

*Her story can change the world*



**Photo credit: Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library**

*In loving memory of  
Ida B. Wells-Barnett*

by Sondra Wilson

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## Prologue – her story in context with today:

This publication was written as my final essay for the class HIS 152 “U.S. History since 1877” with Professor Charles Irwin at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) in the Fall 2023 semester. Our assignment was to pick a topic, “which must include but is not limited to a person, an event, an organized movement, technological advancement, or any military action” between 1877 and today, and write about it in our own words (not copied from websites). Due to the inspiration I received from Ms. Well-Barnett when Professor Irwin taught us about her in class, as well as additional inspiration I received while researching her afterward, I decided to release this essay publicly, and to translate it into Hebrew and Arabic for reasons which will become apparent within the epilogue.

This publication is entitled *Her story can change the world* because I truly believe her story can help create lasting peace between Israel and Palestine, and in other parts of the world. It is written in the context of these current events:

- On Oct. 7th this year, an estimated 2,200 rockets were fired toward Israel by  [Hamas](#) militants. Shortly thereafter, videos were posted online showing a packed music festival in Israel near the Gaza border being attacked by rockets and armed Hamas militants on the ground. The footage shows women and children among those being dragged away in vehicles and driven back into Gaza as hostages. At least 260 bodies were removed from the venue following the attack.<sup>1</sup> Footage was released of Hamas gunman even shooting up porta potties (restrooms).<sup>2</sup>
- On Oct. 20 Amnesty International released a compilation of “damning evidence of war crimes being committed against Palestinian civilians”.<sup>3</sup> Appalled by widespread bombings of civilians, #FreePalestine protests began to occur throughout the United States, with the slogan, “From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free.” Many advocates of Palestinian-Israelis allege that Oct. 7 attacks were justified because Palestinians are living under a form of colonial apartheid.<sup>4</sup>
- Opponents argue that Israel’s restrictive policies toward Palestinians in the occupied territories are driven by legitimate security concerns – *not* racism. Policies which favor ethnic Jews over Arabs are not cases of “petty apartheid”; e.g. segregated use of benches, water fountains, restrooms, schools.<sup>5</sup> Policies are generally there as a means to protect Israel proper from encroachment and conquest through subversion or infiltration. Several organizations posit that the slogan “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free” both directly and subtly promotes the destruction of the State of Israel, which acts as a safehaven to protect indigenous Jews.<sup>6</sup>

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1 Hutchinson, Bill. *Israel-Hamas War: Timeline and Key Developments*, ABC News Network, 22 Nov. 2023, [abcnews.go.com/International/timeline-surprise-rocket-attack-hamas-israel/story?id=103816006](https://abcnews.go.com/International/timeline-surprise-rocket-attack-hamas-israel/story?id=103816006).

2 “Israel Massacre: Chilling Footage Shows Hamas Gunmen Raining Bullets at Toilet Cubicles | Watch.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 14 Oct. 2023, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaESh-clvSE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaESh-clvSE).

3 *Israeli Attacks Wipe out Entire Families in Gaza*, Amnesty International, 8 Nov. 2023, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-as-israeli-attacks-wipe-out-entire-families-in-gaza/#:~:text=Whole%20families%20wiped%20out,attack%2C%20seven%20of%20them%20children](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-as-israeli-attacks-wipe-out-entire-families-in-gaza/#:~:text=Whole%20families%20wiped%20out,attack%2C%20seven%20of%20them%20children).

4 “Colonialism and Apartheid.” *BDS Movement*, [bdsmovement.net/colonialism-and-apartheid/summary](https://bdsmovement.net/colonialism-and-apartheid/summary).

5 Zhou, Li. “The Argument That Israel Practices Apartheid, Explained.” *Vox*, 20 Oct. 2023, [www.vox.com/23924319/israel-palestine-apartheid-meaning-history-debate](https://www.vox.com/23924319/israel-palestine-apartheid-meaning-history-debate).

6 *Allegation: “From the River to the Sea Palestine Will Be Free,”* Anti-Defamation League, 18 May 2022, [www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/allegation-river-sea-palestine-will-be-free?fbclid=IwAR1bjCATb5QdDIeoXSKJ3ydahUBSeVs3wTdCDlduty3O8d99JgLD02NBAM](https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/allegation-river-sea-palestine-will-be-free?fbclid=IwAR1bjCATb5QdDIeoXSKJ3ydahUBSeVs3wTdCDlduty3O8d99JgLD02NBAM).

