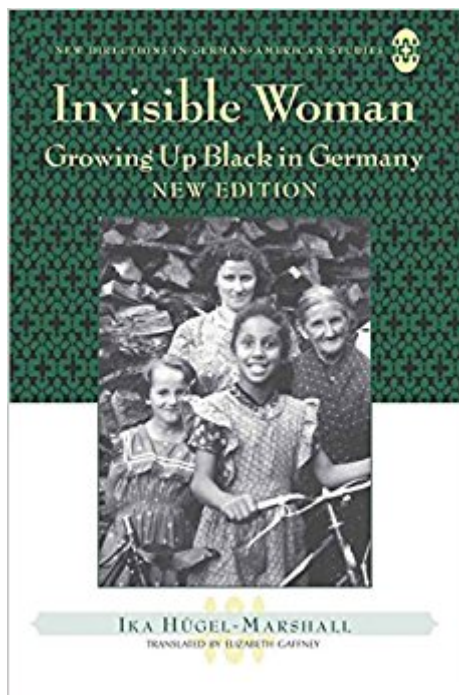




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# Invisible Woman: Growing Up Black In Germany (New Directions In German-American Studies)



## 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

The Author: Ika Hägel-Marshall has a degree in social pedagogics. She is teaching gender studies and psychological counseling at the Alice-Salomon-Fachhochschule für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik in Berlin. Trained as a counselor, she primarily works with intercultural teams and bi-national couples. Ika Hägel-Marshall has published various articles on anti-racist consciousness raising and is co-editor of *Entfernte Verbindungen: Rassismus, Antisemitismus und*

Klassenunterdrückung (1993). In 1996, Ika Hägel-Marshall received the Audre Lorde Literary Award for the completion of *Invisible Woman*. She has given numerous readings in Germany, Austria, and the United States. An artist, she has designed book covers and exhibited her drawings and wood sculptures.

An excellent triumphant story of courage, resilience and heart

The content and subject of this book was excellent; however, the "like new" condition was not as advertised. There was water damage to numerous pages, but it did not prevent my enjoyment of the content.

This book was good but have read a book about the editor of *ebony* who was raised in Germany during the Hitler regime that book was awesome

Sad but interesting.

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 negative and subjective term for a child born to a German mother and a (most commonly) G.I. father from the "occupation forces". Her story is just one of a whole babyboomer generation of both white, and mixed-race children, and what a sad story it is, particularly of those little "Black Germans"! Ika's coerced removal from her mother and placement into a Christian 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 not 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, beautiful 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 terms with her struggle over identity. With the growth in recent years of Afro-German organisations 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 history and identity. Postscript: As a white contemporary of Ika's I had many class/playmates who were black, with family backgrounds similar to hers.

Certainly the Catholic institution (Jugenddorf Klinge in Seckach/Baden) where I spent some years, was not guilty of evil such as experienced by Ika. For a long time now I have wondered about the subsequent fates of my special friend Monika and the other girls I knew.

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Soon after I began reading Ms Marshall's book I experienced a thrill of recognition. In the brutally honest account of her child and early adulthood in Germany, her stories of recognizing and overcoming her internalized racial self-hatred, I remembered and re-lived some of my own similar experiences growing up as a light-skinned, adopted black child in the black community in Baltimore Maryland. Ms. Marshall's harsh treatment at the hands of the staff at the home she was sent to as a child sheds light on the brutal and uncaring treatment many children, especially children of color, still

experience today. Her writing is both personal and informative (she quotes several government documents of her childhood that "institutionalized" the racist treatment of Afro-Germans) and draws the reader into her story so that one cannot help but become caught up with her as she tells it. I found it difficult to put it down. That she survived such a childhood and has become both a strong woman and outspoken opponent of racism in Germany, is a testament to her inner power and strength, as well as to the love she received from her mother before she was taken from her at the age of six years old. Ms. Marshall is still fighting the demons of racism in a country that carries its nationalism in its breast pocket, as it were. It's not that bad in the US of A...yet.

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