



A DOCU-SERIES IN FOUR PARTS

FREAK HISTORY

Freak shows didn't just captivate and entertain America: they helped invent it.

Developed from Curio: A project by Danielle Bainbridge

THE PITCH

Freak History: At a Glance

Logline:

Freak History reveals the untold story of the American freak show through the lives of incredible Black performers who struggled with slavery, fame, and freedom at the dawn of Emancipation.

FORMAT & GENRE

Docu-Series

4 episodes × 60 minutes

Genre

Historical Documentary

BUDGET: PER 60 MIN EPISODE

CORE EDITION

\$250K

Archival, animation & interview-driven

ENHANCED EDITION

\$350–400K

Adds historical recreations of performances

KEY COMP

Exterminate All the Brutes

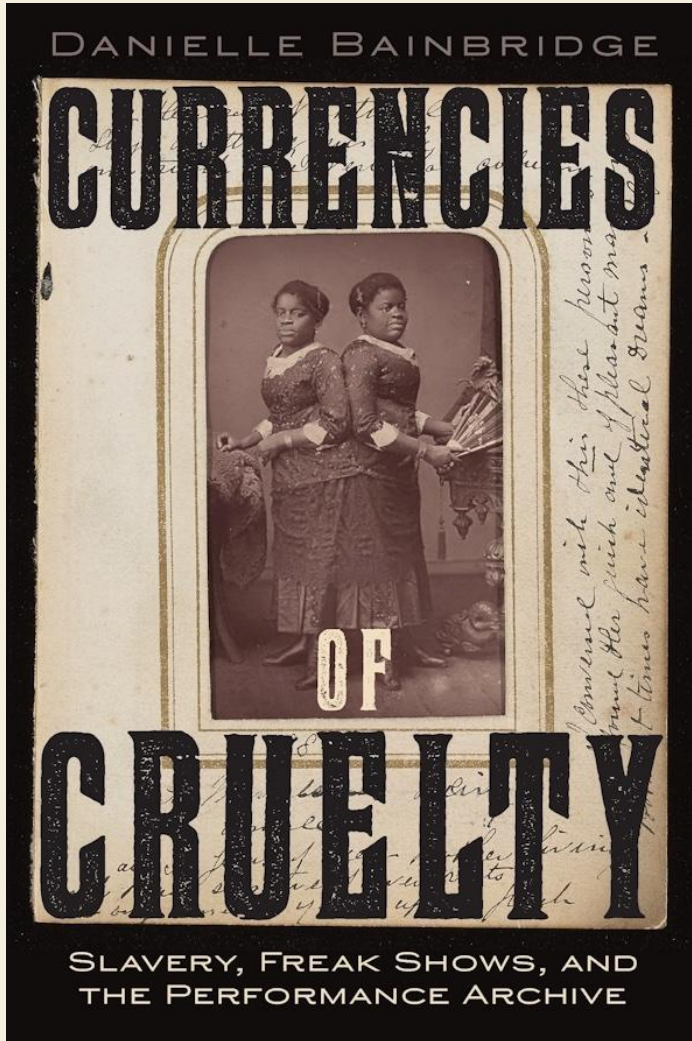
HBO Documentary Films, 2021

4-part hybrid docuseries reframing European and American colonial history told through archival footage and dramatized recreation.

The Core/Enhanced budget split mirrors this model at a more cost-conscious scale.

THE SOURCE MATERIAL

Developed From Original Research & Owned IP



The Book: *Currencies of Cruelty*

Topics: Slavery, Freak Shows & Performance Archive

Publisher: New York University Press

Published: January 27, 2026 · 240 pages

Bainbridge's peer-reviewed scholarship on the McKoy twins and the Bunker brothers forms the historical and analytical backbone of the series.

The Short Film: *Curio*

Based on Danielle's Original Research

Support: \$55K, Northwestern Office of the Provost

Residency: Jack Straw Cultural Center, Seattle

Bainbridge's first completed short documentary — proof of concept for the visual and narrative approach Freak History will scale to series length.



Four Episodes, Four Stories

*Stories told through the performers whose lives sat at the crossroads of fame,
disability, and freedom.*

Four Episodes with 60 Minutes of Compelling Drama

01

PT Barnum & The “Nursemaid of George Washington”

Featured Characters: Joice Heth & PT Barnum

Before PT Barnum became known as a circus man, he was an enslaver who built his fortune on Joice Heth. He exhibited Joice across the country as the 161-year-old woman and the nursemaid of George Washington, until an autopsy proved the claim false.

02

The Original “Siamese Twins”

Featured Characters: Chang & Eng Bunker

Born in 1811 in modern-day Thailand, Chang & Eng Bunker were conjoined twins who spent decades on the freak show stage. In a dark twist, they became enslavers themselves who went broke after the Civil War and forced their return to performing with their own children.

03

The Enslaved Composer

Featured Character: “Blind” Tom Wiggins

Blind Tom was an enslaved piano prodigy who spent his life touring the country. He played Confederate concerts held by his former enslavers and is believed to be the first Black person to play at the White House. Music that he composed still survives to this day.

04

The “Two Headed Nightingale”

Featured Characters: Millie Christine McKoy & PT Barnum

The McKoys were conjoined twins whose freak show acts made them known the world over. Before Emancipation, they endured semi-public medical exams; after, they turned to singing, dancing, and speaking two languages at once. Kept enslaved after Emancipation, they fought for and won their freedom.

Why This Series, Why Now

1

Told from the performers' side of the stage

Not another Barnum puff piece. Instead, each hour centers the performer whose labor, and often whose enslavement, built his fortune and America's entertainment industry.

2

The archive still exists

Physical evidence survives today: plaster casts and organs at Philadelphia's Mütter Museum, surviving compositions by Blind Tom — tangible artifacts a series can visit on camera.

3

An underexplored intersection

Slavery, disability history, and celebrity rarely get examined together. These four stories sit at exactly that crossroads.

4

Backed by original scholarship

Grounded in Bainbridge's peer-reviewed research, *Currencies of Cruelty* (NYU Press, Jan 2026), not just popular retellings.

All underlying intellectual property — the book, the short film, and the Freak History series concept — is wholly owned by Danielle Bainbridge.

THE CREATOR

Dr. Danielle Bainbridge

Associate Professor of Theatre, Northwestern University

Performance Studies & Black Studies (courtesy)

- **Author: Currencies of Cruelty** NYU Press, Jan 2026
- **Producer & Host: PBS Origin of Everything** Co-creator, researcher, writer & host of the webby & telly award winning PBS show with 722K+ subscribers, 53M+ views. Webby & Telly Award-winning.
- **Emmy Nominated** 2021 Daytime Emmy nods for PBS Self-Evident and YouTube Originals “Booktube” (co-host).
- **Co-Creator PBS Historian’s Take:** Host, writer & consulting producer, 2021–22 — 2023 NAACP Image Award & Daytime Emmy nominee.
- **Director of Curio (2026)** — First short documentary; \$55K in Northwestern Provost grant funding + Jack Straw Cultural Center residency. Premiered, Sayville International Film Festival, Aug 2026.





THE ASK

Bring These Stories Home

Seeking a development & production partner for Freak History , a 4-part historical docu-series, budgeted at \$250K/episode (Core) or \$350K/episode (Enhanced, with performance recreations).

Interested in Helping? Contact:
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