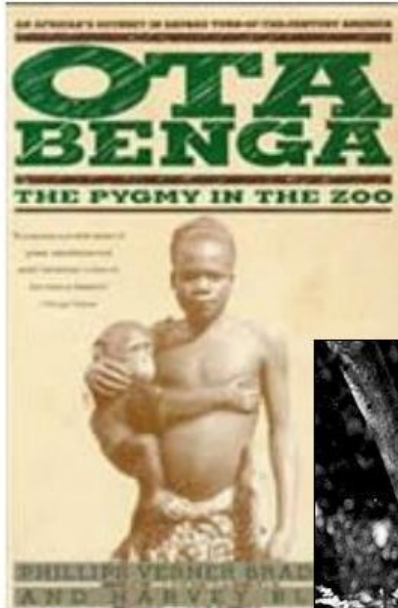


Ota Benga

the man who was put on display in the zoo!



Ota Benga (c.1881 or 1884 – March 20, 1916) was a Congolese pygmy who was featured in a 1906 human zoo exhibit at the Bronx Zoo alongside an orangutan



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Samuel Verner, an American explorer, bought a young man named Ota Benga in the Belgian Congo in 1903. Mr. Verner was working under a contract to the St. Louis World's Fair. He was supposed to bring several Pygmies to America for a living display of the stages of evolution, and then return them to Africa.

Three years later, with the World's Fair over and Mr. Verner in financial straits, Ota Benga was placed in a new home: the monkey house at the Bronx Zoo. The director of Bronx Zoological Park, William Hornaday, recognized a unique business opportunity. People would pay to see this human exhibit, at a time in history when black people were thought to be at the bottom of the evolutionary scale.

The story of Ota Benga is a sad and maddening example of the kinds of blunders that occurred at a time when the theory of Darwinism was rationalizing the evolution of humanity... that man had indeed ascended from savages to masters of civilization.

At first, Ota Benga was permitted to walk around the park's grounds freely. Soon, however, he was locked in a cage in the monkey house, often in the company of an orangutan named Dohong. Bones were scattered around the cage to make Ota Benga's sharpened teeth seem more savage. "To a generation raised on talk of that absentee star of evolution, the missing link, the point of Dohong and Ota disporting in the monkey house was obvious," wrote Mr. Verner's grandson, Phillips Verner Bradford, and Harvey Blume in their 1992 book, "Ota: The Pygmy in the Zoo."

Thousands of spectators flocked to the exhibit on the first weekend, and the New York Times reported that "the joint man-and-monkey exhibition was the most interesting in Bronx Park." While the spectacle provided plenty of laughs, the Times added, "it is probably a good thing that Benga doesn't think very deeply....If he did it isn't likely that he was very proud of himself when he woke in the morning and found himself under the same roof with the orangutans and monkeys."

The Colored Baptist Ministers' Conference, among others, quickly denounced the "degrading exhibition." "Our race is depressed enough," said the Rev. James Gordon, "without exhibiting one of us with apes. We think we are worthy of being considered human beings with souls." Gordon also objected to the exhibit as a demonstration of Darwinism. "The Darwinian theory is absolutely opposed to Christianity," he said.

When Ota Benga was in his mid-20s, he was moved from the zoo and spent the next few years at orphanages for black children in New York. In 1910, he moved to a Baptist seminary in Lynchburg, Va., where he did odd jobs as well as hunted and fished.

Six years later, in March 1916, Ota Benga used a stolen revolver to kill himself.

Reference: The Wall Street Journal"

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB113919007594765671>

The story of Ota Benga is one of the many tragic fruits of evolutionism. But it is one which contains a lesson in helping us to realize the importance of the Christian teaching that all men are brothers, all descendants of Adam and Eve. If all Christians had stood up for creation at the outset of the Ota Benga incident, this horror story of evolutionary racism might have been averted.

Dr. Jerry Bergman, Answers in Genesis

Questions

1. Who was Samuel Verner?
2. For what purpose Samuel Verner buy the African, Ota Benga?
3. To which country Where was Ota taken?
4. The poster states that Ota Benga was born between 1881 and 1884. Why is his date of birth not exact?
5. Approximately how old was Ota Benga when he was bought by Samuel Verner?
6. Why wasn't Ota Verner returned to Africa as soon as the St Louis World's Fair was over?
7. Why was William Hornaday keen to have Ota as an exhibition in the zoo?
8. Write a paragraph about the treatment he received, and his feelings and emotions of Ota during his years at the zoo.
9. During this time in history, most people believed in 'social evolution' which was an aspect of Darwin's theory of evolution. Explain in your own words the theory of 'social evolution'.
10. How did the Colored Baptist Ministers stand up for Ota?
11. Where did Ota live, and what did he do, after he left the zoo.
12. What feelings and emotions do you think he carried with him, even after he left the zoo?
13. How did Ota end his life?
14. Explain in your own words the final comment by Dr Jerry Bergman