

VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE RATING  
ACTIVITY 9: IDA B. WELLS

**Directions:** Decide how well you and your group know each of the words/phrases below by checking your knowledge for each. Put each group member's name in the proper category. Once you have rated a word/phrase, whoever knows the definition must share that knowledge with the rest of the group. Finally, use a dictionary to confirm and/or enrich the group's understanding of the word/phrase.

<b>Word</b>	<b>Can Define/Use It</b>	<b>Heard It/Seen It</b>	<b>Don't Know It</b>	<b>Definition</b>
comply				
segregated				
file suit				
crusade				
lynching				
stridently				
radical				
oppression				
menace				
persecution				
disenfranchisement				
intolerance				
sentiment				
instigate				
indiscriminate				

## ACTIVITY NINE: IDA B. WELLS

### TEACHER DEBRIEFING SHEET

#### Discussion Questions:

1. What is lynching? Why do you think so many African-Americans were lynched at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What solutions did Ida B. Wells propose to the problems facing African-Americans in the early 1900s?
3. What did it mean to be “too radical” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? How is that similar to or different from what it means to be “too radical” today? Why might a newly formed organization choose not to include a “radical” among its leadership?
4. How did Ida Wells use her journalistic skills to help African-Americans? What role can journalists play in effecting social change?
5. From Ida B. Wells’ point of view, what are the advantages and disadvantages of a diversity of people and ideas in the United States?

#### Task:

Pretend that Ida B. Wells has traveled to the present to try to get a job at a major newspaper to write a series of articles about civil rights today. Create a dramatic presentation in which Ida B. Wells interviews with the editorial board of the newspaper. During the interview, Wells must share headlines for at least three articles she hopes to write.

#### Task Evaluation Criteria:

- Interview conveys information about Ida B. Wells’ lifelong activism as a crusading journalist.
- During the interview, Ida B. Wells shares headlines for at least three articles she hopes to write. Headlines cover a variety of modern-day civil rights issues; each headline includes the who, what, when, where, why, and how of each story.
- Each headline clearly communicates what Ida B. Wells’ opinion would be on modern-day civil rights.
- In order to bring the characters in the interview to life, presentation makes use of relevant costumes and props as well as vocal expression, gesture, facial expression, timing, and action.
- Presentation addresses the advantages and disadvantages of diversity in the 1920s from the point of view of Ida B. Wells.

#### Extension Questions:

1. What were Jim Crow laws and why did they exist?
2. Describe Ida B. Wells’ tactics in her crusade against lynching.
3. Do you think Ida B. Wells supported Marcus Garvey’s ideas? Why or why not?
4. What recourse do citizens have when their government fails to protect them?
5. Was Ida B. Wells a muckraker? Why or why not?
6. Compare and contrast William Du Bois’ and Ida B. Wells’ philosophies.
7. Why do you think the Ku Klux Klan had so many followers in the 1920s?
8. Why were so many people able to get away with the crime of lynching in the late 1800s and early 1900s?
9. What do you think contributed to the decline in the number of lynchings over the first half of the 1900s?
10. How did Ida B. Wells’ experiences contribute to her beliefs?

## ACTIVITY NINE: IDA B. WELLS

### ACTIVITY CARD

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the United States underwent significant changes. Cities grew at a rapid rate as the country shifted from a rural- to an urban-based society. Immigrants flooded the new urban centers, changing the composition of the United States from primarily Anglo-Saxon and Protestant to a diverse mix of Italians, Greeks, Poles, Czechs, Russian, and a plenitude of others. Many of the newcomers had non-Protestant beliefs; some had radical political notions. A massive migration of African Americans to northern cities created an even greater surge of diversity in urban centers. Like immigrants from foreign lands, these African Americans hoped for greater freedom and opportunity for themselves and their children.

As the 1920s dawned, many Americans reacted strongly to these changes. In the aftermath of World War I, prominent and powerful forces pushed for a return to “normalcy” – a return to traditional values and beliefs. In response to this atmosphere, Congress passed laws restricting the inflow of immigrants and the foreign ideas that came with them. Organized labor fell under attack as it became associated with radical political elements. People were concerned that the communist revolution birthed in Russia in 1917 would spread to the United States and steal the heart from the “American” way of life. Legislation and court rulings severely limited the influence of the labor movement.

