charmed Christine, who then asked her sister if they could share her husband.¹⁰⁴

In spite of these private daydreams, however, the official policy towards conjoined twins marrying was deeply concerned with the moral consequences, though the law’s treatment of male and female conjoined twins differed dramatically. Chang and Eng Bunker and their wives, sisters Sarah and Adelaide Yates, had no reported trouble securing marriage licenses in their home state of North Carolina in 1843.¹⁰⁵ Simplicio and Lucio Godino, pygopagus twins born in the Philippines in 1908, were at first denied marriage licenses in Manila on the grounds that they were one person with “two personalities” and polygamy was illegal. The Philippines Department of Justice soon reversed the ruling, and the Godino brothers married their sweethearts, identical twin sisters.¹⁰⁶ Female conjoined twins did not fare nearly as well. Daisy and Violet Hilton were both denied marriage licenses multiple times—Violet and her boyfriend in twenty-one states—on the grounds of “morality and decency” before either was eventually able to marry in 1941 and 1936, respectively.¹⁰⁷ Rosa Blazek, a pygopagus twin connected to sister Josefa, reportedly told people that she had married in 1907, but “other accounts” insisted that “the marriage was forbidden.”¹⁰⁸ Had Millie or Christine ever attempted to marry, it is likely that they would have faced the same legal obstacles, for they were already subject to the same moral condemnation.

The differing treatment of male and female conjoined twins most likely stemmed from existing beliefs and stereotypes about the sexual “needs” of the two genders, as demonstrated by a 1989 play about Chang and Eng called “The Wedding of the Siamese Twins.” When the brothers mention to their doctor that they would like to get married, he awkwardly suggests that their freakish bodies make such an idea too provocative. Chang responds, “but we’re also men,

¹⁰¹ Pancoast, 53.

¹⁰² Quigley, 152.; Fiedler, 206.

¹⁰³ *Biographical Sketch*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Martell, 179–180. Millie, of course, refuses.

¹⁰⁵ Mandy Benz, “Chang and Eng: A Love Story,” *The Oxford American*, Oct./Nov. 1996, 44.

¹⁰⁶ J. David Smith, 79. See Fig.21 in the appendix for a photograph of the Godino twins with their wives.

¹⁰⁷ Pingree, 181.

¹⁰⁸ Quigley, 19.

Jim,” and the doctor acquiesces.¹⁰⁹ The possibility of conjoined twins having sex threatened the traditional privacy and intimacy of sexual intercourse, which is why it was so often condemned, but in the case of male conjoined twins, men’s “need” for sex overrode such prudent objections. In the case of women like Millie-Christine, conjoined twins threatened not only the intimacy of the marital union, but also, Allison Pingree asserts, men’s ability to control “when, where, and how their wives experience sexuality,” since touching one woman affected two.¹¹⁰ The late nineteenth century was a time when women challenged long-standing gender hierarchies, such as whether they should be subject to their husbands, sexually and otherwise. The transgressing bodies of conjoined twins like Millie-Christine were deemed threatening because they did not conform to the assumptions that underlay these hierarchies.

Not only did the possibility of conjoined twins marrying defy accepted norms of sexual intimacy, the fact that they already had a literal “life-partner” challenged the very notion that women needed to secure a husband at all. The language that medical journals, advertising pamphlets, and newspaper articles used to talk about Millie-Christine mimicked conventional ways of discussing married couples. Many publications described the sisters as though they were perfect romantic partners. The *Sketch* states that both girls were “never at a loss for society or for company, for each has, attached to itself, another existence;” and a 1925 article about their lives relayed that, “so closely allied was their mentality that their thoughts would often blend, and they would drift into the same topic.”¹¹¹ Lloyd Inman, Millie-Christine’s great-great nephew, told the *Raleigh News and Observer* that his aunts “sensed each other’s moods and feelings perfectly and were devoted to each other... nowhere have I ever found that they argued.”¹¹² The *Sketch* even went so far as to declare that “their present happiness and affection for each other is an example for couples who are yoked in marital bonds.”¹¹³ The marital vow “til death do us part” also resonated quite literally with Millie-Christine. Dr. Pancoast stated that “the Carolina twins are united in life, so I believe they will be in death,” and the *Sketch* confirmed that the twins’ perspective was the same: “Having living thus long together, they express no desire to be parted and hope to leave this world as they came into it—together.”¹¹⁴

This idea of conjoined twins as analog to romantic partners was neither unique to Millie-Christine, nor one invented by their contemporaries. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Aristophanes tells the story of how human beings were once essentially conjoined twins, for they had “four hands and a similar number of legs, and two faces that were exactly alike.” When the humans tried to attack the gods, Zeus decided to punish them by cutting them in half and sending each half in a different direction. Thereafter, Man was fated to continually seek his other half. This story is credited as the origin of love, which “collects the halves of our original nature, and tries to make a single thing out of the two parts.”¹¹⁵ Conjoined twins, therefore, could be imagined as the strongest of partnerships, because they had found, and were bound to, their one true love.

Although Plato’s two-faced humans existed as both mixed-gender and same-gender pairs, the nineteenth century did not consider same-sex friendships or relationships acceptable replacements for marriage. The “New Women” of the postbellum period often enjoyed strong

¹⁰⁹ Burton Cohen, *The Wedding of the Siamese Twins* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1989).

¹¹⁰ Pingree, 182.

¹¹¹ *Biographical Sketch*, 12.; Brown.

¹¹² *Raleigh News and Observer*, “Diaries help keep alive memories of Siamese twins.”

¹¹³ *Biographical Sketch*, 19.

¹¹⁴ Pancoast, 52.; *Biographical Sketch*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Plato, “The Symposium,” in *The Symposium and The Phaedrus: Plato’s Erotic Dialogues*, trans. William S. Cobb (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 29–30.

female friendships, but conservative contemporaries believed that these relationships were alternatives, not additions, to their relationships with men, and thus deemed them “threats to the existing sexual and social order.”¹¹⁶ For some of these women, their friendships with other women may have actually been such replacements, since many “New Women” also delayed or rejected marriage. Their female partnerships, therefore, were a way to demonstrate their newly-claimed freedom. The internal contradiction of applying this line of reasoning to conjoined twins, of course, is the fact that they are always “tied” to another person. Allison Pingree’s analysis of Daisy and Violet Hilton highlights this exact point, for though the sisters “would be seen as reflections of the new, independent woman...neither Daisy or Violet ever was ‘free’...Yet it was precisely their attachment to each other, rather than to a man, that made them so threatening.”¹¹⁷ Like Daisy and Violet, Millie and Christine were clearly devoted to each other, and spoke of their partnership as the most important relationship in their lives; as their autobiography states, “we have but one heart, one feeling in common, one desire, one purpose.”¹¹⁸ Although they were never truly “free” in the eyes of society, conjoined twins’ devotion to each other threatened the assumption that all women must marry.

