

US History

Week 2

Your Week at a Glance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> The Story of Ida B. Wells<input type="checkbox"/> America in World War I

Name

Teacher

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Story of Ida B. Wells

By Shannon Moreau
1999

Ida Bell Wells (1862-1931) was an African-American journalist, editor, suffragist, sociologist, and an early leader in the Civil Rights Movement. The following is a short biography of Ida B. Wells and the personal tragedy she experienced that pushed her to raise national awareness about violence and discrimination against African Americans. As you read, take notes on the examples of prejudice and discrimination that Wells experienced, and how she worked towards ending them.

[1] Ida B. Wells, the young journalist from Memphis, Tennessee, stepped out of the Natchez, Mississippi church with a smile on her face. She had just signed up twenty new subscribers for *Free Speech*, the black newspaper she owned with her business partner, J. L. Fleming. Since she had begun traveling up and down the Mississippi Valley seeking new subscriptions, the Memphis weekly's readership had more than doubled.

The minister of the church walked up to Ida with a newspaper in his hand. "Miss Wells, something bad's happened in Memphis."

A bolt of fear shot through Ida. Her hand shook slightly as she took the 10 March 1892 edition of the *Memphis Commercial*.

The night before, a mob of white men had seized three black grocery store owners, dragged them down to the railroad tracks, and shot them to death. One of the store owners, Thomas Moss, had begged for his life for the sake of his wife, daughter, and unborn child. When he realized he was going to die, he said, "Tell my people to go West—there is no justice for them here."



"Ida B. Wells Barnett" by Mary Garrity is in the public domain.

[5] Ida's heart nearly stopped. She looked up into the minister's solemn face.

"It can't be!" Ida's eyes welled with tears. "Thomas Moss and his wife are my good friends. I'm godmother to their daughter, Maurine. This can't have happened to him!"

Ida caught the next train back to Memphis. During the trip, she battled feelings of anger, shock, and grief. This was not the first time she had been touched by tragedy. Nor was it the first time she had experienced the injustices against blacks in the post-Civil War South.

Ida was born the daughter of slaves in Holly Springs, Mississippi, in 1862, three years before the end of the Civil War. After emancipation,¹ her father worked as a carpenter. He built the house in which he and his wife raised their eight children. As a child, Ida attended the elementary school at Rust College, which had been founded in 1866 by Methodist missionaries from the North.

Many white Southerners rebelled against citizenship for former slaves. Ida remembered hearing about midnight raids by the Ku Klux Klan, a terrorist group bent on maintaining white supremacy. Ida's mother used to pace the floor at night, waiting for her husband to come home from his political meetings.

- [10] In 1878 a yellow fever epidemic swept through Holly Springs. Both of Ida's parents and her baby brother perished. At age sixteen, she quit school to take care of her six brothers and sisters.

In 1883, when Ida was twenty-one, she packed up and moved herself and her two youngest sisters to Memphis, Tennessee, to live with a widowed aunt. She accepted a teaching position in a rural school in Woodstock and commuted to and from work by train. That same year the Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which prohibited segregation² in transportation and public places, was unconstitutional.³ Southern legislatures had already passed laws that barred blacks from voting. Now the way was paved for a rigid system of segregation, beginning with the railroads.

In May 1884, Ida was traveling from Memphis to Woodstock when the conductor approached her. "I can't take your ticket here," he told her. "You'll have to move to the smoking car."

"I have a first-class ticket," Ida replied. "This is my rightful seat."

The conductor disappeared. A few minutes later he returned with two baggage clerks. The three men dragged Ida from her seat while the white passengers clapped. Ida refused to go into the smoking car; instead she got off the train at the next station. Although she hired a lawyer and sued the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad for discrimination,⁴ she lost her case in 1887.

- [15] Now, riding from Natchez back to Memphis, Ida was about to face the third test in her life.

Ida arrived in Memphis too late to attend Thomas Moss's funeral, but she went straight to comfort his pregnant widow, Betty, and their daughter, Maurine. She later wrote: "I have no power to describe the feeling of horror that possessed every member of the race." Brutal killings of blacks in the South were on the rise, and they were going unpunished by the law.