The yearning for a return to traditional values and norms led to friction between old-stock Americans and newcomers. Out of this tension came intolerance. The Ku Klux Klan grew to unprecedented numbers. Lynchings were on the rise. Communists and anarchists were arrested, and in one instance forced on board a ship and sent to communist Russia. Racial tensions erupted as riots broke out in northern U.S. cities. Many people openly wondered how much diversity the United States could tolerate. Would the country become a place where diversity was accepted, even celebrated, or a nation that put up barriers to diverse people and ideas?

Directions: Read the Resource Cards and analyze the visuals. Discuss the following questions with your group:

1. What is lynching? Why do you think so many African-Americans were lynched at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What solutions did Ida B. Wells propose to the problems facing African-Americans in the early 1900s?
3. What did it mean to be “too radical” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? How is that similar to or different from what it means to be “too radical” today? Why might a newly formed organization choose not to include a “radical” among its leadership?
4. How did Ida B. Wells use her journalistic skills to help African-Americans? What role can journalists play in effecting social change?
5. From Ida B. Wells’ point of view, what are the advantages and disadvantages of a diversity of people and ideas in the United States?

**Task:** Pretend that Ida B. Wells has traveled to the present to try to get a job at a major newspaper to write a series of articles about civil rights today. Create a dramatic presentation in which Ida B. Wells interviews with the editorial board of the newspaper. During the interview, Wells must share headlines for at least three articles she hopes to write.

## **TASK EVALUATION CRITERIA**

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## ACTIVITY NINE: IDA B. WELLS

### RESOURCE CARD 1 OF 2



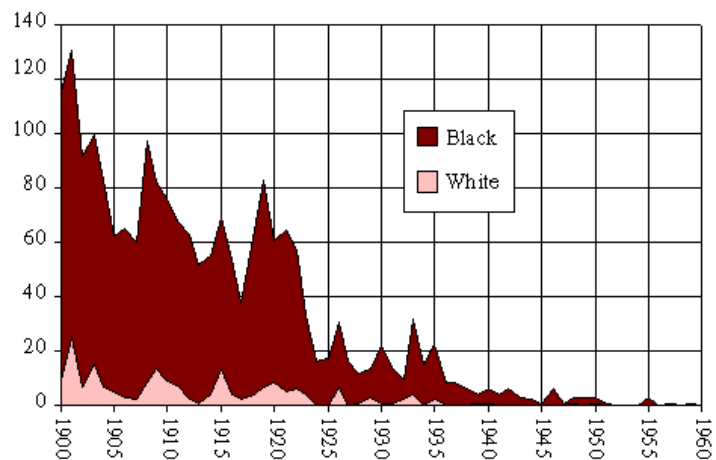
Ida Bell Wells was born to slaves in 1862 during the American Civil War. In her youth in Holly Springs, Mississippi slaves became free and her father, a carpenter, joined the ranks of African-American males who exercised newly granted political rights. During the brief period of Reconstruction, blacks took on political jobs, including becoming sheriffs, Aldermen, and even U.S. senators. Young Ida participated in these political happenings by reading the newspaper to her father and listening to lively political discussions. Wells' relatively happy and stable youth was cut short at age 16 when both her mother and father died of yellow fever. For the next several years, Wells supported five younger brothers and sisters by teaching in a rural school near Holly Springs.

Wells continued her teaching career in a small town near Memphis. Her train ride to school was routine until one day when Wells refused to comply with a new law that required blacks to sit in a segregated, or separate, car along with the smokers. Wells fought three white men as they dragged her from her regular rail car. She filed suit against the railroad, won her case in a lower court, and wrote an article challenging others to stand up for their rights. The article was well received and Wells began a career as a crusading journalist, writing boldly and passionately under the pen name "Iola" for hundreds of black-owned publications around the country. Eventually, she was known as the "Princess of the Press."

In the 1880s Wells' circumstances and outlook soured. Wells' victory over the railroad was overturned by a higher court. Laws requiring strict segregation were passed, and in state after state throughout the South blacks lost the right to vote. But for Wells, the worst came in 1892 when she learned that Tom Moss, a dear friend and good and decent man, had been lynched by a mob of masked white men. Tom Moss's murder changed Wells' life. She spoke out so stridently against lynching that she was run out of Memphis and had to resettle in New York.

From there, Wells began a one-woman crusade against lynching. Her research revealed that in the previous ten years, 728 black men and women had been killed by mobs. Some had been shot, others hung, still others burned or dismembered. She spoke eloquently on the issue on both sides of the Atlantic, using graphic language in her speeches and exhibiting agonizing photographs of some of the victims. Wells' courage in speaking out against lynching brought her considerable fame. Frederick Douglas, a leading black figure, acknowledged her contribution when he wrote, "Brave woman! You have done your people and mine a service that can neither be weighed or measured."