Just as conservative nineteenth-century society disparaged same-sex friendships as a threat to traditional marriage, black women’s sexuality was typically regarded as a menace to white purity. Millie-Christine’s sexuality, however, was not depicted in this way. A prevalent contemporary stereotype racialized black sexuality, deeming black women hypersexual beings with “apelike sexual appetite[s].” The “physical proof” to justify this belief was first articulated by J.J. Virey in his 1819 *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales*, in which he claimed that black women had overdeveloped sexual organs that caused their lasciviousness and “primitive” sexuality. The specific type of black people that Virey deemed the “epitome” of this hypersexuality were the Hottentots, now known as the Khoikhoi, of southwestern Africa. The Hottentot women not only had steatopygia, a condition that caused unusually large buttocks, but also enlarged labia, deemed the “Hottentot apron” by eighteenth-century travelers.¹¹⁹ One of the most famous women displayed in the exoticized mode at American freak shows was Saartjie Baartman, billed as the “Hottentot Venus” in 1810. Baartman wore a tight-fitting nude garment to display her enlarged buttocks to an eager audience, and those who paid an extra fee could also touch her. Her genitalia were always hidden from public view, but after she died of smallpox in 1815, Dr. Georges Curvier took a wax mold of her vaginal area for the public to see.¹²⁰

Black people and the characteristics they represented were thought to be the absolute opposite of white people on a scale of racial prestige, and Hottentots were deemed the “lowest rung” among black tribes. Baartman’s large buttocks, and the unseen titillation of her enlarged labia, thus physically embodied the difference between moral white women and promiscuous black women. Sander L. Gilman has argued that “Bartmann’s [sic] sexual parts, her genitalia and her buttocks, serve as the central image for the black female throughout the nineteenth century.”¹²¹ In spite of these prevailing opinions and depictions of black women’s sexuality,

¹¹⁶ Pingree, 176.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 177.

¹¹⁸ McKoy, 20.

¹¹⁹ Sander L. Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1985), 212-213.

¹²⁰ Thomson, 71-72.; Lindfors, 210.

¹²¹ Gilman 212, 216, 218. Gilman also notes that while the autopsy reports for most nineteenth-century black women described their genitalia in detail, the reports for autopsied black men lacked any mention of their genitals.

Millie-Christine was not presented as promiscuous or overdeveloped. On the contrary, she was displayed in a wholly respectable manner, and the only reference to the possibility of sexual intercourse actually served to reinforce her respectability. Dr. Pancoast's report following his examination of Millie-Christine's vagina stated that it was "naturally small and contracted, as that of an ordinary young unmarried woman."¹²² The implication of this description is that Millie-Christine was a "normal," respectable virgin—the antithesis of Saartjie Baartman. Journalists and doctors tended to deemphasize Millie-Christine's race when she did not fit the stereotype of African-Americans; her sexuality was similarly downplayed. Unlike most black people of her day, Millie-Christine was presented in a respectable, normalized way, and unlike most black women, she was not characterized as hypersexual or wanton. The majority of onlookers seemed to consider Millie-Christine to be different than the rest of her race.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the established gender hierarchy was starting to change, as some women began rejecting their traditional roles and embracing their own freedom and agency in determining their future. Individual attitude changes did not necessarily create institutional reform or a change in cultural opinions about women in society. With their unusual bodies, conjoined twins like Millie-Christine posed problems for both traditional and progressive ideologies about what it meant to be a woman, whether such criteria was based on sex, pregnancy, marriage, or partnership. Ultimately, Millie-Christine never had love affairs, or married, or bore children, though many of her nieces and nephews remember her fondly as the "Aunt Millie-Christine" who helped raise them.¹²³ No surviving records have Millie-Christine articulating exactly what she thought a woman's proper role should be—whether she felt that having children was paramount, for example—but it is clear that she felt happy and content with the lot she had been dealt. A relative of the twins said that Millie-Christine believed that "when God made her, he gave her two heads and two brains because her responsibility was so great."¹²⁴ Although Millie-Christine's physicality, and her race, meant that she was never truly "free" as the "New Women" strove to be, that very same body also allowed her to make a prosperous living and see the world. In this way, she embodied the precise definition of freedom the early feminists strove for: a woman who defied expectations.

Freedom and Identity

Some persons say I must be two / The doctors say this is not true
—Millie-Christine McKoy

Despite ranging widely across issues of race, gender, and sexuality, nearly all analyses of Millie-Christine and her fellow conjoined twins ultimately become discussions about one singular idea: freedom. Contemporary writers and modern historians are equally consumed with questions about freedom: how can American ideals of freedom be squared with an entrenched racial

He consequently argues that "the uniqueness of the genitalia and buttocks of the black is thus associated primarily with the female and is taken to be a sign solely of an anomalous *female* sexuality."

¹²² Pancoast, 48.

¹²³ *Fayetteville (NC) Times*, "Millie-Christine," March 8, 1974.

