



Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells

Ida B. Wells-Barnett , Ada B. Wells , Alfreda M. Duster (Editor)

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Ida B. Wells (1862-1931) was one of the foremost crusaders against black oppression. This engaging memoir tells of her private life as mother of a growing family as well as her public activities as teacher, lecturer, and journalist in her fight against attitudes and laws oppressing blacks.

"No student of black history should overlook *Crusade for Justice*."—William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Journal of American History*

"Besides being the story of an incredibly courageous and outspoken black woman in the face of innumerable odds, the book is a valuable contribution to the social history of the United States and to the literature of the women's movement as well."—Elizabeth Kolmer, *American Quarterly*

"[Wells was] a sophisticated fighter whose prose was as tough as her intellect."—Walter Goodman, *New York Times*

"An illuminating narrative of a zealous, race-conscious, civic- and church-minded black woman reformer, whose life story is a significant chapter in the history of Negro-White relations."—Thelma D. Perry, *Negro History Bulletin*

Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells Details

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From Reader Review Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells for online ebook

Arielle says

2017 Reading List - A book that take's place over a character's lifetime.

This autobiography of Ida B. Wells is a great source of knowledge, not only on Ida B. Wells herself, but on political climate of this country during her lifetime. Through her autobiography the Black women's club movement, the suffragist movement, the founding of the NAACP, and countless other Black advocacy organizations is documented. Because Mrs. Wells was present and active in these movements, we get a personal account and view of the internal workings of these organizations and many monumental peoples within them. This is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in American history, particularly the era of Reconstruction and turn of the 20th century.

Doris Raines says

This. Is. A. Soficated. Book. I. Really. Adore. What. And. Amazing. Woman. Thanks. Doris.

Jeremiah Acuña says

This is the first book that I've read where despite all efforts and toil, the results were not satisfactory for the "protagonist". It's a shame that Ida Wells worked so hard to aid her race, and for so little change to take place, especially since it was the actions of others (mostly "allies") that hindered her work. I truly wish I had her work ethic, compassion, and confidence.

Aubrey says

4.5/5

[H]e would say without qualification that he could not imagine a crime so great that it would need be avenged by lynch law in any country in the world; and what was more he did not believe that crime ever was avenged by lynch law without the lowering of the moral tone of the community, and without the introduction of worse evils than were attempted to be suppressed.

Out of the many books I've tasked myself with getting to, this is one of the ones I've spent the most effort on. Not only did I unhesitatingly shell out for it at an actual store rather than do my customary waiting on the benevolence of book sale shelves, I kept it on my intended 2017 YoRWoC plan from the beginning, only now reading it after the year is nearly through. The rating may make it seem that this effort was less than fully re-compensated, but rather, it made me realize the necessity of Wells having a biographer in the wake of her autobiography. Comprehensively detailed and admirable forthright as this text is, pages are missing, the ending lies unfinished, and with the sheer amount of constantly thwarted triumphs plaguing Wells' life, it

can be assumed that this tale has been severely compromised by ill health from stress, lack of time, and judging from the near to the end transcription that all had been for naught, dearth of motivation. While stereotype demanded a lone woman in the face of her work, I'm glad Wells had her family around her, who I hope sustained her when, once again, the white people had closed in their murderous ranks and the black people had withdrawn into their androcentric stagnation. I can't imagine going on once again, and again, and again in the face of this, and yet Ida B. Wells did just that.

Although it was a well-merited rebuke from her point of view, I could not tell [Susan B.] Anthony that it was because I had been unable, like herself, to get the support which was necessary to carry on my work that I had become discouraged in the effort to carry on alone. For that reason I welcomed the opportunity of trying to help unite our people so that there would be a following to help in the arduous work necessary.

