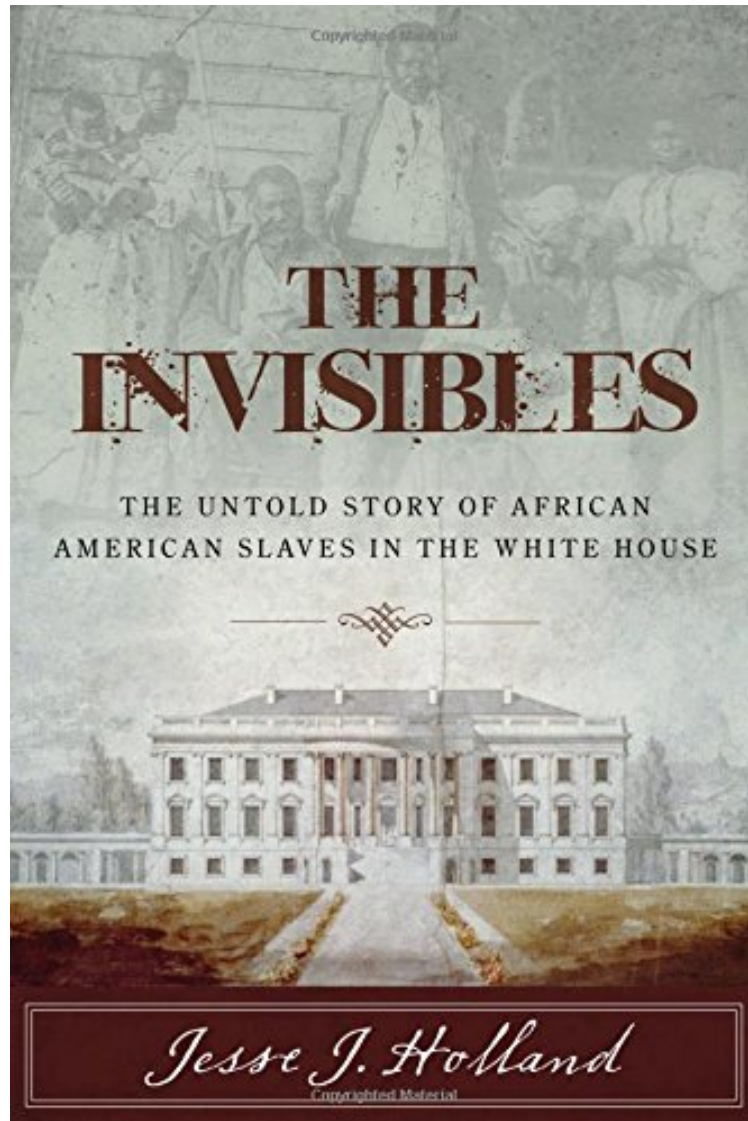


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# The Invisibles: The Untold Story of African American Slaves in the White House

*Jesse J. Holland*

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**Jesse J. Holland : The Invisibles: The Untold Story of African American Slaves in the White House** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Invisibles: The Untold Story of African American Slaves in the White House:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. What a great find! By oregon reader I love stories about unknown people who contributed to projects we know about. What's a bigger project than the White House and early America?

