

Ida B. Wells, World-Class Researcher

Amadi Ozier, Rutgers University

Presented at the April 24th meeting of the Afro-American
Historical and Genealogical Society



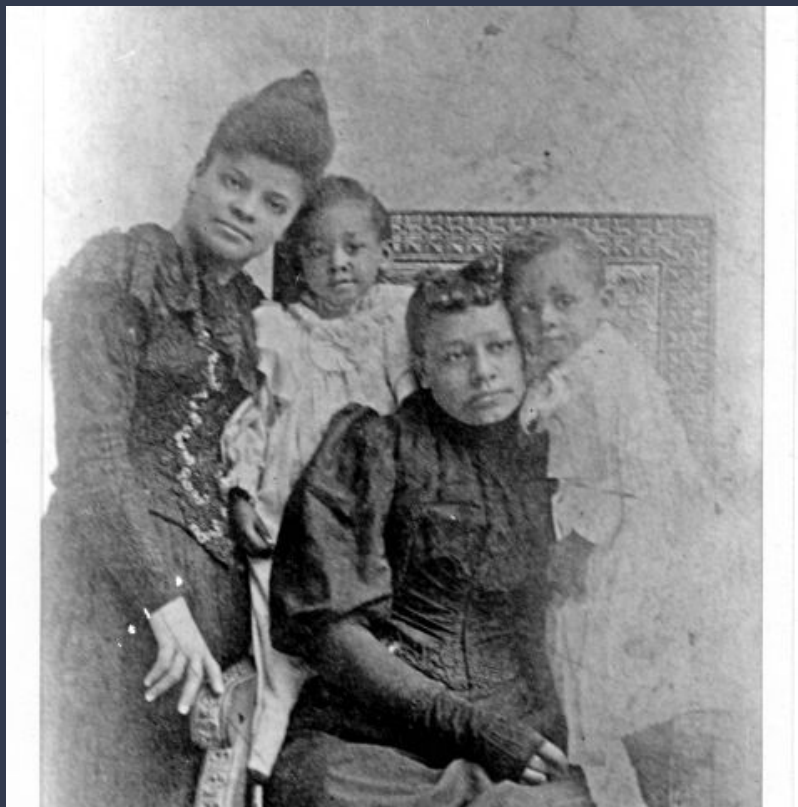
MRS. IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT.

One of the greatest champions of the civil and political status of the Colored people in this country who had been designated as the Joan D'Arc of the Afro-American race.

- Ida B. Wells won a Pulitzer Prize posthumously for her foundational investigative reporting in the 1890s and 1900s. From the Pulitzer Board: “For her outstanding and courageous reporting on the horrific and vicious violence against African Americans during the era of lynching”

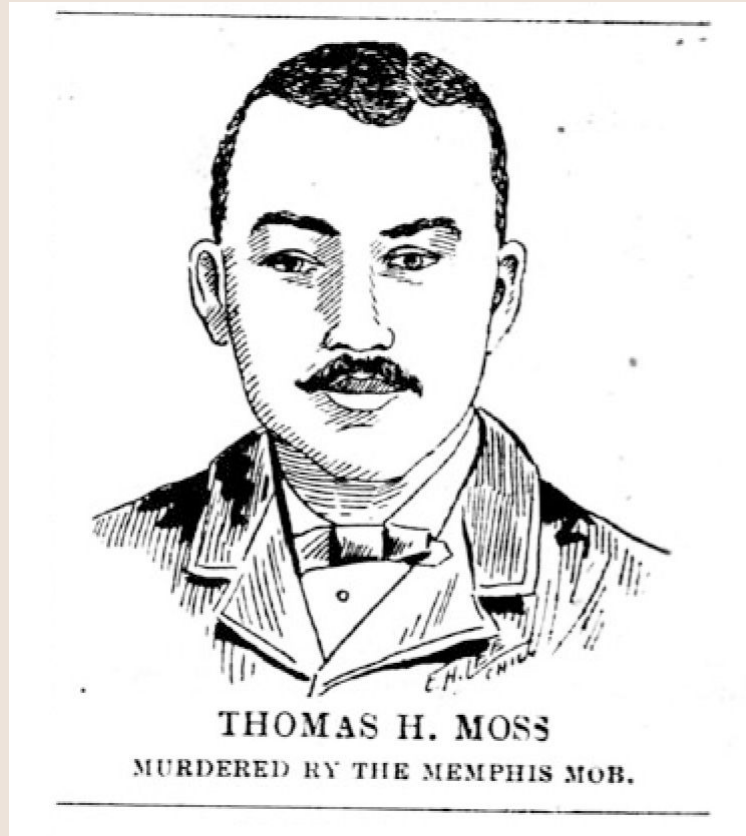
Today's Topics

- Wells's writing strategies
- Well's research strategies
- Strategies for conducting archival research
- Where to access Wells's archives
- Wells's ancestral connections in the present



Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

"Vintage photo of horse and buggy delivery outside the People's Grocery" (date unknown). Via Historic-Memphis.com.



