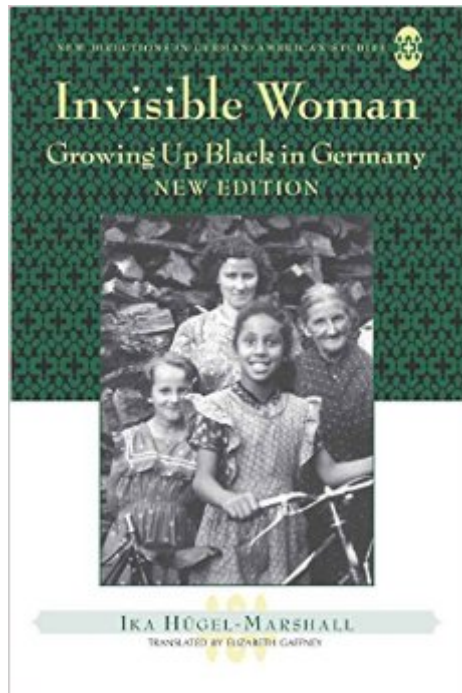


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Invisible Woman: Growing Up Black In Germany (New Directions In German-American Studies)



Synopsis

Invisible Woman: Growing Up Black in Germany, republished in a new annotated edition, recounts Ika Hägel-Marshall's experiences growing up as the daughter of a white German woman and an African-American man after World War II. As an "occupation baby", born in a small German town in 1947, Ika has a double stigma: Not only has she been born out of wedlock, but she is also Black. Although loved by her mother, Ika's experiences with German society's reaction to her skin color resonate with the insidiousness of racism, thus instilling in her a longing to meet her biological father. When she is seven, the state places her into a church-affiliated orphanage far away from where her mother, sister, and stepfather live. She is exposed to the scorn and cruelty of the nuns entrusted with her care. Despite the institutionalized racism, Ika overcomes these hurdles, and finally, when she is in her forties, she locates her father with the help of a good friend and discovers that she has a loving family in Chicago.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I read this book in the original German edition and thus don't know how well the English edition conveys this example of a very 'German' post-war destiny. Ika was a 'Besatzungschild' a very subjective term describing an "occupation forces' child". Her story is just one of a whole babyboomer generation of both white, and mixed-race children of (mainly) U.S. soldiers - and what a sad story it is, particularly for those little 'Black Germans'. Ika's coerced removal from her mother

and placement into a Christian (Lutheran) institution was a common occurrence for 'illegitimate' children of any description. The mothers of Black children were seen as nothing more than whores who were not fit to raise the children they should have had in the first place. The racially motivated mental and physical abuse that Ika endured makes for painful reading - particularly since the abuse was carried out (as it often is) in the name of Christ and for her salvation. That Ika managed to grow up into the strong, well-balanced person she is today is a testimony to her strength of character and indomitable spirit. I was so happy for her that she did manage to find her father and come to grips with her struggle over identity. With the growth in recent years of Afro-German associations I hope that many more stories like Ika's will be published. They will give voice to that previously invisible 'Stolen Generation' who now, in middle-age are finally given a chance to come to terms with their unique identity. The book ideally should be read along with Hans Massaquoi's "Born to Witness: growing up Black in Nazi Germany". The detailed social/historic context of his story paints a vivid backdrop to the arrival of the next generation of Black Germans like Ika.

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