¹²⁴ Quigley, 121.

hierarchy? How can a woman's claim to her own freedom affect society? And how important is freedom to one's sense of being human? In his book on the psychological development of conjoined twins, J. David Smith asks, "What is the definition of being human?", before positing that "[t]he rhetoric, if not always the reality, of our political and cultural tradition has made freedom a basic attribute and right of human life."¹²⁵ Perhaps this obsession with freedom and its implications for identity is the impetus for the modern medical community's unwavering commitment to separating every set of conjoined twins possible, which is typically celebrated as a "release."¹²⁶ J. David Smith's declaration that freedom is a value "people have died for" is more tragic than uplifting when considered in light of the many infants that have died during separation surgeries, including multiple cases of "sacrifice surgeries," in which one twin is killed to save the other.¹²⁷

Many doctors examined Millie-Christine throughout her life to determine if separation was possible, and the resounding answer was no. However, if the twins had lived today, it is likely that modern medical advances could have easily separated them. Yet Millie and Christine's writing, songs, and even their engraved ring present a picture of two women perfectly content to remain together. "We would not wish to be severed, even if science could affect a separation," her autobiography states outright.¹²⁸ Her attitude is not unusual; Alice Domurat Dreger argues that "conjoined twins almost invariably state that, from their point of view, they don't need to be separated to be individuals, because they are *not* trapped or confined by their conjoinment."¹²⁹ Dreger's argument also reveals that identity is an important facet in the discussion of freedom. While we may no longer be so naïve as to think that persons with connected bodies must share a single identity—hence the modern emphasis on calling all conjoined twins by the plural "they"—many of us still hold the assumption that bodily freedom is vital for embracing one's own identity. These two values can certainly influence one another, but Millie-Christine exemplifies the fact that one does necessitate the other.

The concept of freedom is crucial and complicated for every set of conjoined twins, but perhaps nowhere more so than for Millie-Christine, who was not simply conjoined, but also a formerly enslaved woman. Some historians have used the rhetoric of slavery to describe conjoined twins, such as Frederick Drimmer, whose chapter on white twins Daisy and Violet Hilton is subtitled, "Sold Into Slavery;" and Robert Bogdan, who says of the Hiltons, "although the publicity photos showed them smiling...they were actually slaves."¹³⁰ In spite of these rhetorical techniques, Millie-Christine were, of course, *actually* slaves at one point in their lives. What is remarkable about Millie-Christine's life is that in spite of—or, in some cases, because of—being a conjoined black woman, she was able to earn hundreds of thousands of dollars, purchase the plantation on which she was born, travel the world for years, and financially support her entire family. In the decades that followed the Civil War, Americans grappled with the definition of freedom: who was included, who was not, and to what degree freedom was an

¹²⁵ J. David Smith, 137.

¹²⁶ Alice Domurat Dreger, *One of Us: Conjoined Twins and the Future of Normal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 6–7.; Quigley 15. Alice Domurat Dreger tells of a 1993 *New York Magazine* article that announced the separation of infant conjoined twins sisters under the headline, "FREE AT LAST."

¹²⁷ J. David Smith, 132.; Dreger, *One of Us*, 63.

¹²⁸ McKoy, 20.

¹²⁹ J. David Smith, 4.; Dreger, *One of Us*, 63. Not all conjoined twins share this opinion, however. Yvette and Yvonne McCarther are craniopagus (attached at the head) twins; Yvonne vehemently believes that, "I speak for myself, she speaks for herself."

¹³⁰ Drimmer, 69.; Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 170.

innate quality or human right. Millie-Christine's life exemplifies how freedom depended on more than just the color of a person's skin or the shape of her body.

Nineteenth-century American society was consumed by questions dealing with the intersections of freedom and identity: was freedom an innate quality, or did a person's freedom change as she changed locations? The *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case hinged on this precise question. Scott claimed that living in a free state for ten years entitled him to remain free when he returned to Missouri, where he had previously been enslaved. The Taney court's infamous 1857 ruling stated that not only was Scott still a slave, but that his entire case should be nullified since no former slave or descendent of slaves was considered an American citizen, and non-citizens could not sue in a federal court.¹³¹ Millie-Christine had likewise been born a slave, and her life was subjected to the same debate about whether slave identity was fixed or mutable. Millar and Thompson's public version of how they received custody of Millie-Christine involved a visitor protesting that the enslaved twins had been "brought to [Philadelphia,] a free state, where [they] were unjustly deprived of [their] liberty."¹³² When the prizefighters stole Millie-Christine from Millar and gave them to Thompson in 1855, Thompson claimed that a London judge had reviewed legal papers from Pennsylvania and deemed him the twins' "rightful" guardian. The *Dundee Courier* questioned not only whether such a claim was correct, but also if it was even legal.

Within the limits of the British Empire such a document is utterly void and valueless. The law of this country does not recognize the power of Pennsylvania, or of all the States in the United States, to confer a right of property in human beings...Liberty, by the English Law, depends not upon the complexion.¹³³

Like the concerned visitor in Philadelphia, the *Courier* argued that slave status depended on context, and was not inherent. This claim was also echoed—perhaps unintentionally, perhaps strategically—by the American Consul who helped Monemia regain custody of Millie-Christine in England by "demanding the child as an American citizen, and requiring it, as a minor, to be placed in charge of the mother."¹³⁴ This custody case notably occurred in January 1857, as the arguments for *Scott v. Sandford* were still in process, and as citizenship rights for American blacks were still murky at best. Thus, it seems likely that in asserting Millie-Christine's citizenship, the Consul was taking advantage of the English perspective on contextual servitude in an attempt to win the case.

Taney's ruling in *Scott v. Sandford* clarified the institutional opinion on inherent versus contextual slavery, and there is evidence that some American citizens shared this opinion. For example, historian James W. Cook Jr. mentions that pro-slavery advocates like George Fitzhugh believed that there existed a "negro predisposition" towards agrarian labor; and Winthrop Jordan argues that since English culture had associated "blackness" with negative qualities for centuries, white colonists saw black people as predisposed, or "natural," slaves.¹³⁵ An 1857 article in South

¹³¹ *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857).

¹³² McKoy, 9.

¹³³ Martell, 48.

¹³⁴ *Biographical Sketch*, 9.

¹³⁵ James W. Cook, "Of Men, Missing Links, and Nondescripts: The Strange Career of P.T. Barnum's 'What Is It?' Exhibition," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 153.; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 7.

Carolina's *Cheraw Gazette*, however, gives a different American perspective. Monemia had given birth to Millie-Christine's younger sister Elvy while overseas, which caused the *Gazette* to wonder "if the child, born on the soil of Scotland, is bond or free? If born free, how can it be held in slavery here?... The mother was free when she entered Scotland, but returning here she returns to her owners. The remaining question is, can she enslave her child in her own return to servitude?"¹³⁶ The *Gazette* is clear in its opinion that, while in free territory, Monemia was considered a free woman. Millie-Christine's final eight years in slavery were quite tame relative to her first six, so no further discussions arose over her slave status when she traveled the southern states prior to being freed in 1865. Her foray into Europe, however, highlights the varying contemporary opinions on servitude as either inherent or contextual. This was, of course, a debate of major consequence during the era.