The *Appeal*, March 26, 1892. Via the Library of Congress.

SENATE JOB.

WORKING TO PASS WORKS BILL.

March 10.—The big Republican Senate is calculated to do anything but a favorable thing for the State in this the

The Chamber was filled to overflowing by the friends and the opponents of the water-works scheme. They want the Legislature to pass a bill to issue bonds for \$1,000,000 to carry out their plan. The Mayor of that city to carry out the provisions of

and over one hundred others. The measure, and the usual turn at times in which the Governor and the recorder of deeds in the Senatorial chamber meet each other.

and his cards most adroitly. It was successful in getting many of those that were in his Senatorial campaign. It was of the persuasive kind he held out the olive branch to the ultra-conservative wing of the party. It would but support the measure from the House.

It was held out that the legislation would aid in the passing of a bill that should land all the politicians in a bad way.

and against the expenditure of money without so much the question of the vote of the times heated, and persons in very freely.

TO PUNISH THE LYNCHERS

MEMPHIS NEGROES THIRSTING FOR VENGEANCE.

FUNERAL OF THE DEAD RIOTERS—INJURY TO THE CITY'S STANDING—WELL-TO-DO NEGRO RESIDENTS LEAVING THE PLACE.

MEMPHIS, Tenn., March 10.—To-day showed a decided reaction from the excitement into which the city was thrown yesterday by the lynching of the three negro rioters, Tom Moss, Will Stewart, and Calvin Mcbowell. The officers stationed in the disturbed district, where another outbreak was apprehended, report no trouble of any kind. The law-abiding people of both races stopped at home from choice, and the turbulent ones were restrained from stirring abroad by a wholesome fear of the guns carried by the sheriff's forces. As a matter of precaution the posse will be kept on duty to-night and the city police held in readiness for possible emergency, but there is no present prospect of trouble.

The grand jury will consider the lynching to-morrow. The Attorney General expresses a determination to prosecute the lynchers, who are found to be the fullest extent of the law.

The funeral of the three victims of the lynching took place this afternoon from Avery's chapel, on De Soto street, and was attended by a great crowd of negroes, many of whom quit work for the day in order to be present. The crowd was profoundly moved by the sight of the three coffins in front of the altar, and many exclamations of grief and venge

"PILGRIMS" RIDICULED.

NORTH CAROLINA DECLINES TO RECOGNIZE THEIR BARGAIN WITH HILL.

GOLDENBOROUGH, N. C., March 10.—The misdoings of the "pilgrims" from this State, as W. J. Roberts, E. Chamberlain Smith, and Harry Hill were called by The Times's Washington correspondent, has stirred up the natives. It is well understood here that these gentlemen are endeavoring to get fat offices for themselves and organize a party that will have the disposal of all other offices in the State, provided Senator Hill should be elected President next November.

The *Lady Argus*, published in this town, is a strong supporter of ex-President Cleveland, and that paper of the 8th inst. reprinted The Times's editorial, with the following comments:

The special reporter of The New York Times in Washington City is distinguished in that paper, and on March 4 a bold and unwarranted attempt was made on the part of a trio of aspiring politicians in this State in which they proffer to one David L. Hill of New York the support of North Carolina in the coming National Democratic Convention for the nomination for President.

Now this is all more than passing strange. I need not be long in explaining it. It shows an attempt to buy the white in a manner never before practiced in our history. It can be possible that the vote of North Carolina belongs to any three men, if they great or in their small. The idea is preposterous. The heart of every true man in the State is set with righteous indignation at the mere suggestion of it. First, let us consider the action of Mr. Chamberlain Smith, a baron of the State Democratic party, a politician who, by the way, never held any office but was using his personal strength in his office to exploit it. No one in this State of free men and free men questions his right, as an individual, to proceed to Washington, and with the usual ceremonials after the custom of Carolina to land, deliver himself over to Mr. Hill as the man of the hour.