There is, more often than not, an inverse relationship between what a person is known for and what a person is judged for. The most famous, usually by demographic means, have their secrets of which display is censured, the most infamous have their aided and abetted descendants, and the heroes are: gone. Wells is only one of many, and she is one of the more well known, having myriad texts that, from my view, are increasingly coming back to life. That didn't make her story any less frustrating to read, as the sheer number of times when she was the initiative to something that either she didn't have enough time or money to run, she couldn't find someone to take up her mantle, or was simply conspired against till her hardworking dedication and utmost bravery was either thwarted, misinterpreted, misused, or flat out stolen and attributed to someone else. The list of the latter includes W.E.B. Du Bois, among others, all of whom have suffered a decrease in reputation with me, as much as Susan B. Anthony has, surprisingly, enjoyed an increase. She had her moments of whiteness over femininity, but was far more strident about proto-intersectionality upon meeting Wells. This ties back to the odd focus had on good, in Wells' book, white people, as if she needed specific reminders of humanity to stand staunch against the tide committing such atrocities that she battled for the entirety of her life. I'd imagine she was as honest about this as well as her criticisms of individuals of the black community of her time, but it makes for a discomfiting balanced concoction. Other than her husband and a few religious leaders and those she helped, I can't think of any peers she didn't eventually and justly turn her back upon, which makes for a sad reading. I don't wish she had been any less active in her social justice; it's just a disgrace what such heroism affords for certain demographics.

An effort was made to have a resolution passed by that convention condemning lynching, as the Methodist Episcopal Conference had done at Omaha in May. The committee on resolutions decided that it could not be done as they had too many southern delegates present and did not wish to offend them.

I'll be picking up anything I can of Wells, author as well as authored. She is one of many who deserve such recognition on the scale afforded to her oppressors and her ostracizers, and as attested to by a reference in Black Deutschland, she's made an impact that can be well built upon. I'm not sure what's happening to her in the academic world, but I do know that here, she has my review and the 500 GBBW project behind her. I can only hope she inspires others as much in the political and academic realms as she has me.

When the people needed such criticism, I felt he ought to have done as we did—tell them about it at home rather than tell our enemies abroad.

A civilized community does not need lynch law[.]

agatha says

Ida's story was already fantastic enough when read by an outside voice. When you get her own voice telling you, with all the power of her character and her will behind the words, it's a thousand times better. It's a shame she didn't get to finish it, but on the other hand, I'm very happy at how much she did manage to get down on paper - particularly considering how much she was doing during her lifetime!

Jennifer says

I really didn't know much about Ida B Wells-Barnett before picking this up. She decides to write her autobiography after realizing other black stories were not being documented. The book was edited by her daughter and only published years after Ida's death.

Really an amazing woman - she was definitely a crusader against lynching, and traveled internationally even to spread the message. There were numerous defeats yet she managed to have individual successes, too.

Its an autobiography - Ida mentions some of the conflicts she had with others in leadership positions. She certainly comes across as someone who was willing to challenge authority more than others. She was likely considered 'radical'. But who would not be when your race is being lynched?

She interacted with Frederick Douglass, Jane Addams, Susan B Anthony....so many other historical figures of the time.

Sometimes it was hard for me to follow all the people and events and clubs (she started so many organizations!). At first I thought it could have been edited a little more, but I'd be concerned it would remove the sense of Ida's voice that carries through.

Instead of satisfying my curiosity, its been stoked. I now want to read the most recent biography, *Sword Among Lions*, to see how a historical biographer would revisit Ida B Wells legacy.

Marie says

This is a really extraordinary book. It is a retrospective account of her campaigns through the south and in the UK to condemn and eliminate lynchings. I, like most people, knew well her life and work, but I had never read her actual words. She was an immensely powerful writer, incredibly gifted and seemed to instinctively understand what we now consider key media principles: keep coming back to your points, use empathy, back up your statements. Best book I've read in a long time.

Arlene Walker says

Ida B. Wells story leaves me wondering why there hasn't ever been a movie about her life. Very interesting.