Millie-Christine's freedom before the Civil War was at times contingent on location, but her extraordinary body meant that, no matter where she traveled, she would never live the life of an ordinary slave. Even as an infant, the McKays took her "from the cabin to the mansion" to raise her themselves, and because of "her vivacity and goodness, together, no doubt, with her peculiar formation," Millie-Christine became "the almost idolized child of the mother and a general favorite of both old and young."¹³⁷ Though her early exhibitions made sizeable profits for her owners and managers, Millie-Christine began reaping her own fortune after the Civil War freed her from slavery at age thirteen. Great-great nephew Lloyd Inman claims she had over five-hundred thousand dollars in cash when she died—not including her house, jewelry and furniture—and was one of the richest people in her county.¹³⁸ Millie-Christine even met Queen Victoria in 1871, and possibly once earlier in the 1850s.¹³⁹ Had Millie-Christine been born as non-conjoined twins, it is unlikely that her oft-praised intelligence, charm, and singing talents would have been noticed publicly, let alone allowed her to achieve and experience all that she did.

Even after the Reconstruction Amendments abolished slavery and established black citizenship and suffrage, many former slaves found themselves unable to make much money, purchase a plot of land, or even, in some cases, move off their former plantations.¹⁴⁰ Legal freedom translated neither easily nor often to economic freedom for former slaves, which makes Millie-Christine's success all the more impressive. The *Sketch* described just how much her wealth was able to change her life.

To retrieve the fallen fortunes of the [Smith] family she, now free, consented to place herself on exhibition, and afford the world the opportunity of seeing the most marvelous physical development which has ever existed in the human family. It may be mentioned here as an interesting fact, showing *the strange mutability of human fortunes*, [emphasis mine] that Jacob, the father of this wonderful being, once the slave of the planter McCoy, now owns, with his wife Monemia, the very plantation on which he was once a bondsman, and on which

¹³⁶ Martell, 74.

¹³⁷ *Biographical Sketch*, 4–5.

¹³⁸ *Raleigh News and Observer*, "Diaries help keep alive memories of Siamese twins."

¹³⁹ McKoy, 13–14. Martell, 127 and 165. Her autobiography describes such a visit, but there is no royal record of the event.

¹⁴⁰ Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 45–48.

Millie Christine first saw the light of day, the same having been purchased by her with the proceeds of her exhibitions as a present to her father and mother.¹⁴¹

Millie-Christine's freak show career not only allowed her to become unusually wealthy, but by purchasing the land upon which her enslaved family toiled, she was also able to metaphorically reverse her heritage of servitude. Ironically, although Millie and Christine were irrevocably tied to each other, and thus never truly "free" in the physical sense of the word, their unusual body would become their best resource for gaining economic and social freedom.

In spite of the limitations of her race, gender, and body, Millie-Christine was able to assert a surprising amount of agency in determining her future, thus increasing her personal freedom. Modern critical analyses of the freak show invariably argue that showmen exploited the "corporeal otherness" of non-white bodies to create an analog to cultural otherness, thus reassuring white audiences of their own superiority.¹⁴² Millie-Christine's childhood performances do provide examples of this exploitation of otherness, such as how Millar claimed she was born in Africa and enslaved in Cuba. From the age of thirteen until her death, however, Millie-Christine asserted agency and ownership over her body, her race, and her identity. Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that "the [normal] American produces and acts, but the onstage freak is idle and passive."¹⁴³ Millie-Christine defied this characterization, for she was not passive in the least. Rather than allowing the public to define her, she actively shaped her own persona.¹⁴⁴

One major way that Millie-Christine asserted her agency was in regards to the display of her body. As a child, Millie-Christine was kidnapped, sold, and exhibited across the United States and Europe. These first thirteen years of her life were also punctuated by intimate examinations of her sexual organs, performed by dozens of doctors. However, even though the Smith family continued to manage Millie-Christine's career after abolition in 1865, she asserted her personal freedom by restructuring the way in which she was displayed. One of the largest changes Millie-Christine made was forbidding any further examinations of her genitalia. Harvard Medical School doctors later tried to convince her to consent to a full examination, but she steadfastly "defended [her] right to personal privacy" and refused. Even Dr. Pancoast, the trusted doctor who treated her ailments, had to work hard to compel Millie-Christine to disrobe for his famous photograph.¹⁴⁵ Unlike many other freak exhibits of her time, Millie-Christine was able to proclaim her freedom by asserting control over how her body would be displayed.

Millie-Christine's agency extended beyond bodily display, for she also strongly—and publicly—defended her race. An 1855 article in the *Liverpool Daily Post* describes how Millie-Christine was "already showing a consciousness of freedom, [for] they pertinaciously, if called

¹⁴¹ *Biographical Sketch*, 11.

¹⁴² Thomson, 5–7 and 64.; Fahy, 21–22.

¹⁴³ Thomson, 65.

¹⁴⁴ The question of whether or not her performances were exploitative, however, is not so easily answered. The reformers who challenged the morality of the freak show in the early twentieth century claimed exploitation was one of the main reasons to end the freak show. Modern beliefs in disabled rights would probably incline most people today to come to the same conclusion. However, I believe that while Millie-Christine's childhood displays were certainly exploitative, her later shows were not. Even if Millie-Christine was exploited, historians have documented ways in which exploitation is a double-edged sword, for exploited peoples have used their circumstances to their own advantage. An important example is Walter Johnson's *Soul by Soul*, in which he describes how even on the slave market, slaves could affect sales by self-mutilation or even singing subversive songs.

¹⁴⁵ Quigley, 116.; Pancoast, 44.

‘niggers,’ assert that they are ‘coloured individuals’.” Great-great nephew Lloyd Inman tells a similar story of a performance in Birmingham, Alabama in which “someone in the audience called her a nigger. She didn’t stop her song, but she tried to convince them she was just a ‘person of color.’” As a result, “the audience there threw that person out of the concert hall.”¹⁴⁶ In her older years, after building a large home for herself and her family in Welches Creek, Millie-Christine hosted many guests and visitors, but multiple sources remarked on how she reserved Sundays specifically for people of color. Lloyd Inman also says that Millie-Christine organized a school and church specifically for local black children, and donated money to Bennett College, Johnson C. Smith University, Shaw University, Henderson Institute, and Palmer Institute—five historically black colleges in North Carolina.¹⁴⁷ By both asserting her racial identity and supporting black community institutions, Millie-Christine was able to proclaim her agency and freedom in an era that was hostile to black women doing either.

