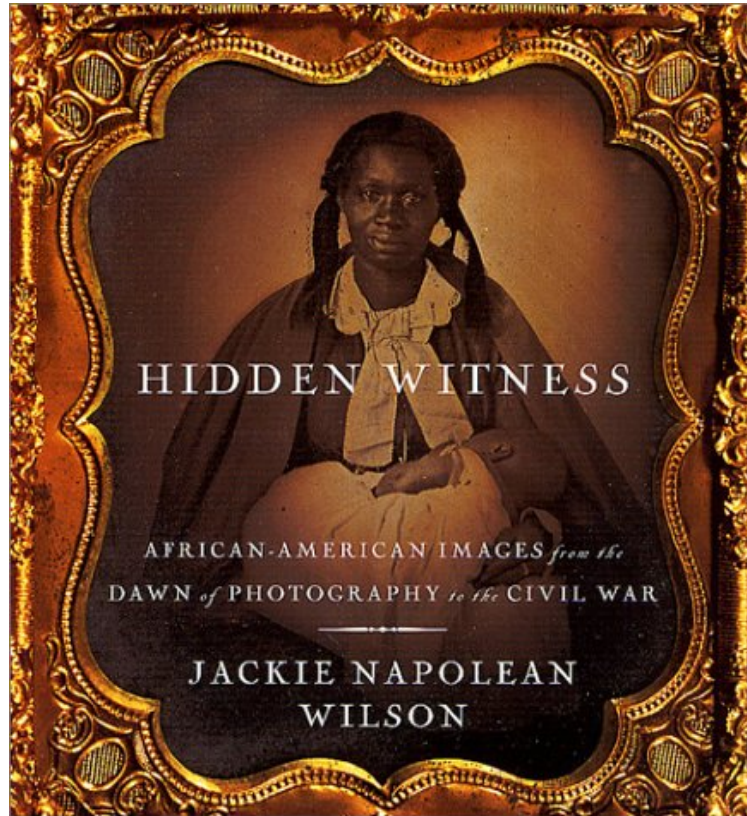


## Hidden Witness: African-American Images from the Dawn of Photography to the Civil War

Jackie Napoleon Wilson

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**Jackie Napoleon Wilson : Hidden Witness: African-American Images from the Dawn of Photography to the Civil War** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hidden Witness: African-American Images from the Dawn of Photography to the Civil War:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Precious history.By History TeacherThis book has photographs to treasure. To see black people at this period of history recorded in photographs is a precious thing. However, I must agree with the consensus that the text is worthless, which is why I didn't give the book five stars. I was not interested in the author's guesses about these people and many times he was actually obnoxious in his anxiety to make sure the reader saw the photographs with his spin on them.Particularly moving, besides the portrait on the front of the woman and child were the memorial photograph of the dead baby, and the couple of photos of slaves lined up in front a plantation. It was interesting to see, although it was not the common experience that there were already so many black middle-class pre-slavery, or at least, so many blacks managed to dress up for even a one-time portrait. I have some older photos in my family and I know from that that people put their best foot forward and rented clothes that were better than their usual ones and so forth for portraits. Also, even in the 19th century it was possible to retouch photos and remove things that they did not want to be seen.8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Fantastic

Pictures, Be wary of the CommentaryBy A CustomerI give this book 4 stars because the photographs are FANTASTIC!! But, I have to agree, Mr. Wilson does take extreme liberty with some of his comments. Don't get me wrong, there are indeed some history lessons to be had here, but indeed on page 27 those women are related. Where he got the idea that these women were merely "abolitionists" puzzles me. I think perhaps he was trying to teach a history lesson here, and he needed a picture to try and fit that lesson, he just used the wrong picture to make his point. I can't imagine someone having such a fabulous picture and not understand the true meaning of it. So, with that said please enjoy the pictures and the history lesson that he's trying to teach. Just don't try and put the two together.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy marshallGREAT READING!!!

As slaves, African-Americans were virtually invisible in American history. Although photography was introduced to this country in 1840, precious few images of African-Americans survive today. Even after the Civil War there were not many African-American photographers, and very few black people had the time, money or freedom for a portrait sitting. Consequently, little photographic evidence remains to bear witness to the lives of four and a half million Americans of African descent. Jackie Napoleon Wilson, whose own grandfather was born a slave in South Carolina between 1853 and 1855, has assembled the most comprehensive and significant collection of such images ever brought together in one place. The concrete reality reflected in daguerreotypes, ambrotypes and tintypes presents these men and women in situations and attire that bring the truth of their daily lives much closer to us. Such scenes of maternal affection, matrimony, friendship, war and the grim reality of the master/slave relationship help focus our perception of the African-American experience in America in ways not otherwise available to the modern reader. Among these images is the only picture of Abraham Lincoln in the company of an African-American and the earliest known daguerreotype of Frederick Douglass (circa 1843).

.com The image is striking: A woman gazes serenely at the camera, baby cradled in her arms in classic Madonna-and-child pose. More striking is the fact that the sitters are black, and the photograph dates from 1860. Few photographs from the mid-19th century feature African Americans, enslaved or free. Those that do are often staged and reflect the biases of the photographer or the printmaker who published them. Others, however, provide glimpses of daily life before the abolition of slavery. Renowned collector of early photographs Jackie Napoleon Wilson has compiled 70 such images in *Hidden Witness*. Each photograph--whether an outdoor scene, where slaves are afterthoughts in the frame, so-called Mammy portraits of slaves holding white children, studio portraits of proud freemen and women--is accompanied by a brief explanation, contextualizing the image and speculating on the nature of the pictured relationships. Some of the subjects are famous, such as Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass; others, though unknowns, carry a force of their own: the exuberant grin of the prizewinning boxer, the proud stance of a Union soldier, the quiet dignity of a slave nurse. A handsome addition to the history of African Americans and photography. --Sunny DelaneyFrom Library Journal*Hidden Witness* consists of reproductions of 69 photographs--almost all from attorney Wilson's private collection as well as a few from the Getty Museum's holdings--that depict African Americans in the 1840s, 1850s, and early 1860s. Most of the photos are formal studio portraits, but others are outdoor scenes. The commentary by Wilson accompanying each photo is more personal reaction and interpretation than conventional scholarship. Something of the difficult lives and restrictive environment in which the pre-Emancipation slaves and freedmen existed are revealed through often subtle clues in posing, clothing, sitter's interactions, arrangement of nearby objects, etc. Considering the paucity of visual documentation from the era of American slavery, this collection of photos is an invaluable resource. In contrast, Jezierski (history, Saginaw Valley State Univ.) offers us a thorough, scholarly study of a heretofore little explored aspect of African American cultural history, detailing the lives and careers of a family of black professional photographers who operated studios in Pennsylvania and Michigan. The nearly eight decades in which Glenalvin, Wallace, and William Goodridge practiced literally spans the early history of photography in America. The Goodridge Brothers not only managed to establish themselves and then flourish as professional photographers, they also gained international renown for their expertise in large-format photography. Both books will engage two groups of readers, those interested in African American history and students of the development of photography in America. Recommended for all libraries serving either of those two constituencies.-Eugene C. Burt, Seattle Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.About the AuthorJackie Napoleon Wilson is an attorney and historian who has been collecting since 1978. He was guest curator of the historic *Hidden Witness* exhibition at The J. Paul Getty Museum. This book is based on that Exhibition. Mr. Wilson lives in Detroit.