



With Trumpet and Bible: The Illustrated Life of James Hembray Wilson (American Music and Musicians)

Frank Tirro

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Were you an African American living and working during the last few years of the 19th century or the first dozen years of the 20th century, you would know the name James Hembray Wilson. You might say, "He's that cornet virtuoso working with Billy Kersands," or "He's the composer of 'Drag Lotz.'" The Freeman writes about him all the time. Wilson was a soloist, composer, conductor, and music professor, a friend and associate of W. C. Handy, and more. Today it seems that his name has slipped into one of time's hidden corners, and this book brings that story to life and into the light. But his life brings other significant issues to light as well. What was life like for an African American raised in the South in the 1880s? Were there paths to education and success for Black Americans facing the terrible prejudicial environment in the states that lost the War Between the States? And issues concerning the status of Black women surface, too. What kind of life and what possible hope might they have during the years before World War I to the years after the Second World War? Exploring these questions and illustrating one Black man's life are but some of the many threads Frank Tirro weaves into the fabric of his fascinating biography, *With Trumpet and Bible*. This compelling story is the documented account of a talented, intelligent, and ambitious African-American musician, James Hembray Wilson, a man who faced the challenges of his day and succeeded, despite his modest education and limited financial resources, and became one of the most respected and idolized professors of a vital Historically Black College in the South. Working hand-in-hand with Alabama A&M's first four presidents, teaching courses as diverse as Rhetoricals, Band, and Bible Study, and serving as Postmaster, Bookkeeper, and, finally, Treasurer of the college, Wilson guided generations of young African Americans to the brink of the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and '60s. His is an American tale that weaves together the history of the shocking inequalities of our educational system, the dawn of the civil rights movement, and the flowering of the African-American musical tradition.

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