Another way that Millie-Christine exerted agency over her identity was by vocalizing whether she would be defined as one or two people. Although many contemporary and modern onlookers have intuitively referred to her in the plural, Millie-Christine was adamant that she saw herself as one. Newspaper articles printed in 1968 and 1969 stated that “Millie-Christine McCoy...always referred to themselves (or herself) as ‘I,’” and that she “chose to be referred to as ‘I.’”¹⁴⁸ Millie-Christine’s opinion clearly influenced her family. A 1934 interview with Clara Yeoman, Millie-Christine’s last surviving sister, ends with such an observation: “when interviewed by newsmen last Friday afternoon, one particular thing was noticed about Clara’s conversation. She always referred to Millie-Christine as one, and never in a plural sense.” Fred McCoy, Millie-Christine’s great-nephew, confirmed the sentiment in 1974, for he remembered that “she always thought of herself as one person [so] that’s the way I thought about her, too.”¹⁴⁹ Modern advocates unfamiliar with Millie-Christine’s own perspective insist that referring to conjoined twins as anything *but* two individuals is insulting to their humanity.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Millie-Christine are the ultimate arbiters of their identity, and to those historians and fans who have studied her life carefully, the choice to refer to her in the singular is entirely the result of her own opinion and agency in the matter.

Even though Millie-Christine was clear about how she envisioned her own identity, her contemporaries seemed split on whether they considered her one person or two. Although Monemia and her other family members called the twins “my child,” most medical journals referred to her in the plural, either directly or by emphasizing the differences between the two girls. Dr. Miller said that Millie and Christine “constitut[ed] two distinct beings,” and that discharging feces was the “only thing which they do in common... in all other respects they are perfectly distinct.” Dr. Pancoast emphasized how “Millie had diphtheria, but not Chrissie,” and that “the individuality of each twin was [also] shown on examining the pulse.” Dr. Ramsbotham spoke of the “children” and how “their systems do not act at all in unison.”¹⁵¹ Advertisements for Barnum’s 1886 exhibit capitalized on what Allison Pingree has called the “confounding

¹⁴⁶ *Liverpool Daily Post*, “The United African Twins.”; Wilson.

¹⁴⁷ Quigley, 120.; Martel, 262–263.

¹⁴⁸ *Whiteville (NC) News Reporter*, “Twin(s) in news again,” July 11, 1966.; Wray Thompson, “Millie-Christine remains moved to another cemetery,” *Whiteville (NC) News Reporter*, November 27, 1969.

¹⁴⁹ *Whiteville (NC) News Reporter*, “A surviving sister of famous twins relates the story of their lives,” March 29, 1934.; *Fayetteville (NC) Times*, “Millie-Christine.”

¹⁵⁰ Nearly all online reviews I have read (on Amazon.com, for example) for Joanne Martell’s book *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, published in 2000, include commenters who deride Martell’s use of the singular.

¹⁵¹ McKoy, 6.; H.V.N. Miller, 80 and 84.; Pancoast 46–47.; Fisher 228.

mathematics of personhood” posed by conjoined twins, who are “both more than one yet not quite two”: Millie-Christine is called “a duality of persons in one. Two mortals combined... two living branches on one stem.”¹⁵² Other broadsides switched freely back and forth between one and two, using titles such as “United Twins,” “Carolina Twins,” “Two-Headed Woman,” and “Two-Headed Nightingale;” sometimes both a plural and singular title on the same page.¹⁵³ Similarly, a neighbor’s 1859 letter to her sister referred to Millie-Christine as “the two headed girl or the twin babys [sic].”¹⁵⁴ This fluidity between one and two demonstrates how, in spite of her agency, Millie-Christine could never have full control over her image. Like all public figures, freak and otherwise, she was subject to the definitions and depictions created by every person who saw her. Nevertheless, unlike most of her freak show contemporaries, the fact that Millie-Christine had even *some* impact on her public image demonstrates how much freedom she was able to have, despite being a black conjoined woman.

Whether or not they decided to define Millie-Christine as one or two people, physicians and audiences were influenced by many different factors. Some cited Millie-Christine’s separate minds as evidence that they were two. Dr. Pancoast noted how “each brain acts separately [and] there are two intelligences,” and a 1925 article declared that “mentally they were two separate individuals, with intellectual faculties entirely distinct, with wills independent.” Similarly, a *Liverpool Mercury* article marveled at how “the two mouths will at the same time converse with different persons upon topics of a widely different character.”¹⁵⁵ Other people, particularly doctors, used Millie-Christine’s anatomy to determine if the twins were one or two. Dr. T.H. Andrews echoed a common sentiment when he stated that while “intellectually, they are separate and distinct, sexually [they are] but one.” This literal, scientific means for calculating personhood had been used in past centuries; in *The Generation of Animals*, for example, Aristotle states that conjoined twins with two hearts are two people, and those with one shared heart are just one person. Additionally, in a 1533 autopsy of conjoined twins in Santo Domingo, two sets of bodily organs assured the priest that his baptism of the twins as two separate people had been the correct choice.¹⁵⁶ The fact that there was no widely-accepted official or customary classification of personhood—whether it should be defined by the mind, the body, or the soul—allowed each person to articulate his own ideas and values when interpreting Millie-Christine’s identity.¹⁵⁷

Interestingly, this process also worked backwards, for identity was actually able to influence scientific discourse. Dr. Pancoast spent several pages of his article about Millie-Christine ruminating on a major scientific question of the day: whether conjoined twins were created via the joining of two embryos—the fusion hypothesis—or the splitting of a fertilized egg—the fission hypothesis. Dr. Pancoast believed that the “distinct intelligences” of conjoined twins such as Chang and Eng and Millie-Christine were evidence that “such cases are due to the development of two entities at the earliest stage of embryogenesis” that later “coalesce as to

¹⁵² Pingree, 173.; Quigley, 120.

¹⁵³ See Fig. 21 in the appendix for a sample broadside that uses both singular and plural titles.