Finally putting a name to some of the slaves, some of the people, who lived and helped our first Presidents is incredible. There are concrete stories that may change your mind a little about some of those Presidents. All through the book is woven freedom. The contradictory story of the Founding Fathers and how the early Presidents (except the two Adamases) couldn't reconcile their love of freedom with their financial or racial need to put Africans, and later, African-Americans, in a different category. And how all the slaves, no matter how well treated and comfortable their lives were would have traded everything for freedom. There is also history about the introduction of slavery into America that I didn't know and some history about the early US I didn't know. Really an important read. 42 of 43 people found the following review helpful. A good book for stories, not so much as history. By LOSI don't remember where I heard about this book, but I was excited to hear about it. The book is a pretty quick read, I managed to knock it out over the course of a couple of days. I do appreciate this book as it attempts to present an oft-unheard facet of U.S. history. I do not agree that everything in the book was "untold." While some of the information was new, a lot of it was a condensed version of narratives which could be found elsewhere. The book was also lacking in the sort of academic rigor that one may expect from a history book. The bibliography was scant and there were virtually no citations. It's impossible to reference his sources or verify that the information presented is even correct. This was perhaps the most problematic part of the book for me. Sometimes, the author would say where the quotes came from, a newspaper article, or letter, etc. Most commonly though, quotes were inserted into the text with no means of knowing where they were sourced. Similarly, the author would often use phrases such as "it is thought that" or "some researchers say." Who thinks that? What researchers say that? There was little to tie each chapter together. While interesting on their own, the book read more as a series of stories or essays with no relation to one another. It would have been nice to see the author weave a common theme through the chapters so that they were cohesive and complementary to one another. Therein lies a big issue with the book. What was the author's argument? Did he have an argument? I hate to be so constructive in my criticism, but a history book needs some thesis. What is the author's claim? How will he prove the claim? What source material will he draw from? Lastly, I wasn't too impressed with the prose. Many times, it was difficult to know whom or what the author was speaking about. Pronoun references were confusing at times, and I was forced to read sentences or paragraphs a few times before I could figure out what the author was trying to present. It was a little surprising, given the author's background in nonfiction writing. Now, all of that said, this is a great book as it does present information that is often overlooked in the story of the U.S.A. As a student of history, much of the information in the book wasn't new, so much as an amalgam of other histories in one place. For people who aren't history nerds, this book will provide a lot of new information relating to slavery in the United States. The sheer dearth of narratives dedicated to slaves as individuals, as human beings, means that even with its few shortcomings, *The Invisibles* serves an important purpose in providing context to a complicated time in the nation's history, and the complicated men who led from its founding. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good Read, Important Book By LFL8812I really enjoyed this. It is well researched well written I learned a lot. It had never occurred to me that there had been slaves in the White House, I don't know why. It's obvious, when you think about it. There was one story that I was disappointed was missing, tho. I saw it on *Finding Your Roots*. My memory is no longer good I can't remember a lot of the details. It was the ancestry of a young fella currently in the music industry. I had heard his name but do not keep w up w/ popular music so I was unfamiliar w/ him. But, his ancestor had been a slave butler in the WH. Someone came took him away saying he was free but he went back to continue being the butler, much to the disbelief of his descendant. There was even a photo of him. Unfortunately I don't remember his name or who that president was. I believe this is an important book. The author hopes to update it one day as he uncovers more stories I look forward to that. I've been reading a lot of slave stories lately think this is something we all need to know more about so I appreciate that this book was written.

**THE INVISIBLES:** *Slavery Inside The White House and How It Helped Shape America* is the first book to tell the story of the executive mansion's most unexpected residents, the African American slaves who lived with the U.S. presidents who owned them. Interest in African Americans and the White House are at an all-time high due to the historic presidency of Barack Obama, and the soon-to-be-opened Smithsonian National Museum of African American Culture and History. *The Invisibles* chronicles the African American presence inside the White House from its beginnings in 1782 until 1862, when President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation that granted slaves their freedom. During these years, slaves were the only African Americans to whom the most powerful men in the United States were exposed on a daily, and familiar, basis. By reading about these often-intimate relationships, readers will better understand some of the views that various presidents held about class and race in American society, and how these slaves contributed not only to the life and comforts of the presidents they served, but to America as a whole.

Ten of the first 12 United States presidents were slave masters. In this brisk history, Holland (*Black Men Built the Capitol: Discovering African American History In and Around Washington, D.C.*, 2007), Washington correspondent for the Associated Press, examines the tangled relationships between slaves and the presidents they served, from

