

# OTA BENGA UNDER MY MOTHER'S ROOF

Carrie Allen McCray

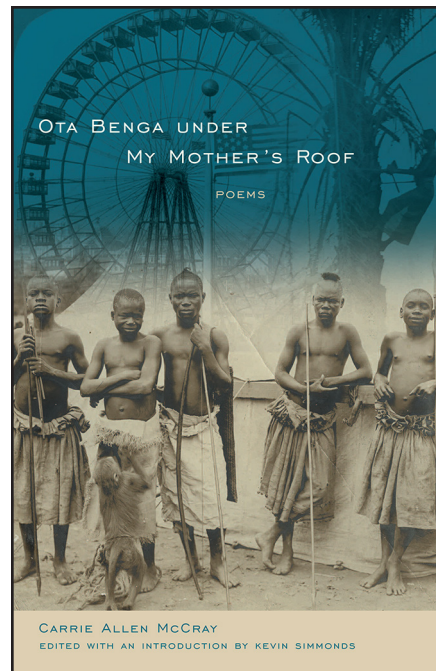
Edited with an Introduction by Kevin Simmonds

In *Ota Benga under My Mother's Roof*, Carrie Allen McCray (1913–2008) uses poignant and personal verse to trace the ill-fated life of the Congolese pygmy who was famously exhibited in the Bronx Zoo in 1906 before being taken in by the McCray family of Lynchburg, Virginia. Rooted in the rich historical and autobiographic context of her own experiences with Benga, McCray offers compelling, dexterous poems that place Benga's story within the racial milieu of the early twentieth century as the burgeoning science of social anthropology worked to classify humans based on race and culture. The theme of this book is a study of humanity, of people of all kinds, in which Benga's vitality becomes the measure against which everyone is measured. With poems that revel in African American signifying, spirituality, and traditional storytelling, McCray's collection establishes a sincere legacy for Ota Benga as she shares her friend's harrowing tale with new generations.

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Born in Lynchburg, Virginia, **Carrie Allen McCray** was an educator and social worker before turning to writing later in life. McCray is the author of *Freedom's Child: The Life of a Confederate General's Black Daughter*, which details her discovery that her mother was the child of a Confederate general and his black servant. McCray is the author of the poetry chapbook *Piece of Time*, and her poems have been published in *Ms. Magazine*, *River Styx*, *Point*, and the *Squaw Review*, and in the anthologies *Moving beyond Words* and *The Crimson Edge: Older Women Writing*.

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