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Maggie (last name unknown) to sister, August 13, 1859, Millie-Christine Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.

¹⁵⁵ Pancoast, 46.; Brown.; *Biographical Sketch*, 15.

¹⁵⁶ *The Millie-Christine Concert and Exhibition Co.* Aristotle, “Generation of Animals,” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, Revised Oxford trans., ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1196.; J. David Smith, 5.

¹⁵⁷ *Biographical Sketch*, 33. So non-universal was the definition of personhood that Millie-Christine had to present letters to railroad conductors stating that was “customary” for her to travel on just one ticket.

cause a fusion of their membranes.”¹⁵⁸ Modern scientists would later dismiss Pancoast’s belief as incorrect, concluding instead that conjoined twins were the result of fission, not fusion. However, it is notable that Pancoast’s opinion on such an important scientific matter was swayed by his observation of Millie-Christine’s separate identities and abilities. Identity then is not just a question that concerns conjoined twins, their doctors, and their lovers, but one that provides insight into a larger breadth of beliefs and ideas.

An analysis of Millie-Christine’s identity ultimately intersects with the fundamental American question of freedom, an issue of paramount importance during the decades that followed the Civil War. Indeed, American ideology is grounded in the notion of freedom and individuality for all citizens, but conjoined twins pose a problem for this fundamental process. Leslie Fiedler argues that conjoined twins “challenge our individuality, along with the distinction between self and other, upon which that individuality depends;” and Allison Pingree highlights how conjoined twins are “a most literal challenge to the borders of personal identity.”¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, since conjoined twins are permanently attached to another human being, some scientists and historians have argued that they will never be truly “free.” As a conjoined black woman, Millie-Christine’s freedom was clearly a more complicated question, but so too was her identity. W.E.B DuBois famously expressed the “twoness” of the black American identity, since they have “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings.” He believed that the very history of African-Americans is one of attempting “to merge his double self into a better and truer self [while] wish[ing] neither of the older selves to be lost.”¹⁶⁰ As was well documented by observers, Millie-Christine already possessed two distinct souls and two distinct thoughts, but her strivings were certainly not unreconciled. Rather, her two hearts, minds, and bodies were coordinated and harmonious, defying the stereotype that most conjoined twins had conflicting personalities.¹⁶¹ For a woman to whom DuBois might have assigned four conflicting “selves,” Millie-Christine remained focused, peaceful, and assertive in pursuing her freedom and success.

Conclusion

The last fifty years of the nineteenth-century saw significant and lasting change for many of the United States’ most powerful and ingrained institutions. Millie-Christine McKoy was born and became famous during this era, and it is through her life and career that reflections of these major changes can be seen. During decades of mass immigration and the upheaval of slavery, the freak show rose to prominence as a way to reinforce physical differences and social distance between powerful white onlookers and the deformed or exotic people on display. While Millie-Christine’s participation in these freak shows drew on some of the common techniques that showmen employed for displaying non-white bodies, she was an exception in many ways. Indeed, rather than being exoticized or aggrandized, Millie-Christine was presented in a respectable style. This same period of transformation for the racial hierarchy also saw women beginning to question and subvert the gender hierarchy. Millie-Christine’s unusual formation literally embodied these challenges, for her body provoked unprecedented discussions of childbearing, marriage,

¹⁵⁸ Segal, 296.; Pancoast, 54 and 57.

¹⁵⁹ Fiedler, 203.; Pingree, 173–174.

¹⁶⁰ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: Signet Classic, 1995), 45.

¹⁶¹ Wright, 118.

sexuality, and partnership. Finally, the antebellum period was permeated by the question of freedom, and to what extent it was innate or contextual. Millie-Christine's body was what landed her on the freak show's often-exploitative stage, but that same body gave her freedom, for it allowed her to become wealthy, support her family, travel the world, and assert her identity. Millie-Christine's body and personality did not fit neatly within the categorical assumptions held for individuals, women, or black people—let alone a person who was all three. Her very existence subverted the status quo.

Yet despite all the ways in which Millie-Christine's body, career, personality, experiences, and success defied expectations, she did not change society. Exoticized freaks of color still continued to be exploited long after the height of Millie-Christine's fame, and world's fairs as late as the 1930s included "native villages" to showcase exotic foreigners such as the "dog-eating natives" from the Philippines.¹⁶² Women continued to be confined to their traditional spheres of motherhood and domesticity, and black people were the victims of continued systematic racism and limits on their freedom. What is notable about Millie-Christine's provocative and unusual life, however, is not that she was a catalyst for social change, but rather that she reflects the changes that were currently in process. Millie-Christine's goal in life was not to overthrow the patriarchy or to end oppression, but simply to live as fully and happily as she possibly could. There were moments along the way when she shook things up, but her most important legacy was that she changed the people around her. More than sixty years after her death, James P. Troy, a local man who had lived near Millie-Christine as a child, remembered how "they influenced me to try to get an education, not by telling me but by being so very intelligent themselves."¹⁶³ Ultimately, Millie-Christine's legacy was exactly that: leading the community by lovely example.

¹⁶² Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 51–52.

¹⁶³ Rebecca Robinson, "Memories of the Siamese Twins," *Kin'Lin': Local Heritage Publication of Hallsboro High School*, Spring Edition (1976–1977), 40.

Appendix



Fig. 1: An image of Millie-Christine McCoy that appeared in Dr. William H. Pancoast's 1871 article in the *Photographic Review of Medicine and Surgery*. This is the only known image to display Millie-Christine's point of conjunction. (Image in Joanne Martell, *Millie-Christine: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* [Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair Publisher, 1999], 143.)

