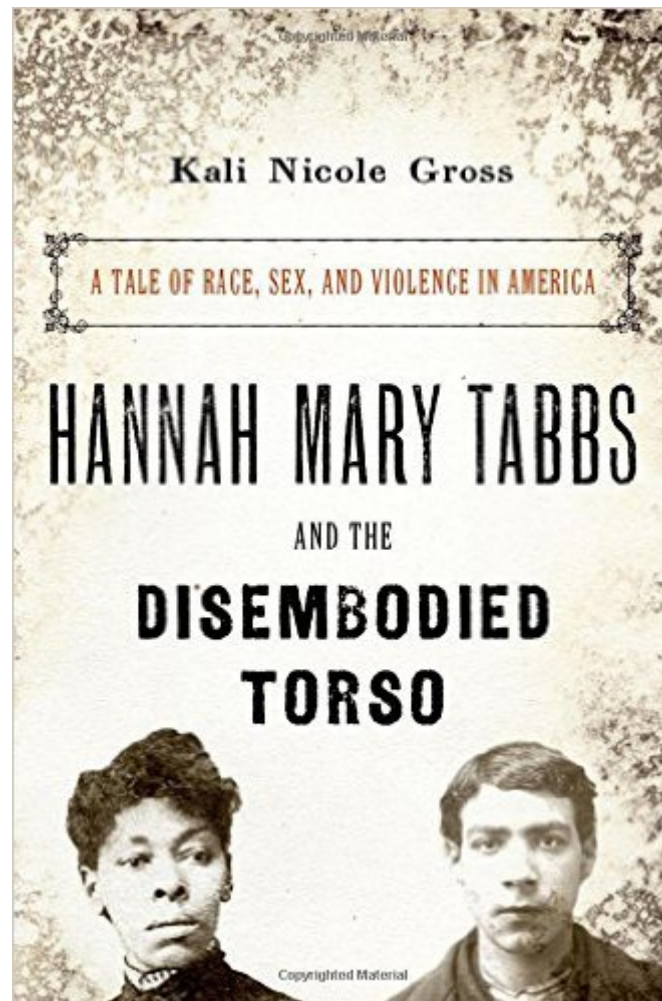


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# Hannah Mary Tabbs And The Disembodied Torso: A Tale Of Race, Sex, And Violence In America



## Synopsis

Shortly after a dismembered torso was discovered by a pond outside Philadelphia in 1887, investigators homed in on two suspects: Hannah Mary Tabbs, a married, working-class, black woman, and George Wilson, a former neighbor whom Tabbs implicated after her arrest. As details surrounding the shocking case emerged, both the crime and ensuing trial—which spanned several months—were featured in the national press. The trial brought otherwise taboo subjects such as illicit sex, adultery, and domestic violence in the black community to public attention. At the same time, the mixed race of the victim and one of his assailants exacerbated anxieties over the purity of whiteness in the post-Reconstruction era. In *Hannah Mary Tabbs and the Disembodied Torso*, historian Kali Nicole Gross uses detectives' notes, trial and prison records, local newspapers, and other archival documents to reconstruct this ghastly whodunit crime in all its scandalous detail. In doing so, she gives the crime context by analyzing it against broader evidence of police treatment of black suspects and violence within the black community. A fascinating work of historical recreation, *Hannah Mary Tabbs and the Disembodied Torso* is sure to captivate anyone interested in true crime, adulterous love triangles gone wrong, and the racially volatile world of post-Reconstruction Philadelphia.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Hannah Mary Tabbs and the Dismembered Corpse* by Kali Nicole Gross. Kali Nicole Gross is an Associate Professor and Associate Chair of African and African Diaspora Studies at the University

of Texas at Austin. She holds a B.A. in Africana Studies and a certificate in African Studies from Cornell University and a M.A. in American Civilization and a Ph.D. in History and a certificate in Women's Studies from the University of Pennsylvania. Hannah Mary Tabbs was a married black woman from Virginia, living in Philadelphia in 1887, when the torso of her murdered lover is discovered in a pond. She was quickly identified as the woman seen carrying a mysterious package toward the pond late one night. Although Tabbs initially confessed to the murder, she recants and accuses an acquaintance, George Wilson of the actual murder. While the testimony of Tabbs and Wilson would differ as to who knew what, their guilt was established beyond any doubt even before the trial began. The book recounts the investigation into the identity of the victim, as well as the arrest and trials of the two suspects. The main characters in the book are Hannah Mary Tabbs and George Wilson, her accomplice. The body of her unfortunate lover, Wakefield Gaines, is the subject of a frenzied search, after only his torso is found in a pond. Not much is known about Wakefield Gaines, except that he was a waiter by profession and the target of Hannah's frequent fits of rage and jealousy. It's fitting, I suppose, that his character was so vague, since his death, sadly, was just as inexplicable. 32-year old Hannah Tabbs was well-known in the black community for her tendency for violence, but played the role of a submissive, non-threatening woman like a violin when around whites.

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