Mr. Smith has no right, either as such or as chairman of the State Committee, to "pledge" Mr. Hill the vote of the "straight-out" Democracy of North Carolina.

NYT 3/11/92 S. 1

What disturbed Wells about the incident at the Peoples Grocery, as she recounted in a speech delivered in Boston in February 1893, was not just that the lynching confirmed her “horror” that “the protection of the law which we had so long enjoyed was no longer ours,” but also that the crime’s naked injustice was made possible by a culture of theatrical and absurd ignorance.



“It was done by unknown men,’ said the jury, yet the Appeal-Avalanche, which goes to press at 3 a.m., had a two-column account of the lynching. ... ‘It was done by unknown parties,’ said the jury, yet the papers told how Tom Moss begged for his life, for the sake of his wife, his little daughter and his unborn infant.”

Ida B. Wells's research

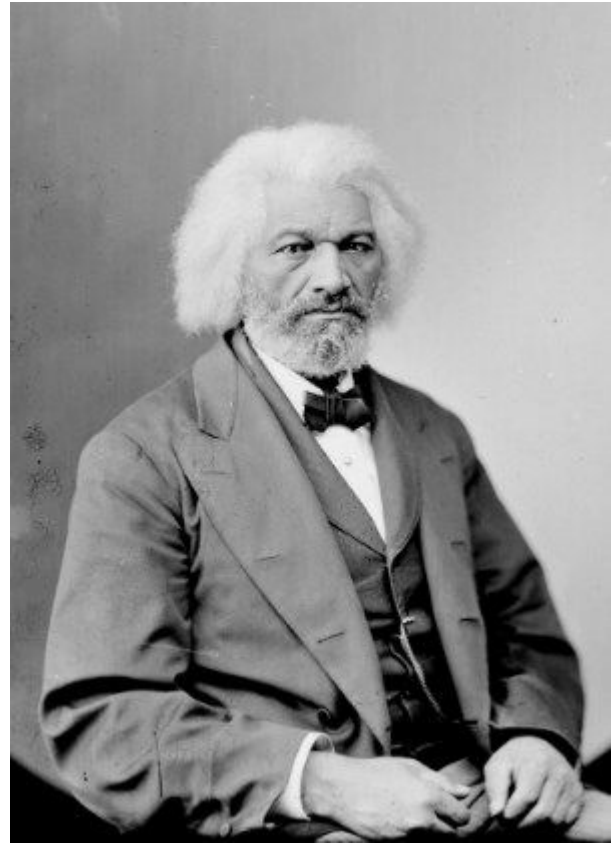
- **Premise:** stereotype of black men being lynched for raping white women was almost always false
- In two-thirds of mob murders, rape was never an accusation
- Interracial sex was frequently consensual (extremely controversial in the 1890s!!!)
- Lynching was a response to black economic development

Methods

- Local newspaper records of lynching violence
- Eyewitness interviews
- Testimony from victims' families
- *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* - 14 pages of statistics on lynching cases
- White sources (important!)

“There has been no word equal to [your work] in convincing power. I have spoken, but my word is feeble in comparison.”

Letter from Frederick Douglass (pictured) to Ida B. Wells, Cedar Hill, Anacostia, D.C., Oct. 25, 1892. (Re-printed in Ida B. Wells's *Southern Horrors*.)



“Nobody in this section of the country believes the old thread-bare lie that Negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful, they will overreach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.”

Ida B. Wells, for *The Free Speech*, May 21, 1892.

DRIVEN FROM HOME.

The fearless spirit of Ida B. Wells, editor of the Memphis Free Speech, has been spoken of in these columns and her bravery commended. Among all civilized people, courage commends itself to brave people, but among barbarians, of the Memphis stripe, her courage was a menace; so these brave chivalrous southern people, made up their minds to drive this plucky little woman out of town. they waited for an opportunity and last week it came.

“Directly the conductor returned to me and said that I would have to go to the coach in front, that I was in the wrong car. ... To this I replied, that I would not ride in the forward car, that I had a seat and intended to keep it. He said to me that he would treat me like a lady, but that I must go into the other car, and I replied, that if he wished to treat me like a lady, he would leave me alone. ... He then took hold of me to carry me to the other car. I resisted him – holding on to my seat when he called for help, and two white passengers helped him to carry me out. I resisted all the time, and never consented to go. My dress was torn in the struggle, one sleeve was almost torn off. Everybody in the car seemed to sympathize with the conductor, and were against me.”

Circuit Court of Shelby County,
James P. Sisson, Judge.
Joseph N. Bell, Clerk.