Chris Tallant says

Ida B. Wells not only had a magical style with her words, but also with how she could see through the thin gossamer veil of prejudice and hypocritical politics during the Reconstruction. This book chronicles Mrs. Wells' own life as she wades knee-deep throughout the deception and racial tensions; tensions still felt throughout the world today. Compiled from lectures, diary entries, letters, short stories, and other written articles from her underground newspaper, "Crusade for Justice" is a must for any human being - period. Feminists, racial, equality, - basically anyone looking into details for civil rights should never pass this book. It's one of the best books written about the trials and tribulations of humanity, and goes to show simply how little we've gone toward achieving true equality.

James Blatter says

One of the ten most extraordinary women in American history and I'd bet less than 1 in 10 peoples have even heard of her, this is a great story of a great woman

Megan Henderson-Redding says

This book is a testament to one-woman's determination to bring light to the horrendous policy of lynching African-American's in the United States. She tirelessly travelled the world denouncing inhumane treatment of African-American's, dedicating and endangering her own life to shame the United States and their unjust policies concerning African-Americans before after and during the Red Summer of 1919. This book makes you want to qualify the people that we cast as heroes.

Kathryn Bundy says

This memoir is so pertinent to what is happening in the US today. Required reading!

Zach Irvin says

As I started this book, I realized it is actually the first autobiography I have ever read. I'm so glad I started with this one. Ida B. Wells was a powerful, intelligent and dedicated person whose influence on the Civil Rights movement cannot be understated. Direct and matter-of-fact, Mrs. Wells-Barnett's personality is almost palpable on the page. Known for her campaigns against lynchings in the South, she traveled all across America and to Great Britain doing the work.

One thing that struck me while reading was that, while many of the things she did during her life certainly took tremendous bravery, mostly they were simply the right thing to do. Lynch law in America gave way to almost unspeakable atrocities. Mrs. Wells talks about a woman who was sealed in a wooden barrel, and after the barrel had many nails driven through the sides she was rolled down a hill until she died. Mrs. Wells fought back. She told the stories of the victims and demanded their justice, either with community action, or by herself. She denounced murderers and held white people accountable for their actions even though the law rarely did. In everything she brought hard, logical reasoning and facts to the discussion, believing that the truth would set her and her community free. I will teach my kids about her and hope that I can one day be able to stand up even a little the way that she did.

Interestingly, one of the most common themes in the book involved the procedural elements of organized action by grass-roots committees. I was fascinated to watch, through Mrs. Wells stories, how movements begin, how change is enacted in a community. Mrs. Barnett could control a committee meeting like few others could. As an talented public speaker, she knew how to speak so that people would listen carefully and her experience as a journalist helped her write forceful statements on behalf of the cause. As a side note, the book includes sources and extra information in the footnotes, which of course the academic in me loves.

One thing that really got me thinking was when she wrote about her experiences speaking in England to raise awareness about the repugnant lynch law in the South. She was able to tell many people about the atrocities, and was even able to raise money when needed. However, the brutal imperialist history of Great Britain complicates everything. The horrors of Britain's time in India were only mentioned in one paragraph. But it fascinates me to think about her speaking about racism to racists, albeit a different kind than she was used to.

In the preface, Mrs. Wells tells a story of a young black woman asking her about her life. She notes that afterward, she realized that the woman did not have any record to which she could be directed in order to learn about the history of the struggle for equal rights. This incident served as the impetus for her to write her story, since "[t]he history of this entire period... reflected glory on the race... Yet most of it is buried in oblivion and only the southern white man's misrepresentations are in the public libraries and college textbooks of the land." (5) In my opinion, this book is an incredible part of the foundation for that record. She worked tirelessly, and often alone, her whole life. She pursued what was right and good with conviction, all the way up to her death. In fact, the last sentence stops MID WORD. I'm so glad the editor chose to leave it that way, because the work is unfinished.

Barbara says

I knew very little about Ida B. Wells. She's now a hero to me. What an organizer. Such a big spirit.