"Betty," Ida said to the tearful widow, "I'll never forget the talks Thomas and I had when he delivered mail to the *Free Speech* every day. He believed that we should defend the cause of right and fight wrong wherever we saw it."

Ida fought injustice against blacks in the best way she knew how—with her pen. The first article she'd ever published had been about her incident with the railroad. Subsequent stories dealt with education and religion. She was now about to tackle the biggest issue of her career.

1. referring to the historical abolishment of slavery and freeing of slaves following the Civil War
2. the separation of races, classes, or ethnic groups
3. not according or consistent with the constitution; what is or is not deemed constitutional is dependent on the judgement of a certain group (i.e. the Supreme Court)
4. **Discrimination** (*noun*): the unjust or unfair treatment of people based upon race, gender, religion, age, etc.

The *Free Speech* published Ida's editorial. It said in part:

The city of Memphis has demonstrated that neither character nor standing avails the Negro if he dares to protect himself against the white man or become his rival.... There is therefore only one thing left that we can do; save our money and leave a town which will neither protect our lives and property, nor give us a fair trial in the courts, but takes us out and murders us in cold blood when accused by white persons.

- [20] After Betty Moss gave birth to a son, Thomas Moss Jr., the widow moved her family to Indiana. Many other black citizens were packing up and leaving Memphis as well. This exodus got the attention of the white businessmen and city officials. They were losing labor and the money of the black people. The daily papers printed editorials urging black citizens to stay. Ida countered with her own articles describing the new lives people were making for themselves in Oklahoma Territory.

Those who remained in Memphis boycotted the newly opened streetcar line. Two officials from the City Railway Company came to the *Free Speech* office and asked Ida to tell her people to ride the streetcars again. In her next article for the *Free Speech*, she told her readers to keep up the boycott.

Ida was trying to decide where she herself wanted to go. A few years before, she had met T. Thomas Fortune, a New York newspaper editor, at a press convention. Fortune wrote Ida and asked her to come look at New York City before she decided where to settle down. Ida had already planned to attend an African Methodist Episcopal conference in Philadelphia. From there she took a train east to visit New York.

Fortune met her at the train station. "Well, I've been trying for a long time to get you to New York," he said, "but now that you are here, I'm afraid you'll have to stay."

Ida said, "I don't understand what you mean."

- [25] "That ruckus you kicked up in Memphis. When I heard about it, I knew it had to be you because it sounded so like you."

Ida was totally bewildered. "What are you talking about?"

"Haven't you seen the morning newspaper?" Fortune asked.

"No."

He handed her a copy of the *New York Sun*.

- [30] A group of Memphis citizens had stormed the offices of the *Free Speech* during the night. They had destroyed all the equipment and run Ida's business partner, J. L. Fleming, out of town. They left a note among the ruins: anybody who tried to publish the paper again would be punished by death.

Alarmed, Ida sent a telegram to her lawyer to find out if her partner was safe. Friends sent letters and telegrams back to her. Fleming had escaped Memphis unharmed. Her friends begged her not to return, since white men with guns were watching the train stations and her house. They had orders to kill her on sight.

Ida B. Wells never went home. She stayed on in New York, then moved to Chicago where she married Ferdinand Barnett, a lawyer and journalist. Ida devoted the rest of her life to investigating, reporting, and lecturing on the growing numbers of lynchings⁵ of black citizens. She toured England twice and became famous in America and England for her anti-lynching crusade.

Her speeches raised the consciousness of the nation. Condemnation from the North as well as England forced Southerners first to justify lynching, then publicly to deplore it. Between 1893 and 1898, several Southern states passed anti-lynching laws.