1885
#212

*The Chesapeake Ohio and
Southwestern Railroad Co*

PLAINTIFF IN ERROR,

VS.

No. _____ Trial Debit.
SUPREME COURT.

Ida Wells

DEFENDANT IN ERROR.

ATTORNEYS:

W. Lewis Summers
FOR PLAINTIFF IN ERROR.

Sam Adams & S. J. Cassels
FOR DEFENDANT IN ERROR.

Filed _____ day of _____ 1885

Clerk Supreme Court.
By _____ Deputy Clerk.

19 trial, which is signed by the judge presiding and filed as part of the record herein without being spread at large upon the minutes.

Bill of Exceptions
Filed December 27, 1884

Ida Wells

vs.

*The Chesapeake Ohio and
South Western Rail Road Co*

On the trial of this cause the following evidence was introduced by the plaintiff:

The Plaintiff:
Who said: I am 20 years of age and unmarried, my profession is that of School Teacher and during September 1883, I was teaching a public school at Woodstock, a station on defendants road, ten miles North of Memphis - My salary was \$30.00 a month - On 15th September

In the Supreme Court of Tenn.
APRIL TERM, 1885.
CHESAPEAKE, OHIO & S. W. RAILROAD,
Plaintiff in error,
vs.
IDA WELLS, Defendant in error.

**BRIEF OF
GREER & ADAMS,**
FOR DEFENDANT IN ERROR.

LEWIS WELLS, 211 BROAD ST., MEMPHIS.

A legal brief for Ida B. Wells' lawsuit against Chesapeake, Ohio, and Southwestern Railroad Company before the state Supreme Court, 1885. Courtesy DPLA.

Key Features of Ida B. Wells's writing

- **Close attention to detail.** Collating a broad variety of sources. Closely reading white texts in order to produce alternative interpretations.
- **Unrelenting candor.** Unapologetic prose style, which sometimes triggered ire from both the black and white public.
- **Juxtaposition.** Using a broad variety of sources to point out hypocritical patterns.

Resources and Sources

Ida B. Wells's Writings

- *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader.*
- *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*
- *Southern Horrors* (1892). Available via Google Books.
- *The Red Record* (1895). Available via Google Books.
- *Lynch Law in Georgia*. Available via Project Gutenberg.
- *Mob Rule in New Orleans*. Available via Project Gutenberg.
- *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells* (Beacon Press, 1995)

Bibliographies, Archives, and Digital Archives

Free Speech (Memphis), *Headlight* (Memphis), *Conservator* (Chicago), *New York Age*

Danky, James Philip. *African-American Newspapers and Periodicals: A National Bibliography*. Available via Archive.org

Chronicling America

Digital Public Library of America

The Ida B. Wells Papers at the University of Chicago

Library of Congress Digital Collections

IDEAS

I'm Ida B. Wells's Great-Granddaughter, and I'm Still Fighting Her Fight for the Vote



Ida B. Wells in Chicago in 1909 with her children: Charles, Herman, Ida and Alfreda Archivio GBB/Redux

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IDEAS

BY MICHELLE DUSTER AUGUST 17, 2020 9:24 AM EDT

Duster is the author of the forthcoming book *Ida B. the Queen: The Extraordinary Life and Legacy of Ida B. Wells*

My great-grandmother Ida B. Wells was a suffragist. You probably have not heard her described this way before. She is most often honored for her journalism exposing lynchings in the South. To me, she is what great-grandmothers are to many: a teacher. From Ida, I learned that there is no end

- **Parents:** James Wells (1839 - 1878) and Elizabeth “Lizzie” “Liza” Arrington (1844 - 1879)
- **Siblings:** Eugenia, Edward, James “Jim”, George, Annie, Lilian “Lily”, and Stanley Wells
- **Spouse:** Ferdinand Lee Barnett, Jr (1852 - 1936)
- **Children:** Charles Aked Barnett (1896 - 1957), Herman Kohlsaatt Barnett (1897 - 1975), Ida B. Wells Barnett (1901 - 1988), Alfreda Marguerita Barnett (1904 - 1983)
- **Grandchildren:** Troy Duster (sociologist and author), Alfreda Ferrell (retired educator)
- **Great-Grandchildren:** Dan Duster (motivational speaker and author), Michelle Duster (author, speaker, and educator)
- **Great-Great-Grandchildren:** Tiana L. Ferrel (communications specialist, playwright)

Via the Ida B. Wells Foundation:

<https://ibwfoundation.org/descendants>