



# Invisible Woman: Growing Up Black in Germany

*Ika Hugel-Marshall*

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## **Invisible Woman: Growing Up Black in Germany** Ika Hugel-Marshall

"In March 1947 I was born. My arrival was celebrated within the inner family circle, quietly and anxiously. When I was a year old, my mother married a white German man; a year later my sister was born. We grew up relatively unburdened during those first five years, just like most children. We felt we were a family, even though I knew that my father was not my real father. I had no reason to doubt that with my white mother, in my white family, in my white hometown, I could grow up and be happy". So begins the story of Ika Hugel-Marshall, daughter of an African American serviceman who left Germany for America the day after learning that he had impregnated the German woman with whom he was having an affair. When Hugel-Marshall was seven, the state intervened in her happy family life, recommending that she, like other "occupation children", be placed in an orphanage. Here, she was subjected to the daily tyrannies of her caretaker, Sister Hildegard. She struggled to come to terms with life as a German -- the only life she knew -- among people who seemed bent on disavowing her existence. Not until she was in her late thirties did she meet other "Afro-Germans" who as children had shared fates similar to her own and who encouraged her to seek out and meet her biological father. In 1993, with the support of friends, she set out on a journey from Berlin to Chicago's South Side to discover a past -- and a family -- she had never known.

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