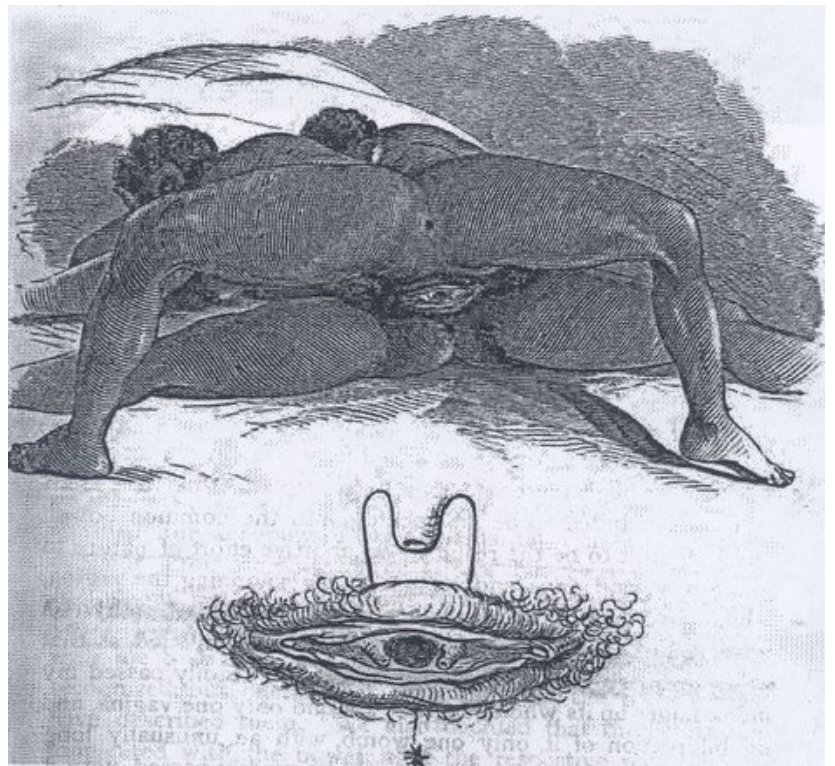


Fig. 2: A woodcutting that also appeared in Dr. Pancoast's 1871 article. (Image by William H. Pancoast, M.D. "The Carolina Twins," *Photographic Review of Medicine and Surgery* 1 [1870–1871], 47.)



Fig. 3 - 5: Publicity photos of Millie-Christine that are representative of the presentation style and dress she wore in virtually all surviving photographs. Note the conservative hem length and sleeves in Fig. 3 and 5, the crowns in Fig. 4, and the jeweled hair pins in Fig. 5. (Images 3 and 4 in Syracuse University Digital Library, <http://digilib.syr.edu>. Image 5 in Martell, *Millie-Christine: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* [Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair Publisher, 1999], 241.)

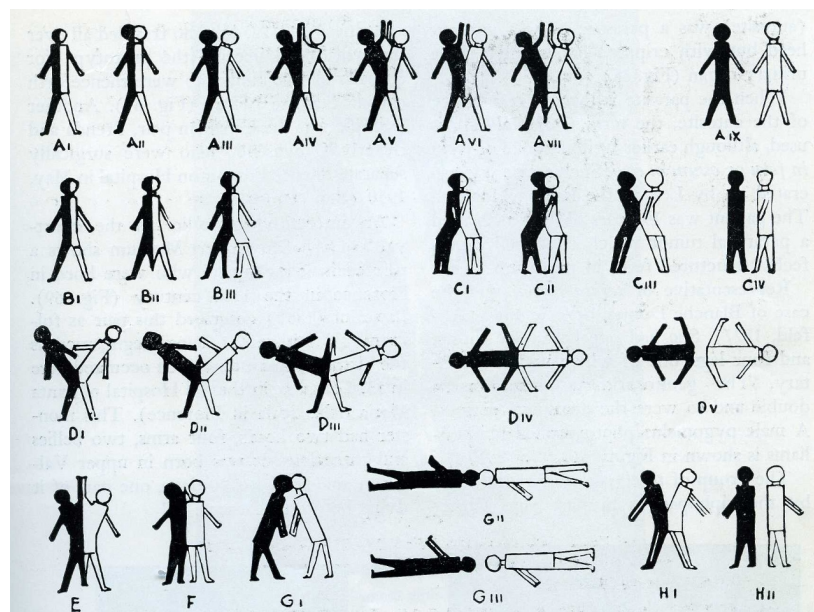


Fig. 6: A chart from 1961 depicting possible conjoined twin configurations. H I is pygopagus, like Millie-Christine. (Image in Luigi Gedda, *Twins in History and Science*, trans. Marco Milani-Comparetti [Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1961], 107.)



Fig. 7: Millie-Christine's modern headstone, located in the Welches Creek Cemetery, Whiteville, NC. The inscription mentioned above the word "McCoy" reads "A soul with two thoughts, Two hearts that beat as one." (Photo by author.)



Fig. 8: An undated broadside depicting Chang and Eng Bunker. The dress and scenery emphasizes their "exotic" roots. (Image in Corbis, [http://pro.corbis.com/search/Enlargement.aspx?CID=isg&mediauid={6A2564D1-01E8-469C-AB2F-544840B6F5DF}.\)](http://pro.corbis.com/search/Enlargement.aspx?CID=isg&mediauid={6A2564D1-01E8-469C-AB2F-544840B6F5DF}.))

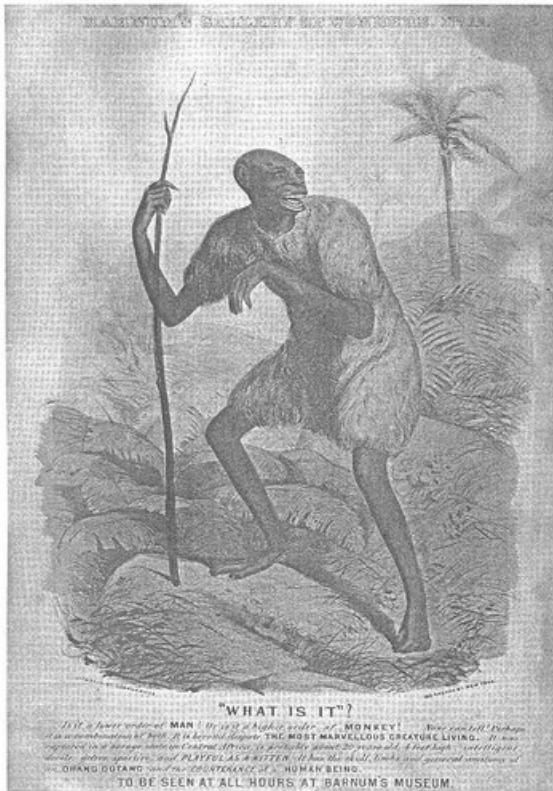


Fig. 9: An undated sketch of Barnum's "What Is It?" presented in the exoticized mode. (Image in Rosemarie Garland Thomas, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1997], 57.)