The day that Ida B. Wells heard the terrible news about her friend Thomas Moss was a day that changed her life forever. Experience had taught her strength and courage. She needed both for her tireless and fearless work, telling the nation about crimes against black citizens and asking U.S. Courts to punish the perpetrators. Change came slowly. It wasn't until decades after her death in 1931 that lynchings of black people almost completely stopped. In 1942 a Gallup poll showed that a majority of Americans favored making lynching a federal crime. Ida launched the movement that changed public sentiment and led to the time when the atrocities would end. Personal tragedy inspired Ida B. Wells to work heroically to bring about justice for her people.

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5. an informal public execution, usually by a mob and often by hanging, in order to punish an accused person or to intimidate a minority group

Unit 3: “The Story of Ida B. Wells”

<https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/the-story-of-ida-b-wells>

1. Who was Ida B. Wells?
2. Why did Thomas Moss say “Tell my people to go West. There is no justice for them here.”?
3. How did the tragedy of losing her friend lead Ida B. Wells to change laws in the US?
4. Why was this not the “first time she had been touched by tragedy”?
5. What did the Civil Rights Act of 1875 accomplish?
6. Why might she have lost her court case against the railroad in 1887 despite the obvious discrimination she had faced?
7. How did Wells use her writing to combat injustice? Provide 2 concrete examples from the text.
8. What is a lynching? How did Wells use her platform to help raise awareness for this crime?

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To the Front Lines: America in World War I

By USHistory.org
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On July 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist, setting off a chain of events that would quickly culminate in the First World War. Despite this rapid development in Europe, the United States would not enter this war until April, 1917. The following text discusses American neutrality and isolationism leading up to the war, as well as how Americans helped win World War I. As you read, take notes on the events that eventually led to American entrance into World War I.

[1] Isolation was a long-held American tradition. Since the days of George Washington, Americans attempted to remain secluded,¹ protected by the mighty oceans on either side. When European conflicts erupted, as they frequently did, many in the United States claimed exceptionalism: America was different. Why get involved in Europe's self-destruction? When the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was killed in cold blood and his empire declared war on Serbia,² alliances forced most European countries to pick a side, igniting the most destructive war in human history until that point. But the initial reaction in the United States was the expectation to remain neutral.³ As a nation of immigrants, the United States would have difficulty picking a side. Despite the obvious ties to Britain based on history and language, there were many United States citizens who claimed Germany and Austria-Hungary as their motherlands. Support of either the Allies or the Central Powers⁴ might prove too divisive.⁵



"Two American soldiers run towards a bunker" by H.D. Girdwood is in the public domain.

1. **Secluded (adjective):** sheltered, private, or tucked away; undisturbed by outside forces
2. Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1863-1914) was the heir presumptive of the Austro-Hungarian throne. His assassination is considered the starting event of the first World War.
3. **Neutral (adjective):** impartial; not helping or supporting either side in a conflict
4. The Allied Powers were the countries that opposed the Central Powers in World War I and notably included: France, the British Empire, Russia, Italy (which was originally allied with the Central Powers), Serbia, Japan, and the United States. The Central Powers included Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire.
5. **Divisive (adjective):** tending to cause disagreement and conflict between people

In the early days of the war, as Britain and France struggled against Germany, American leaders decided it was in the national interest to continue trade with all sides as before. A neutral nation cannot impose an embargo⁶ on one side, continue trade with the other, and still retain its neutral status. In addition, American merchants and manufacturers feared that a boycott⁷ would cripple the economy. Great Britain, with its powerful navy, had different ideas. A major part of the British strategy was to impose a blockade⁸ on Germany. American trade with the Central Powers simply could not be permitted. The results of the blockade were astonishing. Trade with England and France more than tripled between 1914 and 1916, while trade with Germany was cut by over ninety percent.

With American trade becoming more and more lopsided⁹ toward the Allied cause, many feared that it was only a matter of time before the United States would be at war. The issue that propelled most American fence-sitters to side with the British was Germany's submarine warfare against Americans at sea.

The British, with the world's largest navy, had effectively shut down German maritime¹⁰ trade. Because there was no hope of ever having more ships than the British, the Germans felt that the submarine was their only key to survival. One German "unterseeboot" (undersea boat), or "U-boat," could secretly sink many battleships, only to slip away unseen. This practice would stop only if the British would lift their blockade.