**Lynchings in the United States, by Race, 1900-1960**



## ACTIVITY NINE: IDA B. WELLS

### RESOURCE CARD 2 OF 2

In 1895 Ida Wells married and became Ida Wells-Barnett. She and her husband settled in Chicago, where she bore and raised four children. In addition to tending to her family responsibilities, Ida continued to work for justice. She helped found the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. Later, in 1909, Wells was one of only a few black women to be involved in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Wells was deeply disappointed when only one black was named an officer to this organization—William Du Bois. Wells was considered too radical to be a member of the guiding committee for the NAACP. As a result, she felt that she had been betrayed by the white founders who were supposed to be champions of civil rights.

Platform Adopted by the National Negro Committee (NAACP), 1909 (of which Ida B. Wells was a member)

*We denounce the ever-growing oppression of our 10,000,000 colored fellow citizens as the greatest menace that threatens the country. Often plundered of their just share of the public funds, robbed of nearly all part in the government, segregated by common carriers, some murdered with impunity, and all treated with open contempt by officials, they are held in some States in practical slavery to the white community. The systematic persecution of law-abiding citizens and their disfranchisement on account of their race alone is a crime that will ultimately drag down to an infamous end any nation that allows it to be practiced, and it bears most heavily on those poor white farmers and laborers whose economic position is most similar to that of the persecuted race...*

*As first and immediate steps toward remedying these national wrongs, so full of peril for the whites as well as the blacks of all sections, we demand of Congress and the Executive: (1) That the Constitution be strictly enforced and the civil rights guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment be secured impartially to all. (2) That there be equal educational opportunities for all and in all the States, and that public school expenditure be the same for the Negro and white child. (3) That in accordance with the Fifteenth Amendment the right of the Negro to the ballot on the same terms as other citizens be recognized in every part of the country.*

In the 1920s, conditions for African Americans worsened, but Wells continued her activism. During World War I blacks had served America in Europe to “make the world safe for democracy” but had returned to a society caught up in a frenzy of intolerance. Lynchings of blacks increased during the decade, and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was on the march again to spread anti-black sentiment. Race riots, often instigated by whites, erupted throughout the country. Wells responded to this intolerance by courageously speaking out for civil rights and protection just as she had in the past. Wells was often the first journalist to arrive on the scene of a riot to report the sometimes indiscriminate killing of African-American citizens. Wells continued her political activity until her death in 1931.

Ida Wells, Speech at the National Negro Conference, 1909

*Why is mob murder permitted by a Christian nation? What is the cause of this awful slaughter? ...*

*The only certain remedy is an appeal to law. Lawbreakers must be made to know that human life is sacred and that everyone is first a citizen of the United States and secondly a citizen of the state in which he belongs... The strong arm of the government must reach across state lines whenever unbridled lawlessness defies the law. Federal protection of American citizenship is the remedy for lynching ...*

*Time was when lynching was sectional (regional), but now it is national -- a blight upon our nation, mocking our laws and disgracing our Christianity. "With malice toward none but with charity for all" let us undertake the work of making the law effective and supreme upon every foot of American soil -- a shield to the innocent and to the guilty punishment swift and sure.*

## ACTIVITY NINE: IDA B. WELLS

### INDIVIDUAL REPORT

A vote for Truman electors is a direct order to our Congressmen and Senators from Mississippi to vote for passage of Truman's so-called civil rights program in the next Congress. This means the vicious, anti-poll tax, anti-lynching and anti-segregation proposals will become the law of the land and our way of life in the South will be gone forever.

In the box at left is the text from the 1948 sample ballot put out by the Mississippi Democratic Party; the comment was made about the race between Strom Thurmond and Harry Truman. If Ida B. Wells had been alive in 1948, how would she have responded to the Mississippi Democratic Party's statement? Be sure to discuss both the substance of her response and the method(s) she would have used to deliver that response. Justify your answer with specific evidence.

#### **Evaluation Criteria:**

- Response clearly states how (substance and method) Ida B. Wells would have responded to the Mississippi Democratic Party's statement.
- Response includes at least three justifications for your answer; justifications make use of specific examples and terminology from your Resource Cards.
- Response demonstrates a clear understanding of Ida B. Wells' philosophy and methods.
- Response addresses the advantages and disadvantages of diversity in the 1920s.