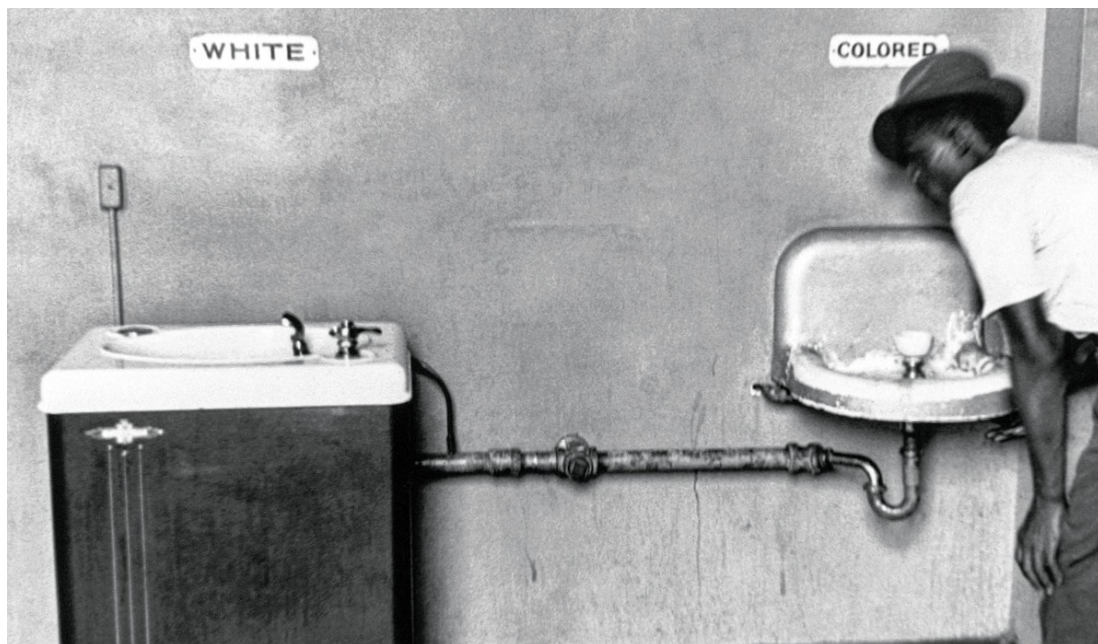
### **Ida was born into an abusive, racist society:**

Ida was born on July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1862 in Holly Springs, Mississippi.<sup>7</sup> The following year, the Emancipation Proclamation freed her family from slavery. Her parents, who had both been enslaved and therefore not allowed to legally wed, got married at once. Her father opened a carpenter's shop and became active in local politics.

Ida and her siblings received an education at Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church (now called Rust College), and even her mother attended the school to learn to read.

When she was only 16 years old, the deadly Yellow Fever struck her hometown, taking the lives of both her parents and her baby brother. With five younger siblings to support, Ida became a school teacher.<sup>8</sup>

Ida lived during the time of "Jim Crow laws", state and local laws mostly present throughout the southern states (but also found in the north) used to separate blacks from whites in all aspects of daily life. Favoring whites and repressing blacks, these unjust laws became an institutionalized form of inequality.<sup>9</sup> Jim Crow laws began to appear in 1877, just after the collapse of the Reconstruction. Although the following photographs were taken in the 1900s, they exemplify the types of segregation she and other African Americans were forced to live under.



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7 *Ida B Wells Timeline*, Have Fun With History, 4 July 2023, [www.havefunwithhistory.com/ida-b-wells-timeline/](http://www.havefunwithhistory.com/ida-b-wells-timeline/).

8 Fraedrich, Megan. "12 Facts You Didn't Know about Ida B. Wells." *Cricket Media, Inc.*, 17 Feb. 2023, [cricketmedia.com/blog/12-facts-you-didnt-know-about-ida-b-wells/#:~:text=12%20Facts%20You%20Didn%20Know%20About%20Ida%20B.,%E2%80%9CThe%20Princess%20of%20the%20Press.%E2%80%9D%20...%20More%20items](http://cricketmedia.com/blog/12-facts-you-didnt-know-about-ida-b-wells/#:~:text=12%20Facts%20You%20Didn%20Know%20About%20Ida%20B.,%E2%80%9CThe%20Princess%20of%20the%20Press.%E2%80%9D%20...%20More%20items).

9 *Segregated Travel and the Uncommon Courage of Rosa Parks -- the Henry Ford Blog - Blog*, The Henry Ford, [www.thehenryford.org/explore/blog/segregated-travel-and-the-uncommon-courage-of-rosa-parks](http://www.thehenryford.org/explore/blog/segregated-travel-and-the-uncommon-courage-of-rosa-parks).

