

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Ida B. Wells

activist, journalist

“The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.”

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Background Information

Born: July 16, 1862

Death: March 25, 1931

Ida B. Wells was born into slavery to parents James and Lizzie Wells in 1862. The Emancipation Proclamation was issued shortly after her birth and soon freed her family. Wells' parents became active in the community and helped to create Rust College for Black students. Ida received her education at Rust until she was 16, when her parents and one sibling died of the yellow fever. As a result, Ida was forced to drop out of school to help support her family financially. Wells first worked as a teacher, and then continued her education at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.¹

Wells' Resistance

Wells was riding on a train after purchasing a first-class ticket, and was forcibly removed from the first-class car. She then hired a lawyer to sue the railroad company and initially won the case, but later the Supreme Court reviewed the case, and found Wells was the one at fault. Wells knew this was wrong and began writing articles for newspapers challenging the Jim Crow laws in the south.² She then began protesting a local lynching in her area where three black men were murdered by a mob of people. Wells wrote newspaper articles to bring attention to the issue of lynching in the South causing people to break into the newspaper and destroy her equipment and threaten her life, forcing her to move to Chicago.² She was also a strong supporter for women's right to vote.³

Achievements

Wells' methods as a journalism inspired the field of investigative journalism. In 1988, Wells was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame. In May 2020, Wells was awarded a Pulitzer Prize special citation for her courageous actions challenging lynching and violence towards African Americans during her life.³

¹ Biography.com Editors (24, June 2020) *Ida B. Wells*. A & E Television Networks. Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/activist/ida-b-wells>

² Steptoe, T. (2007, January 19) *Ida Wells-Barnett (1862-1931)*. Retrieved from <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/barnett-ida-wells-1862-1931/>

³ Wikipedia contributors. (2020c, October 17). *Ida B. Wells*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ida_B._Wells