Steph says

This is the proof that Ida B Wells-Barnett was one of the ultimate kick-ass women who turned history on its head. She was witty, intelligent, and fearless. She was a ferocious warrior for justice and for the advancement of her people. Because she dedicated so much of her life, her energy, and her love to the cause of advancing, protecting, and fighting for her people, this autobiography reads more like a recounting of her career with tidbits of personal information.

Ida was such a selfless spirit that she focused on her story as a way to provide more insight to the overall trajectory of attempts at fighting lynching and the racist system that allowed such tragedies take place. Ida, by no means, paints herself as a saint. Often, she provides insight into her emotions that can get the best of her, her struggles of being a black woman working with white female suffragists and women of her own race, and being the first woman to continue working after becoming a wife and mother.

Mrs. Barnett was inspired to recount her life after she had a conversation with a young black woman who cited Ida as the woman she believed to have characteristics of Joan Arc, but did not know much about Ida and wanted to understand why she was regarded as such a noble woman.

"And so, because our youth are entitled to the facts of race history which only the participants can give, I am thus led to set forth the facts contained in this volume," and that is exactly what Mrs. Barnett does, all while allowing us insight into her journey from a child of former slaves to the fierce crusader for Justice.

Ida states that this book is dedicated to the youth who know not much about their history, and I believe that by reading such an endearing tale is the smallest way we could pay back a woman who dedicated her life to fighting for ours.

Karen says

Upon reading this you begin to understand why Ida struggled to keep friends... she was uncompromising on all levels, but a visionary crusader nonetheless. Her book serves as an excellent insight into the struggle for African- American justice as well as African-American women's rights.

Staci Taylor says

The title definitely does this book justice! In her last years, Wells wrote this autobiography which I feel many historians should read. It's sad that she is not as well known of an African American hero because she is a woman, but she is just as courageous as Fredrick Douglas and Du Bois. After her parents both died within 24 hours of each other from the 1878 yellow fever epidemic, Wells was the oldest of 6 and had to take care of her younger siblings. She became a teacher and was continuously involved in writing for African American journals and newspapers. She investigated the psychological reasoning behind why whites would accuse black men of raping white women. Lynching, Wells stated, was just an excuse to get rid of blacks competing economically with whites and to terrorize future competitors and all blacks, ultimately treating them as second class citizens. Wells went to England to help advocate against lynching and while in London she formed the anti-lynching community which was the first in the world! In England, the people did not know of the harsh treatments African Americans were receiving in the US so Wells informed them. Of course the US denied having supported any sort of lynching because England was huge importer of cotton which made them indispensable economically if they decided to boycott US cotton due to lynchings. With this anti-lynching community, there was a declining result of lynchings and mob violence and even a two decade span of none being reported. Wells also helped 12 Africans Americans be released from prison and

the death sentence after the 1919 Elaine, Arkansas Race Riot where over 100 blacks were murdered by whites for holding a meeting to obtain better payments for their cotton crops as sharecroppers with the white plantation owners. Instead of arresting the white men, the police arrested the blacks and 79 were charged for crimes, tried, and convicted! Wells used the power of the media and wrote pamphlets in protest for these 12 men and the NAACP and Walter White helped form legal defenses to overturn the Elaine convictions. Wells did a lot for African Americans to have some sort of justice in a time of Jim Crow laws and dangerous mob violence in the US. She should be remembered as a crucial black woman that helped in the racially uplift movement along side Du Bois.

Amanda says

Ida B. Wells is seriously the most incredible person I've ever learned about -- brave, witty, and tirelessly devoted to justice. It's frustrating how many of her experiences and insights still ring true today.

Louisa says

Black Feminist Theory Text, and a history of one of my own personal heroes. Organizers and leaders can learn from her unrelenting belief in the need to change the detrimental laws and beliefs of the day.

Landon says

Great read and learning to as well. Great service and a great story about someone I knew nothing about.