10 *The Jim Crow North*, The New York Times Upfront, [upfront.scholastic.com/issues/2019-20/030920/the-jim-crow-north.html?language=english#1300L](http://upfront.scholastic.com/issues/2019-20/030920/the-jim-crow-north.html?language=english#1300L).



Black citizens sit in the rear of the bus  
in compliance with South Carolina segregation law, April 1956:



Students at Clinton High School in Clinton, Tennessee picket their school  
when it becomes the first state-supported school to integrate, on Aug. 27, 1956:



11

11 Sanchez, Gabriel H. *29 Disturbing Pictures of American Life under Jim Crow*, BuzzFeed, 11 Feb. 2017, [www.buzzfeed.com/gabrielsanchez/this-is-what-life-in-america-looked-like-under-jim-crow](http://www.buzzfeed.com/gabrielsanchez/this-is-what-life-in-america-looked-like-under-jim-crow).

## In 1883, Ida sued the railroad *and won*:

Everyone in the United States learns in school about civil rights hero Rosa Parks, who, in 1955, *refused to move the back of the bus* as was required under Jim Crow. Many Americans, however, have never heard of Ida Wells. Seventy-seven years before Ms. Parks refused to budge, in 1883, 22 year old Ida Wells *refused to move off the whites-only train car*. After being physically assaulted and forced from the train car, Ida sued the railroad and won!<sup>12</sup> The court decided in her favor and ordered the railroad company to pay damages, which they did. Although the Tennessee Supreme Court later overturned the ruling, it is self-evident when reviewing the case that this was done to perpetuate the practice of segregation. Here is what happened according to key excerpts of Ida's testimony:

"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.... On 15th September, 1883 I was in Memphis, and started to return to Woodstock – took a seat in the rear car of defendant's passenger train that left Memphis about 4 o'clock that afternoon..... I... bought a ticket which read as follows: "*Chesapeake Ohio & Southwestern R.R. – one continuous trip – Memphis to Woodstock.*"

... There were only two passenger cars in the train, two passenger car, and one baggage car. I saw one drunken white man in the front coach.... Rougher people ride in the front car than in the rear car. There was no person on the seat with me and I was the only colored person in that car. The car was not crowded. When a mile or so from Memphis, the conductor came collecting tickets, he took mine, looked at me, and returned it to me, saying he could not accept it in that car, and passed on. I was reading a news paper at the time. 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. That he had the rear car for white people alone, and that colored people must ride in the forward coach. 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. When we reached Fraziers, the first station, the train stopped and the conductor again came to me and said he would again ask me politely to go into the other car, and I refused to do so. 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. [W]hen they got me onto the platform between the cars, I got off the train refusing to go into the forward coach. The conductor asked me not to get off, but I said that I would not ride in the forward coach. There were several colored passengers in that car. I paid 30¢ for my ticket and still hold it.... I also noticed smoking going on in the forward car. This car was used for colored men and white men too. There never was any smoking and drunkenness in the rear coach and sometimes colored people also rode in it."<sup>13</sup>

"There must always be a remedy for wrong and injustice if we only know how to find it."

– Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice*

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12 Boomer, Lee. "Life Story: Ida B. Wells." *Women & the American Story*, New York Historical Society Museum & Library, 3 Aug. 2022, [wams.nyhistory.org/modernizing-america/fighting-for-social-reform/ida-b-wells/](https://wams.nyhistory.org/modernizing-america/fighting-for-social-reform/ida-b-wells/).

13 "A Legal Brief for Ida B. Wells' Lawsuit against Chesapeake, Ohio, and Southwestern Railroad Company before the State Supreme Court, 1885." *A Legal Brief for Ida B. Wells' Lawsuit against Chesapeake, Ohio, and Southwestern Railroad Company before the State Supreme Court, 1885.* | DPLA, [dp.la/primary-source-sets/ida-b-wells-and-anti-lynching-activism/sources/1113](https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/ida-b-wells-and-anti-lynching-activism/sources/1113).



## Ida publishes anti-lynching articles, her newspaper gets burned down:

While working as a teacher, Ida joined a lyceum— a club for intellectual and literary discussion—founded by Black teachers. Club meetings ended with readings from a newspaper called the *Evening Star*. When the editor of the paper moved away, Ida took over his duties. She was then invited to write articles for a local religious newspaper, *Living Way*. Despite having no training in journalism, readers enjoyed her clear, straightforward writing style. An article she wrote describing her lawsuit against the railroad became reprinted in multiple newspapers around the country. Before long, she was contributing to ten newspapers around the USA! In 1889 she was elected secretary of the National Press Association, and became co-owner and editor of the *Memphis Free Speech* and *Headlight* newspapers.<sup>14</sup> Although few female reporters had much influence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ida – or Iola, the name she wrote under – was called the “Princess of the Press.”<sup>15</sup>