George Washington to Ulysses S. Grant, and exposes the convoluted laws enacted to impede slaves' quests for freedom. Of the first 12 presidents, only John Adams and his son John Quincy Adams, fierce opponents of slavery, did not own slaves, thereby incurring heavy costs for domestic help to maintain the White House. Although some slaves' lives have been lost to history, Holland creates a vivid portrait of many, including William Lee, who worked as Washington's 'body servant,' and Oney Judge, born at Mount Vernon, who was Martha Washington's favorite. They were among some 150 slaves that Washington amassed by the time of the Revolution, many bought by his wife. Martha cherished Oney, and she was devastated when the woman fled from servitude. Tracked down, Oney was told that the Washingtons would free her when she returned to them—but she didn't believe the offer. 'I am free now and choose to remain so,' she replied.' Holland reprises Jefferson's connection to the Hemings family, whose descendants claimed that he fathered Sally Hemings' children, and he reveals that even presidents who spoke against slavery kept slaves to run their farms and work on their land. James Madison, convinced that slaves should not be freed into white America, founded the American Colonization Society, 'dedicated to freeing slaves and transporting them to the west coast of Africa.' James Monroe, Henry Clay, and Andrew Jackson also endorsed that idea. Several thousand freed slaves were sent to Liberia from 1820 to 1840; in honor of Monroe, the capital was renamed Monrovia. A quick, informative history of a lamentable chapter in America's past. (Kirkus) 'Jesse J. Holland's riveting book *The Invisibles* shines a long overdue light on the enslaved men and women who were forced to serve in the nation's seat of executive power—The White House. Not only does Holland reveal this ugly chapter of American history with sharp analysis and insight, he reveals the blatant hypocrisy of the nation's presidents and other leaders in permitting such a system of forcible servitude to exist. More importantly, he brings to life the stories and experiences of this group of nearly forgotten African Americans, who showed remarkable courage and resilient character despite being imprisoned by slavery in the heart of the so-called 'land of the free.' '--J.D. Dickey, author of *Empire of Mud: The Secret History of Washington, DC* "Oney Judge, who dared to flee to freedom from George Washington's household. Edith Fern Fossett, a chef trained to prepare French delicacies for Thomas Jefferson. Andrew Jackson's wily jockeys. Jesse J. Holland makes visible the courage, expertise and fortitude of the slaves held by U.S. presidents. Holland's contribution to a complete history of our complex nation is one worth savoring." --Donna Bryson, author of *It's A Black White Thing* "Jesse Holland's *The Invisibles* uncovers White House secrets certain Presidents surely would have kept buried. Those Presidents who owned human beings and those who rejected slavery will come as a surprise. *The Invisibles* is a revealing journey for all readers. This is American history told well." --Gloria J. Browne-Marshall, author of *The U.S. Constitution: An African-American Context and Race, Law, and American Society: 1607 to Present* "If you want to know the real history of the White House or the U.S. presidency, you must read Jesse Holland's *The Invisibles*. He not only writes in crisp and engaging prose, but Holland has done the extensive research necessary to bring to life the slaves who toiled in anonymity for the nation's early presidents, sharing quarters in the executive mansion with some of the most powerful men in the world. From William Lee, George Washington's manservant, to the hundreds of nameless slaves who labored for another 11 U.S. presidents, Holland tells their complicated and engaging tales, providing critical heretofore largely overlooked context to events that we learned about in grade school." --Del Quentin Wilber, author of *Rawhide Down: The Near Assassination of Ronald Reagan* Holland's account of slaves who built and sustained the White House answers many hard historical issues, and it reveals how little tribute has been given for the contributions of enslaved persons to the normal functioning of early American institutions. (Publishers Weekly) "Holland's book shows how the personal became political, as presidents arguing for American liberty remained entangled by slavery in their private lives and public service. This is a useful first step toward a larger study of slavery and the presidency that we sorely need if we are ever to understand the hold slavery had on the republic." (Library Journal) About the Author Jesse J. Holland is the author of *Black Men Built the Capitol: Discovering African American History In and Around Washington, D.C.* (Globe Pequot, 2007) and a longtime Washington correspondent for The Associated Press, the world's largest news organization. Since moving to Washington, D.C. in 2000, Holland has covered the White House, the Congress, and the Supreme Court for The AP. A regular guest on CNN, NBC, Fox News, PBS, C-SPAN's Washington Journal and ABC's News Now, Holland speaks frequently on African American and Washington political topics. Holland is a member of the National Press Club, the National Association of Black Journalists, the Capital Press Club, the Washington Association of Black Journalists, and the Society of Professional Journalists. Holland is a sought after-speaker on African American history and politics, having lectured at universities and institutions like Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City. Holland lives in Bowie, Maryland, with his wife and children.