

Name _____ Date _____

Ida B. Wells

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b’

While working as a teacher in Memphis, Tennessee, Wells began contributing articles to newspapers. Among other topics, she wrote about the racial inequities plaguing the public school system. The school system retaliated by refusing to renew her teaching contract. Wells was now out of a teaching job, but in some ways, this liberated her. She bought a partnership in a Black-owned newspaper called The Memphis Free Speech and began working as a full-time journalist. Wells was happy in the thought that our influence was helpful and that I was doing the work I loved and had proved that I could make a living at it. Wells recalled in her autobiography, Crusade for Justice.

Then, in 1892, a horrific event occurred in Memphis. Three Black grocery store owners were murdered by an enraged White mob. The grocers were innocent of any crimes. However, the success of their grocery store had engendered anger among some White community members. The tragedy, Wells wrote, changed the whole course of my life.

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2. b'

An investigative journalist is a reporter who researches and writes about a certain topic in order to expose hidden truths about it. Ida B. Wells used investigative journalism to uncover truths about lynching in America.

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Lynching refers to the illegal mob murder of individuals in the name of supposed justice. In the post-Civil War United States, lynching was racially motivated. Black Americans, particularly in the South, lived under its constant threat, and many lost their lives to the foul practice. Wells knew that a large number of Americans weren't aware of the full extent of the situation, and she was determined to raise awareness about it.

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3. b'

Wells launched a full-scale investigation of lynchings throughout the South. She interviewed victims' loved ones and analyzed police records and newspaper reports. Her investigation revealed that lynchings were not about restoring justice in the face of crimes, as many claimed. Instead, they were about oppressing and terrorizing Black Americans.

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Shortly after Wells published these findings in an article, a White mob destroyed her newspaper office. Wells was visiting Philadelphia when this occurred, but the mob threatened to kill her if she set foot in Memphis again.

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Wells went to New York, but she didn't back down. She published a pamphlet called Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases. In it, she wrote, 'It is with no pleasure I have dipped my hands in the corruption here exposed. Somebody must show that the Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen upon me to do so. The awful death-roll that Judge Lynch is calling every week is appalling, not only because of the lives it takes, the rank cruelty and outrage to the victims, but because of the prejudice it fosters.'

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Wells ultimately settled in Chicago, where she continued her work. In 1895, she published *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States*. In addition to presenting facts and details about lynching, she issued a call for readers to engage in activism against it. Below is a quote from this work:

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We demand a fair trial by law for those accused of crime, and punishment by law after honest conviction. No maudlin sympathy for criminals is solicited, but we do ask that the law shall punish all alike. We earnestly desire those that control the forces which make public sentiment to join with us in the demand. Surely the humanitarian spirit of this country which reaches out to denounce the treatment of the Russian Jews, the Armenian Christians, the laboring poor of Europe, the Siberian exiles and the native women of India will not longer refuse to lift its voice on this subject.... Can you remain silent and inactive when such things are done in our own community and country? Is your duty to humanity in the United States less binding?

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