Wells' anti-lynching commentaries in the *Free Speech* had been building, particularly with respect to lynchings and imprisonment of black men suspected of raping white women. A story broke on January 16, 1892, in the *Cleveland Gazette*, describing a wrongful conviction for a sexual affair between a married white woman, Julia Underwood, and a single black man, William Offet. Offet was convicted of rape and served four years of a 15-year sentence, despite his sworn denial of rape. Two years later she confessed to her husband, Rev. Isaac T. Underwood, that she had lied about the rape allegations. Rev. Underwood worked diligently to get Offet out of the penitentiary, and as a result Offet was released and subsequently pardoned by Ohio's Governor.<sup>16</sup>

On May 21, 1892, Wells published an editorial in the *Free Speech* refuting what she called "that old threadbare lie that negro men rape white women. If southern men are not careful, a conclusion might be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women."<sup>17</sup>

Four days later, on May 25, *The Daily Commercial* published a threat: "The fact that a black scoundrel [Ida B. Wells] is allowed to live and utter such loathsome and repulsive calumnies is a volume of evidence as to the wonderful patience of Southern Whites. But we've had enough of it." *The Evening Scimitar* copied the story that same day, but, more specifically raised the threat: "Patience under such circumstances is not a virtue. If the Negroes themselves do not apply the remedy without delay it will be the duty of those whom he has attacked to tie the wretch who utters these calumnies to a stake at the intersection of Main and Madison Sts., brand him in the forehead with a hot iron and perform upon him a surgical operation with a pair of tailor's shears."<sup>18</sup>

A white mob ransacked the *Free Speech* office, destroying the building and its contents.<sup>19</sup> Wells, who had been out of town, never returned to Memphis.<sup>20</sup>

14 *Ida B Wells Timeline*, Have Fun With History, 4 July 2023, [www.havefunwithhistory.com/ida-b-wells-timeline/](http://www.havefunwithhistory.com/ida-b-wells-timeline/).

15 Fraedrich, Megan. "12 Facts You Didn't Know about Ida B. Wells." *Cricket Media, Inc.*, 17 Feb. 2023, [cricketmedia.com/blog/12-facts-you-didnt-know-about-ida-b-wells/#:~:text=12%20Facts%20You%20Didn%2E%80%99t%20Know%20About%20Ida%20B.,%E2%80%9CThe%20Princess%20of%20the%20Press.%E2%80%9D%20...%20More%20items.](https://cricketmedia.com/blog/12-facts-you-didnt-know-about-ida-b-wells/#:~:text=12%20Facts%20You%20Didn%2E%80%99t%20Know%20About%20Ida%20B.,%E2%80%9CThe%20Princess%20of%20the%20Press.%E2%80%9D%20...%20More%20items.)

16 "Horrible but True". *Cleveland Gazette*. Vol. 9, no. 23. January 16, 1892. p. 1 – via Ohio Historical Society.

17 Wormser, Richard. "The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow – Jim Crow Stories: Ida B. Wells Forced Out of Memphis (1892)". *www.thirteen.org*. WNET. Retrieved November 27, 2018. p. 1

