

“LETTERS NEVER SENT: HUEY LONG TO P.T. BARNUM”

By Phillip Loeb

P.T. Barnum,

You bloated ringmaster of American gullibility,

I have watched your whole career with the same fascination a man gives to a carnival freak stitched together from bad instincts and cheap whiskey. You built an empire not on truth, not on labor, not on courage – but on humbug. You took the public by the nose and marched them through tents full of frauds, curiosities, and painted nonsense while collecting their nickels like a riverboat thief skimming poker tables.

And yet, I will admit this much: you understood America.

You knew this country is crowded with men willing to believe any loud fool with a banner, a brass band, and enough nerve to shout over the next liar. You sold them mermaids sewn from monkey carcasses. You sold them tiny generals, giant elephants, and fabricated wonders. The newspapers called you a genius because you discovered that people prefer spectacle to substance.

But here is where we differ.

You exploited the stupidity of the people for profit. I exploit their anger for power. You filled pockets; I intend to fill bellies. Your circus distracted the poor while bankers robbed them blind. Mine points directly at the thieves.

You taught America to applaud deception. Wall Street perfected it. Every banker in New York is merely Barnum with a cleaner collar and a larger victim count. They promise prosperity while farmers lose their land, workers starve in mills, and children grow up thinner than fence rails. At least your elephants were real.

You once said there is a sucker born every minute. The rich have turned that into national policy. They sell patriotism to the hungry and call misery “freedom.” They parade millionaires as if wealth itself were virtue. A parasite in silk remains a parasite.

I do not intend to entertain the people. I intend to arm them politically. I want every sharecropper to look at a mansion and ask why one family needs thirty rooms while another

sleeps six to a shack. I want every laborer to understand that the men calling themselves “captains of industry” are often nothing more than well-dressed pickpockets.

Your circus ends when the tents come down.

Mine begins when the crowd stops clapping.

Huey P. Long
United States Senator
Kingfish of Louisiana