Sinking the Lusitania and the Zimmermann Telegram

- [5] The isolationist American public had little concern if the British and Germans tangled on the high seas. The incident that changed everything was the sinking of the British ship Lusitania.

The Germans felt they had done their part to warn Americans about the danger of overseas travel. The German government purchased advertisement space in American newspapers warning that Americans who traveled on ships carrying war contraband¹¹ risked submarine attack. When the Lusitania departed New York, the Germans believed the massive passenger ship was loaded with munitions¹² in its cargo hold. On May 7, 1915, a German U-boat torpedoed the ship without warning, sending 1,198 passengers, including 128 Americans, to an icy grave. The Lusitania, as it turned out, was indeed carrying over 4 million rounds of ammunition.

President Wilson¹³ was enraged. Wilson's Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan,¹⁴ recommended a ban on American travel on any ships of nations at war. Wilson preferred a tougher line against the German Kaiser.¹⁵ He demanded an immediate end to submarine warfare, prompting Bryan to resign in protest. The Germans began a 2-year practice of pledging to cease submarine attacks, renegeing on that pledge, and issuing it again under U.S. protest.

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6. An embargo is an official ban on trade with a particular country.
 7. A boycott is the refusal to support an organization or service as a form of punishment or protest.
 8. A blockade is a means of sealing off a place to prevent goods or people from entering or leaving.
 9. **Lopsided** (*adjective*): crooked or askew
 10. of or related to the sea, especially in regards to trade and military activity
 11. Contraband are goods that have been banned and are thus imported or exported illegally.
 12. Munition is a term that refers to military weapons, ammunition, equipment, and stores.
 13. Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) served as the 28th President of the United States from 1913 until 1921. Wilson presided over American participation in WWI.
 14. William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) was an American public speaker and politician from Nebraska. He was also a great force in the populist wing of the Democratic Party.

Wilson had other reasons besides the Lusitania for leaning toward the Allied side. He greatly admired the British government, and democracy in any form was preferable to German authoritarianism.¹⁶ The historical ties with Britain seemed to draw the United States closer to the Allies.

Many Americans also felt a debt to France for their help in the American Revolution. Several hundred volunteers, appropriately named the Lafayette Escadrilles after the French general¹⁷ who served in the American Revolutionary War, volunteered to fight with the French in 1916. In November of that year, Wilson campaigned for re-election with a peace platform. “He kept us out of war,” read his campaign signs, and Americans narrowly returned him to the White House. But peace was not to be.

- [10] In February 1917, citing the unbalanced U.S. trade with the Allies, Germany announced a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. All vessels spotted in the war zone would be sunk immediately and without warning. Wilson responded by severing diplomatic relations with the German government.

Later that month, British intelligence intercepted the notorious¹⁸ Zimmermann Telegram. The German foreign minister Arthur Zimmermann sent a message proposing an alliance with Mexico in the event that the United States should enter the war. Zimmermann promised Mexico a return of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona — territories it had lost to the U.S. in 1848.

Relations between the U.S. and Mexico were already strained. Despite the recent souring between Mexico and its northern neighbor, the Mexican government declined the German offer. In a calculated move, Wilson released the captured telegram to the American press.

War Declared on Germany

A tempest¹⁹ of outrage followed. More and more Americans began to label Germany as the true villain in the war. When German submarines sank several American commercial ships in March, Wilson had an even stronger hand to play. On April 2, 1917, he addressed the Congress, citing a long list of grievances²⁰ against Germany. Four days later, by a wide margin in each house, Congress declared war on Germany, and the U.S. was plunged into, what was at the time, the bloodiest battle in history.

After two and a half years of isolationism, America entered the Great War. Unfortunately, the United States was developing a nasty pattern of entering major conflicts woefully²¹ unprepared.