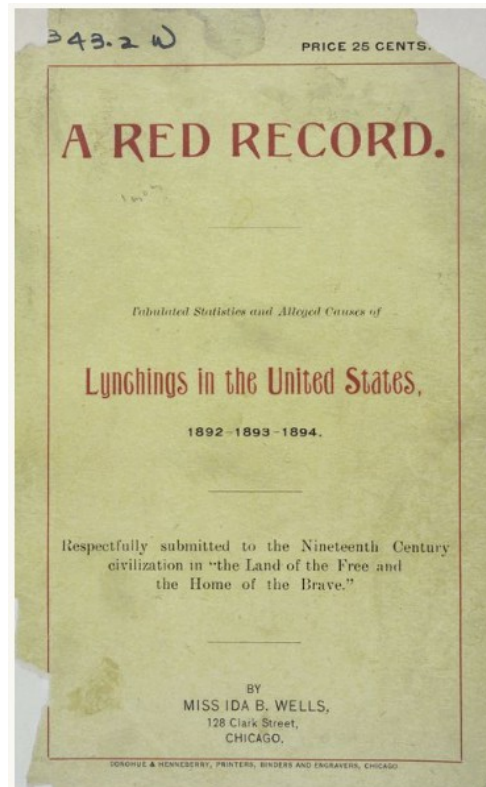
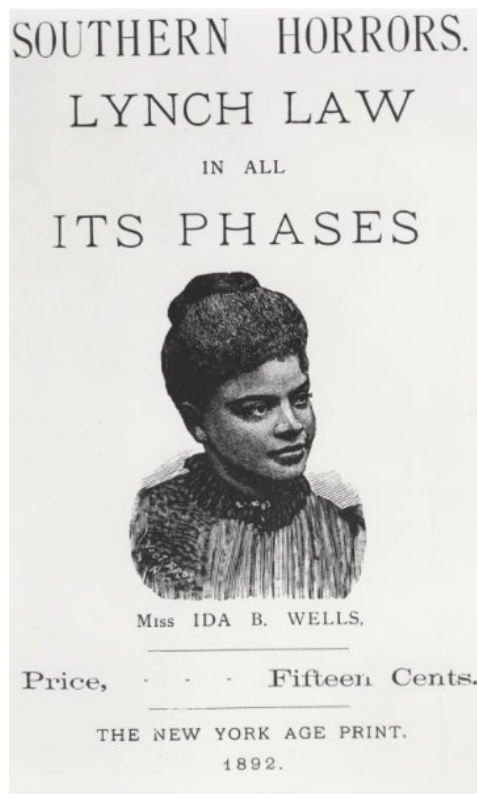
18 Wells, Ida B. (1892). *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*. New York: New York Age Print. Archived from the original on January 8, 2021. Retrieved August 21, 2020 – via Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library. p. 35

19 Staples, Brent (July 10, 2021). "How the White Press Wrote Off Black America". *The New York Times*.

20 Wells, Ida B. (1892). *Southern Horrors*....

## Outspoken anti-lynching activist:

In October 1892, Wells published her first pamphlet, “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases”, followed by “A Red Record” in 1895. *A Red Record* exposed the practice of lynching as a tactic designed to maintain white supremacy and limit African American opportunities for economic, social, and political power. Wells addressed and dismantled white southerners’ typical justifications for lynching, which included alleged threats of “race riots,” the chaos that would result from “Negro rule” should African Americans be allowed to exercise their fifteenth amendment right to vote, and black criminality, specifically the rape of white women. In *A Red Record*, Wells collected and published the newspaper accounts of hundreds of lynchings across the southern states which occurred from 1892-1894 along with their alleged crimes. Wells expands on the raw statistics with accounts of specific incidents in which legal due process was denied, families and individuals were targeted arbitrarily, and innocent people were killed.<sup>21</sup> Wells continued to travel and give speeches for decades to come.



“The mob spirit has grown with the increasing intelligence of the Afro-American....

Those who commit the murders write the reports....

The Afro-American is not a bestial race. If this work can contribute in any way towards proving this, and at the same time arouse the conscience of the American people to demand justice for every citizen, and punishment by law for the lawless, I shall feel I have done my race a service. Other considerations are of minor importance.”

– *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* by Ida B. Wells, 1892

<sup>21</sup> The Cover Page for *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892-1893-1894* by Ida B. Wells., Digital Public Library of America, [dp.la/primary-source-sets/ida-b-wells-and-anti-lynching-activism/sources/1116](https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/ida-b-wells-and-anti-lynching-activism/sources/1116). Accessed 23 Nov. 2023.

“... During the last ten years a new statute has been added to the 'unwritten law.' This statute proclaims that for certain crimes or alleged crimes no negro shall be allowed a trial; that no white woman shall be compelled to charge an assault under oath or to submit any such charge to the investigation of a court of law. The result is that many men have been put to death whose innocence was afterward established; and to-day, under this reign of the 'unwritten law,' no colored man, no matter what his reputation, is safe from lynching if a white woman, no matter what her standing or motive, cares to charge him with insult or assault....

The nineteenth century lynching mob cuts off ears, toes, and fingers, strips off flesh, and distributes portions of the body as souvenirs among the crowd.”

– Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Lynch Law in America* (1900)

On Aug. 7, 1930, Lawrence Beitler took what would become the most iconic photograph of lynching in America. Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith were lynched in the town center of Marion, IN for allegedly murdering a white factory worker, Claude Deeter, and raping his companion, Mary Ball, but the case was never solved. I included this graphic photo in honor and with respect to Ms. Wells-Barnett, and in sorrow for those who were persecuted in such terrible ways.



“Although lynchings have steadily increased in number and barbarity during the last twenty years, there has been no single effort put forth by the many moral and philanthropic forces of the country to put a stop to this wholesale slaughter.”