Fig. 10: A "respectable" white man is seated next to an exoticized black man to emphasize the visual difference between them. (Image in Rosemarie Garland Thomas, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1997], 55.)



Fig. 11: A black Ubangi woman posed next to a white woman. (Image in Rosemarie Garland Thomas, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1997], 56.)

**EXTRAORDINARY AND MOST WONDERFUL
NATURAL CURIOSITY!
THE
UNITED TWINS
AFRICA!**

Being Two Coloured Children, both Females, about Five Years old,
JUST ARRIVED FROM AMERICA.

How poor, how rich, how stupid, how sagacious,
How beautiful, how marvellous to see!
How gentle, how kind, how noble the mind,
Who cannot be one make each strange response
From different sources marvellously joined?

An heir of glory! a fair child of death!
Highland, lowland, down, bestride!
A woman! A Child! I wonder no more,
And in myself my lot.

THE INHABITANTS OF DUNDEE ARE NOBLY INFORMED, THAT THE

**UNITED
AFRICAN TWINS**

WILL HOLD THEIR REVERES FOR
Positively but Six Days,
ON WEDNESDAY the 22d AUGUST, 1855,
AT THE
THISTLE HALL, UNION STREET.

(The Hall has been newly painted and decorated in an elegant style.)

These interesting Children are the Grandest of Living Curiosities. They were born in Africa, and when only a Year old, were shipped
of legions, with both their parents, three brothers, and two sisters and sold into slavery at Cuba. Their faces are gentle, pleasing, and
expressive, hands dexter, and beautifully formed bodies, perfect in the eye, when they are placed back to back, and with the most extra-
ordinary complexion, they are perfect in every respect.

While in Liverpool, hundreds desired to see them, among whom were many of the most influential families, the greatest parties
being ladies, who took the most lively interest in the Twins, and testified their admiration of their pleasing and interesting
manners by having them valuable presents as mementoes of their visit to Great Britain.

A Lady who has resided five years in Cuba, and the Slave States of America, accompanies
the Twins, and will give to Visitors any information which may be desired relative to the
condition of Slaves in those places.

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE.

"Dundee, August 15th, 1855.—We have this day carefully examined the 'African Twins,'—the most interesting and extra-
ordinary human beings, not even excepting the 'Siamese Twins,' of being separated from the ordinary human structure that perhaps has
ever appeared. The two little girls, now five years old, and for their age, remarkable for their sprightly intelligence, are united at the
lower part of the spine by a cylindrical band, extending evidently in the centre of loins, covered thickly by somewhat whitish
lower part of the spine by a cylindrical band, extending evidently in the centre of loins, covered thickly by somewhat whitish


**WATERLOO ROOMS
EDINBURGH.**

**ON MONDAY,
19th JANUARY, 1857,
AND FOLLOWING DAYS!**

The Greatest Wonder of the Age!

**AFRICAN
TWINS**

UNITED BY NATURE.



ACCOMPANIED BY THE FINEST

Fig. 12 and 13: Broadside from 1855 and 1857. Note the emphasis on Millie-Christine's supposed "African" roots. (Images in the Millie-Christine Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.)



Fig. 14–19: Various publicity photos of Millie-Christine. (Images 14–17 and 19 in Syracuse University Digital Library, <http://digilib.syr.edu>. Image 18 in Martell, *Millie-Christine: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* [Winston–Salem, NC: John F. Blair Publisher, 1999], 153.)



*Fig. 20: An undated photo of Julia Pastrana, the so-called “Ugliest Woman in the World.” (Image in Frederick Drimmer, *Very Special People: The Struggles, Love, and Triumphs of Human Oddities* [New York: Amjon Publishers, 1973], 53.)*



Fig. 21: The Godino brothers with their wives: identical twin sisters. (Image in Phreeque.com, http://phreeque.com/godinos_and_wives.jpg.)

Song of the "Two-Headed Nightingale"

WORDS BY D. P. STONER, OF LOS ANGELES.

Respectfully Dedicated to Millie-Christine.

Kings and Queens have gazed with wonder—
Saw what ne'er before was seen—
God has joined me. Who can sunder,
Two in one, Millie-Christine?

I'm a puzzle to physicians,
The eighth wonder of the Earth;
Back to back are my positions—
Two in one e'er since my birth.

Theologians, men of science,
Say, "Since time began to roll,
Ne'er was such a strange alliance—
Two minds with a single soul."

Europe paid me highest tribute,
And Columbia's crowds have seen—
Nature's students all contribute—
Calling on Millie-Christine.

Millionaires, "great lords and nobles,"
Seek my presence and admire
The most marvelous of Earth's "doubles"
Two minds with but one desire.


I'm the happiest of mortals;
"Single-blessedness" I prize;
Will not enter Hymen's portals
With two heads, two hearts, four eyes.

With four feet I'm apt at dancing,
And my heads talk several tongues
Four eyes serve me well in glancing;
Breathe I with two pair of lungs.

Facts are stranger far than fiction
God here shows his marvelous powers;
He has blessed me—no affliction—
Blessings on us all he showers.

Los Angeles, Cal., March 28, 1894.

HER LIKE YOU MAY NEVER SEE AGAIN.



**The Millie-Christine
CONCERT AND EXHIBITION CO**

Headed in Person by
**THE FAMOUS LIVING
TWO-HEADED WOMAN**

BETTER KNOWN AS THE
Carolina Twins

Born in Whiteville, N.C., in 1851. Has appeared before
Kings, Queens and Emperors. Has attracted
more attention among the Educated Class
than any other Woman ever born.

Both Heads Sing Sweetly © ©
Both Heads Speak Four Languages
© © She is a Graceful Dancer

SHE HAS BEEN ALL OVER ENGLAND, IRELAND, SCOTLAND, FRANCE, GER
MANY, AND IN FACT, ALL OVER THE CIVILIZED WORLD.

DON'T DENY YOURSELF THE PRIVILEGE OF SEEING HER

A FIRST-CLASS PERFORMANCE

Is also given by other artists in addition to hearing
MILLIE-CHRISTINE SING AND SEEING HER DANCE
EVERY 30 MINUTES

Fig. 22: A broadside that uses both singular ("Two-Headed Woman," "Two-Headed Nightingale") and plural titles ("Carolina Twins") to refer to Millie-Christine. (Image in North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.)

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