- [15] When Congress declared war in April, the army had enough bullets for only two days of fighting. The army was small in numbers at only 200,000 soldiers. Two-fifths of these men were members of the National Guard, which had only recently been federalized.²² The type of warfare currently plaguing Europe was unlike any the world had ever seen.

15. “Kaiser” is the German word for “emperor” and refers specifically to either the German or Austrian emperor, or the head of the Holy Roman Empire. The German Kaiser at the time was Wilhelm II (1859-1941), the last German emperor and king of Prussia.

16. Authoritarianism is the enforcement or advocacy of strict obedience to authority at the price of personal freedom.

17. The Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834) was a French aristocrat and military officer and a close friend of key revolutionary figures such as George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson. He was also a major figure in the French Revolution of 1789 and the July Revolution of 1830.

18. **Notorious** (*adjective*): famous or well known, typically for some bad quality or deed

19. **Tempest** (*noun*): a violent, windy storm

20. **Grievance** (*noun*): a real or imagined wrong or other cause for complaint or protest

21. **Woefully** (*adverb*): depressingly; badly

The Western front, which ran through Belgium and France, had been in a virtual stalemate since the early years of the war. A system of trenches had been dug by each side. Machine-gun nests, barbed wire, and mines blocked the opposing side from capturing the enemy trench. Artillery shells, mortars,²³ flamethrowers, and poison gas were employed to no avail.

The defensive technology was simply better than the offensive technology. Even if an enemy trench was captured, the enemy would simply retreat into another one dug fifty yards behind. Each side would repeatedly send their soldiers “over the top” of the trenches into the no man’s land of almost certain death with very little territorial gain. Now young American men were sent to these killing fields.

Feeling a Draft

The first problem with entering the war was raising the necessary number of troops. Recruitment was of course the preferred method, but the needed numbers could not be reached with only volunteers. Conscription²⁴ was unavoidable, and Congress passed the Selective Service in May 1917 to enforce a draft.

All males between the ages of 21 and 30 were required to register for military service. The last time a draft had been used resulted in great rioting because wealthy people could purchase exemptions. This time, the draft was conducted by random lottery.

[20] By the end of the war, over four and a half million American men and 11,000 American women served in the armed forces. 400,000 African Americans were called to active duty. In all, two million Americans fought in the French trenches.

The first military measures adopted by the United States were on the seas. Joint Anglo-American operations were highly successful at stopping the dreaded submarine. Following the thinking that there is greater strength in numbers, the U.S. and Britain developed an elaborate convoy²⁵ system to protect vulnerable ships. In addition, mines were placed in many areas formerly dominated by German U-boats. The campaign²⁶ was so effective that not a single American soldier was lost on the high seas in transit to the Western front.

The American Expeditionary Force²⁷ began arriving in France in June 1917, but the original numbers were quite small. Time was necessary to inflate the ranks of the United States Army and to provide at least a basic training program.

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22. To federalize something is to approve of and bring it under the control of the central, or federal, government. In this case, this means that the National Guard, which is a reserve military force for the U.S. Army, were officially brought under federal control.
 23. a type of gun used for firing shells (technically called bombs) at high angles
 24. Conscription is compelled enlistment into the armed forces, such as a draft.
 25. A convoy is a group of ships or vehicles that travel together, typically accompanied by armed troops or warships for protection.
 26. In this context, “campaign” refers to a series of military operations intended to achieve a particular goal in a specific area.
 27. The American Expeditionary Force (AEF) was made up of the U.S. Armed Forces. They were sent to Europe under the command of General John J. Pershing in 1917.

When the Bolsheviks²⁸ took over Russia in 1917 in a domestic²⁹ revolution, Germany signed a peace treaty with the new government. The Germans could now afford to transfer many of their soldiers fighting in the East to the deadlocked Western front. The seemingly infinite supply of fresh American soldiers countered this potential advantage and was demoralizing to the Germans. Were it not for the fresh supply of incoming American troops, the war might have followed a very different path. The addition of the United States to the Allied effort was as elevating to the Allied morale as it was devastating to the German will.