– Speech given in Chicago, IL, 1900

22 Photo Credit: Lawrence Beitler/Bettmann/Corbis: <https://www.npr.org/2010/08/06/129025516/strange-fruit-anniversary-of-a-lynching>

## **Wells co-founds the NAACP, helps birth the civil rights movement:**

Ms. Wells, who became Wells-Barnett after marrying Ferdinand Barnett in 1895, went on to co-found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, then become an outspoken advocate for women's' suffrage (right to vote) for many years to come. Although Ida cut ties with the NAACP because she felt, in its infancy, it lacked action-based initiatives,<sup>23</sup> over the decades the NAACP went on to serve a primary role in ending arbitrary voting restrictions, putting a stop to lynching, ending Jim Crow laws, and getting the Civil Rights Act passed.<sup>24</sup>

The NAACP began to see national recognition thanks to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. When it became clear racial discrimination was rampant within virtually of her husband's New Deal job programs, Eleanor pressured him for remedies. In 1934 she openly lobbied for passage of the federal anti-lynching bill that the president privately supported but could not politically endorse. Despite the subsequent failure of the Senate to pass such legislation, Eleanor succeeded in arranging a meeting between her husband and then-NAACP president Walter White to discuss anti-lynching and other pertinent calls for civil rights legislation.

During WWII, approximately 2.5 million African Americans registered for the draft, and 1 million of them subsequently served. Initially, African American soldiers, who served in segregated units, had been used as support troops and were not sent into combat. By the end of the war, however, manpower needs resulted in African American recruits serving in the infantry and flying planes. The Tuskegee Institute in Alabama had instituted a civilian pilot training program for aspiring African American pilots. When the war began, the Department of War absorbed the program and adapted it to train combat pilots. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt demonstrated both her commitment to African Americans and the war effort by visiting Tuskegee in 1941. To encourage the military to give the airmen a chance to serve in actual combat, she insisted on taking a ride in a plane flown by an African American pilot to demonstrate their skill. When the Tuskegee Airmen did get their opportunity to serve in combat, they did so with distinction.

Later President Truman directly addressed several of the NAACP's concerns within his "Fair Deal" program, and in 1946 he commissioned a Presidential Committee on Civil Rights to investigate racial discrimination in the United States. In 1948 he desegregated the armed forces.

Until 1954, racial segregation in education was legal nationally, and required in seventeen states. Thurgood Marshall, then chief counsel for the NAACP, successfully argued the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* of Topeka, Kansas before the U.S. Supreme Court. Marshall showed that the practice of segregation in public schools made African American students feel inferior. Even if the facilities provided were equal in nature, the Court noted in its decision, the fact that some students were separated from others on the basis of their race made segregation unconstitutional. A year later, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered southern school systems to begin desegregation. Some school districts voluntarily integrated their schools. Others stubbornly resisted.

It soon became clear that enforcing *Brown v. the Board of Education* would require presidential intervention. In 1957, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, was forced to accept its first nine African American students, who became known as the Little Rock Nine. In response, Arkansas governor Orval Faubus called out the state National Guard to prevent the students from entering. A white mob ensued and harassed the students as they were turned away. Eisenhower then placed the Arkansas National Guard under federal control and sent the U.S. Army's 101<sup>st</sup> airborne unit to escort the students to and from school as well as from class to class. This was the first time since the end of Reconstruction that federal troops protected the rights of African Americans in the South.

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23 "Ida B. Wells" *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, [www.nps.gov/people/idabwells.htm#:~:text=Though%20she%20is%20considered%20a,Alpha%20Suffrage%20Club%20in%20Chicago](http://www.nps.gov/people/idabwells.htm#:~:text=Though%20she%20is%20considered%20a,Alpha%20Suffrage%20Club%20in%20Chicago). Accessed 4 Dec. 2023.

24 *Our History*, NAACP, 11 May 2021, [naacp.org/about/our-history#:~:text=Civil%20Rights%20Era&text=Board%20of%20Education%20\(1954\)%2C,Voting%20Rights%20Act%20of%201965](http://naacp.org/about/our-history#:~:text=Civil%20Rights%20Era&text=Board%20of%20Education%20(1954)%2C,Voting%20Rights%20Act%20of%201965).



Throughout the school year, the Little Rock Nine were insulted, harassed, and physically assaulted; nevertheless, they returned to school each day. At the end of the school year, the first African American student graduated from Central High. At the beginning of the 1958–1959 school year, Orval Faubus ordered all Little Rock’s public schools closed. In the opinion of White segregationists, keeping all students out of school was preferable to having them attend integrated schools. In 1959, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the school had to be reopened and that the process of desegregation had to proceed. A

Many White southern racists, frightened by challenges to the social order, responded with violence. When Little Rock’s Central High School desegregated, an irate Ku Klux Klansman from a neighboring community sent a letter to the members of the city’s school board in which he denounced them as Communists and threatened to kill them. White rage sometimes erupted into murder. In August 1955, both White and Black Americans were shocked by the brutality of the murder of Emmett Till. Till, a fourteen-year-old boy from Chicago, had been vacationing with relatives in Mississippi. While visiting a White-owned store, he had made a remark to the white woman behind the counter. A few days later, the husband and brother-in-law of the woman came to the home of Till’s relatives in the middle of the night and abducted the boy. Till’s beaten and mutilated body was found in a nearby river three days later. Till’s mother insisted on an open-casket funeral; she wished to use her son’s body to reveal the brutality of southern racism. The murder of a child who had been guilty of no more than a casual remark captured national attention, as did the acquittal of the two men who admitted killing him.

One of those inspired by Till’s death was Rosa Parks, an NAACP member from Montgomery, Alabama, who became the face of the 1955–1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott. City ordinances in Montgomery segregated the city’s buses, forcing African American passengers to ride in the back section. They had to enter through the rear of the bus, could not share seats with white passengers, and, if the front of the bus was full and a White passenger requested an African American’s seat, had to relinquish their place to the white rider. The bus company also refused to hire African American drivers even though most of the people who rode the buses were Black.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white man, and the Montgomery police arrested her. After being bailed out of jail, following Ida’s lead, she decided to fight the laws requiring segregation in court. To support her, the Women’s Political Council, a group of African American female activists, organized a boycott of Montgomery’s buses. News of the boycott spread through newspaper notices and by word of mouth; ministers rallied their congregations to support the Women’s Political Council. Their efforts were successful, and forty thousand African American riders did not take the bus on December 5, the first day of the boycott.

Other African American leaders within the city embraced the boycott and maintained it beyond December 5, Rosa Parks’ court date. Among them was a young minister named Martin Luther King, Jr. For the next year, Black Montgomery residents avoided the city’s buses. Some organized carpools. Others paid for rides in African American-owned taxis, whose drivers reduced their fees. Most walked to and from school, work, and church for 381 days, the duration of the boycott. In June 1956, an Alabama federal court found the segregation ordinance unconstitutional. The city appealed, but the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the decision. The city’s buses were desegregated.<sup>25</sup>

The NAACP went on to play a prominent role in establishing the Civil Rights Act, which finally passed in 1964. The Act prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, gender, or national origin. Sometimes the seeds we sow do not blossom within our own lifetime. Ms. Ida Wells-Barnett should be remembered as one of the most prominent champions of the civil rights movement. She passed away on March 25, 1931.

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25 Corbett, Scott, et al. “U.S. History.” Ch. 26-28. *Free Textbooks Online with No Catch*, OpenStax, [openstax.org/details/books/us-history](https://openstax.org/details/books/us-history). Accessed 4 Dec. 2023.

## Epilogue; a message to Palestine and Israel, and how it relates to Ida B. Wells:

Ida certainly lived a difficult, yet very admirable life. It is extremely sad, however, because she should not have had to fight these fights in the first place. She should have just gotten to be a school teacher – and lived a joyful and rewarding life in doing so, if that is what she wanted to do.

That is what we all deserve – a chance at happiness. Ultimately we are here to love and help each other, but for too many millennia there have been *far too many people with far too much power* who have steered us in the *wrong directions* – directions which harm our neighbors instead of help them – whether as individuals – or *as nations*.

Instead of producing something of value to help themselves and help their neighbor, they choose to attack their neighbor and take from them.

I have a lot of sympathy and sorrow for the displacement of Palestinian people in 1948, just as I have sympathy and sorrow for Jewish people who more than anything want live in their homelands in safety and in peace. I don't necessarily believe that what was done in 1948 was right, but at some point on this planet, we need to seek to not make the same mistakes that others have made. We must rise above and heal. We do not need to fight the wars of our ancestors.

But how does Ida's story, and the centuries-long fight for civil rights here in the United States, relate to Palestine and Israel? Please bear with me – this is going to be an unexpected connection: Ida B. Wells sued the railroad using the *civil law* system (as opposed to the *criminal law* system). The civil law system can be used to sue the government when the government does wrong, or private individuals when individuals (or businesses) do wrong. The US civil law system largely traces its roots back to the story of Jesus as told in John Chapter 8 (Holy Bible), which (paraphrased) reads, “**The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now, what do you say?’... [T]hey kept on questioning him. He said, ‘If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her. None of them did.’**” When religious zealots were about to murder a woman because they believed God told them to, Jesus injected *reason* into the conversation just long enough to make them *think* – and *saved her life!* Civil law is about challenging injustices against human rights – often injustices that are found within the criminal law system. Perhaps that is what is needed throughout Israel and Palestinian regions – a court system that the people can petition to find redress to prevent government harm: a court system which upholds civil rights.