Counting the Casualties

The new soldiers began arriving in great numbers in early 1918. The “doughboys,” as they were labeled by the French, were green³⁰ indeed. Many fell prey to the trappings of Paris nightlife while awaiting transfer to the front. African-American soldiers noted that their treatment by the French soldiers was better than their treatment by their white counterparts in the American army. Although the German army dropped tempting leaflets on the African-American troops promising a less-racist society if the Germans won, none took the offer seriously.

- [25] By the spring of 1918, the doughboys were seeing fast and furious action. A German offensive came within fifty miles of Paris, and American soldiers played a critical role in turning the tide at Chateau-Thierry and Belleau Wood. In September 1918, efforts were concentrated on dislodging German troops from the Meuse River.³¹ Finding success, the Allies chased the Germans into the trench-laden Argonne Forest,³² where America suffered heavy casualties.³³

But the will and resources of the German resistance were shattered. The army retreated, and on November 11, 1918, the German government agreed to an armistice.³⁴ The war was over. Over 14 million soldiers and civilians perished in the so-called Great War, including 112,000 Americans. Countless more were wounded.

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28. The Bolsheviks were the majority faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) and were also known as the “Reds,” especially during the Russian Civil War. The Bolsheviks were led by Soviet dictator Vladimir Lenin and made up the Communist Party, which controlled the Soviet Union.
 29. “Domestic” means internal or non-foreign; it is not a comment on the degree, significance, or violence of the revolution.
 30. **Green (adjective):** new, untrained, or immature
 31. The Meuse is a major European river, beginning in France, flowing through Belgium and the Netherlands, and emptying into the North Sea.
 32. The Battle of Argonne Forest (September 26, 1918 – November 11, 1918), also known as the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, was a major battle of the Allied offensive in World War I.
 33. Roughly 26,000 American casualties. Comparatively, Germany suffered about 28,000 in losses.
 34. An armistice is an agreement made by enemy sides to stop fighting, like a truce.

Contributions to the war effort were not confined to the battlefield. The entire American economy was mobilized to win the war. From planting extra vegetables to keeping the furnace turned off, American civilians provided extra food and fuel to the war effort. The United States government engaged in a massive propaganda³⁵ campaign to raise troops and money. Any opposition against this effort was stifled, prompting many to question whether American civil liberties were in jeopardy. In the end, the war was won, but peace was lost. The Treaty of Versailles,³⁶ presented by President Wilson, was eventually rejected by the Senate from U.S. ratification,³⁷ which prevented the U.S. from joining the League of Nations, unlike the countries that did ratify the treaty. Without the support of the United States, the League of Nations was unable to soften some of the more damaging effects of the treaty, such as worldwide economic crises between 1929 and 1933. The bitterness that swept Europe and America would prevent the securing of a just peace, imperiling³⁸ the next generation as well. Two dangerous decades of political isolationism followed, only to end in an ever more cataclysmic³⁹ war.

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35. Propaganda is information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, that is used to promote a political cause or point of view.
 36. The Treaty of Versailles was a peace treaty at the end of World War I, ending the war between Germany and the Allied Powers. It was signed exactly five years after Archduke Franz Ferdinand's death on June 28, 1919.
 37. Ratification is the act of signing or giving formal consent to a treaty, contract, legislation, etc. and making it officially valid.
 38. **Imperil** (*verb*): to put at risk of being harmed
 39. **Cataclysmic** (*adjective*): extremely violent

Unit 4: "To the Front Lines: America in WWI"

<https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/to-the-front-lines-america-in-world-war-i>

1. What started WWI in Europe?
2. Why did Americans practice "isolationism" for so long?
3. Why was the US hesitant to get involved in WWI?
4. What is a blockade? How did the British Blockade impact international trade?
5. Which issues led many Americans to take Britain's side in the war? Which of these issues/incidents led to US involvement in WWI?
6. Why was the sinking of the Lusitania such a complex event?
7. What is the Selective Service? Why was it instituted?
8. Besides their efforts on the battlefield, what other contributions to the war effort did Americans make?