After Jesus was killed, his followers were rounded up and killed by the Roman government! Beginning around 100 CE, Roman emperors tried to stifle the Christian faith with prohibitions, extreme torture, and monstrous methods of execution. In the 250s Roman subjects were compelled to sacrifice to Roman gods or face imprisonment and execution. This violated Christians' beliefs because the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was done as a “final sacrifice” – humans were no longer supposed to sacrifice animals to “atone for their sins” or “appease the gods”. As a result, in 303 the emperors Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius issued a series of edicts rescinding Christians' legal rights and demanding that they comply with traditional religious practices. The “Diocletianic persecutions” as they became to be called were most severe persecutions of early Christians in the Roman Empire.<sup>26 27</sup>

Soon after, in 325 CE, Emperor Constantine ordered the creation of the First Council of Nicaea. The Council was charged with establishing statements of orthodox belief to which all Christians would follow. Within the orthodoxy they set forth, the Church instituted the Holy Bible as their shared scriptural doctrine. Although the Bible preserved remarkable and inspiring stories, such as the aforementioned story of Jesus, it also contained verses which did not match the spirit of Jesus's teachings. For example Genesis 9:20–27, the story of

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26 Gaddis, Michael (2005). *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*. p. 29. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press. ISBN 0-520-24104-5.

27 Philip F. Esler, ed. (2000). *The Early Christian World, Vol.2*. Routledge. pp. 827–829. ISBN 978-0-415-16497-9.



Ham and Shem, was used to justify the enslavement of people of color, and Leviticus 20:13 was used to justify murdering homosexuals. For centuries, Europeans were forced to live under strict Biblical law, and were tortured or murdered if we disobeyed or spoke out. Political dissenters were murdered.

It was not until the Reformation, which began in 1519, that the theocracy (government which enforces religion) became challenged by revolutionaries. For hundreds of years, wars broke out between Catholics and “Protest”ants – or people who *protested* against unjust government. In time, however, Protestantism became hijacked by corrupt kings, who used the religion to attack so-called “non-believers”. Since then, as a culture the US tends to have two types of people:

1. people who learn about history, and try to move the country toward upholding civil rights;
2. people who are trying to enforce their religious views onto others through the law system.

You, Palestinians and Israelites, have been put into similar situations of oppression and fear, wherein religion is being used to steer nations into the direction of *harm* instead of *safety*, *war* instead of *peace*, *contempt* instead of *compassion*, *superstition* instead of *reason*.

- Many Palestinians argue that they are being subjugated by the State of Israel (which is the reason Palestine has repeatedly attacked them). Palestinians do not have equal rights, and are under a form of apartheid; they are subjugated. Palestinians want civil rights.
- The State of Israel has strong legal protections for women and LGBT+ people. Many Israelites are concerned because 97% of the Palestinian population is Muslim<sup>28</sup> and enforces sharia, a theocratic law system (voted in using the democratic process) used to murder LGBT+ people and apostates (people who try to leave the religion), and subjugate women. When people talk about “Freeing Palestine from the river to the sea”, Israelites are terrified that their descendants could become forced to live beneath sharia, a dogmatic system which violates human rights. Israelites want civil rights.

Palestinians want civil rights.

Israelites want civil rights.

Ida B. Wells wanted civil rights.

I am drawing this connection because I assume that when you hear about the United States, you are only exposed to the imperial arm of our country. You do not hear stories about our great civil rights heroes like Ida Wells or Dr. Martin Luther King, jr. These are the people who represent the America that many of us believe in. Obviously we do not always have leaders who uphold these values, and that is both sad and shameful. Many of us are, however, working on it.

*It is time to end the cycle of violence. Israel and Palestine. Seek peace together in an agreement that honors civil rights for all people. All our ancestors have suffered, but they also gave us the tools and the wisdom to heal. It is up to us to use them, and to help each other in doing so.*

“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” – Dr. Martin Luther King, jr.

“The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written, as with a sunbeam, in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of the Divinity itself, and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.” – Alexander Hamilton, *The Farmer Refuted* (1775)

“For the whole law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love thy neighbor as thyself.”

– Galatians 5:14, Holy Bible

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28 *Who Are the Palestinians?*, Palestinian Children’s Relief Fund, [www.pcrf.net/information-you-should-know/who-are-the-palestinians.html](http://www.pcrf.net/information-you-should-know/who-are-the-palestinians.html).