FOREWORD
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I suspect many readers may come to this book seeking something it cannot readily give. It remains unfinished, ending abruptly mid-narrative. At its conclusion, Wells is in the midst of a complicated account involving fundraising by the American Citizenship Federation, an invitation for Robert Sengstacke Abbott (the famous publisher of the *Chicago Defender*) to dine at the Drake Hotel, and the invitation's withdrawal for fear hotel staff would discriminate against him. The book's final sentences read, "In a few days an item appeared in the *Tribune* stating that the two-million-dollar drive had been called off. I also received some beautiful letters from members of the board of directors thanking us for calling attention to what was go . . . ," and there it ends. Midstory, midsentence, midword. What could be more maddening? A century beyond the era of Ida B. Wells, we who so admire her, who so aspire to her legacy of politically transformative writing and organizing, are left grasping for something she wasn't able to give us. In the corpus of memoirs and autobiographies left behind by luminaries of her caliber, this one stands apart. Largely missing are general observations about what constitutes a good life, admonitions about where and how to direct our energies toward achieving social change, and grandiose statements about the nature of blackness, or of womanhood, or of the American democratic project.

Instead, fittingly, Ida B. Wells has given us a record of her work. Indeed, the above passage about the Drake Hotel incident is typical. This is a woman who changed the world through meticulous fact-finding, who often established a record where there was none, using

careful documentation when others were satisfied with hearsay or outright lies. Her autobiography is no different. Chapter by chapter, she spells out in detail all the messy facts that others would just as soon omit. Much of the book is dedicated to her travels throughout the United Kingdom:

> I spoke in Pembroke Chapel the first Sunday night of my stay in Liverpool. The pastor of the church, Rev. C. F. Aked, presided. Last Sunday afternoon to an audience of fifteen hundred men in the Congregational church. Sunday night at the Unitarian church, Rev. R. A. Armstrong presided. The Lord Mayor of Liverpool is a member of this congregation and consented to preside at my meeting but was prevented at the last minute from doing so.

Roughly 140 pages of *Crusade for Justice* are filled with these details—the name of the meeting, the name of the city, the train she took to get there, the people who were the hosts, the newspaper that reported the convening, the discord or unplanned adjustments. For the reader eager to learn more about Ida B. Wells, legendary anti-lynching advocate, revolutionary, and iconic champion of justice, these lengthy accounts may be discouraging. But this is the book Wells set out to write. In the preface she tells of meeting a young woman who asked about her work and of realizing "there was no record from which she could inform herself. I then promised to set it down in writing so those of her generation could know how the agitation against the lynching evil began, and the debt of gratitude we owe to the English people for their splendid help in that movement."

In the very minutiae of her narrative, Wells is teaching us something necessary yet easily forgotten about the work of social change. A project of this magnitude—battling against the frequent extrajudicial killing of Black people and the widespread casual view of such murder as socially acceptable—requires more than platitudes and easy pronouncements about hope. It is as mundane as it is taxing. It involves endless train rides alone to places where you are not wanted, figuring out how to breast-feed your child in a back room of a conference ("I honestly believe that I am the only woman in the United States who ever traveled throughout the country

with a nursing baby to make political speeches"), and navigating the petty disputes and flaws of the people who are supposed to be your allies.

Rarely is this the story of political history we receive; our understanding overflows with larger-than-life tales of monumental men who, we are left to assume, changed the course of human civilization through sheer willpower. This book is not that. This is a book about a woman who sometimes did not have child care, who went on the road when she would rather have stayed home, who constantly fretted over fundraising, who sometimes offended people and sometimes was offended, who got seasick, who was told she would be nominated for a committee only to find out that W. E. B. Du Bois had removed her name from the roll without bothering to consult anyone. Ida B. Wells was a muckraker, and this is part of the muck.

Certainly, if we make our way between the dates and the dispatches, the trappings of a more orthodox autobiography are there. And there is so much that was remarkable about Ida B. Wells. More than a decade before *Plessy v. Ferguson*, she refused to move from a Whites-only train car, bit the conductor's hand when he tried to forcibly remove her, and subsequently sued the railroad—a case that went to the state supreme court. She was a public intellectual by calling, beginning her work as an editor because she had "an instinctive feeling that the people who had little or no school training should have something coming into their homes weekly which dealt with their problems in a simple, helpful way." At a time when the YMCA and the settlement house movement failed to serve Black people, especially those newly arrived in Chicago from the South during the Great Migration, she cofounded a reading room and social center where newcomers could find employment; get counseling, clothes, and housing assistance; and have a safe place to read and to establish social networks.

The anti-lynching work for which Wells is most famous was hardly an abstract exercise. She was personally traumatized by the same violent White supremacist fervor that motivated her writing. In 1892 the lynching of a Black grocery store owner and his two

employees stunned the people of Memphis. In response the *Free Speech*, the newspaper Wells co-owned, urged Black people to flee Memphis, "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." Wells wrote missives encouraging Black residents to move west or, if they remained, to stop spending money in the city and to stop riding the streetcars.

For this Wells faced threats against her own life. While she was away from home, a mob destroyed the office of the *Free Speech* and ruined all the newspaper's equipment, driving her business partner out of town. A warning appeared in the local White newspaper that "anyone trying to publish the paper again [would] be punished with death." Wells's loved ones wrote to alert her that her home was being watched by men who had pledged to kill her the moment she returned. Wells determined to carry on with as much vigor as ever. "They had made me an exile and threatened my life for hinting at the truth. I felt that I owed it to myself and my race to tell the whole truth."

It was this principle that guided her in the years to come, even when telling less than the whole truth would have been safer and more convenient. Wells was critical of the widely beloved White Christian leaders of the temperance movement, considered moral exemplars in their time, because of what she saw as their approval of lynching and their claims that the practice was a reasonable response to the sexual threat that Black men posed to White women. During the fervor over the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, she worked with Frederick Douglass to publish a pamphlet criticizing the fair's exclusion of Black Americans and circulated ten thousand copies to fair attendees from around the globe. She chastised Booker T. Washington for "telling chicken-stealing stories on his own people in order to amuse his audiences and get money for Tuskegee." She directly questioned Susan B. Anthony's tactic of excluding Black women from the suffrage movement in order to appease White southerners.

This dedication to telling the truth earned Wells plenty of challenges. One rival editor sent investigators to every town across the

South where Wells had lived seeking information that could be used to disparage her character. She was publicly censured for choosing to marry, which was seen as a tacit abandonment of her work. Like many Black women who came before her and who have come since, she seemed so capable and so exceptional that those around her had no qualms about expecting superhuman feats from a very human person. In 1909 a Black man was brutally lynched in Cairo, Illinois—hanged, shot more than five hundred times, dragged through the streets for the amusement of onlookers, decapitated, and burned. Wells, by then the mother of four young children, at first refused to go and investigate. Her ten-year-old son awakened her in the middle of the night, saying her husband wanted her to get on the train. "Mother," he said, "if you don't go nobody else will." Wells traveled to Cairo, unearthed the details of the incident, and appeared before the governor as "the official representative of all the black people of Illinois" to argue that the sheriff who permitted the gruesome event to happen should not be reinstated. She spoke against the sheriff's attorney, who was a state senator, and stood toe-to-toe with the state's attorney. With no formal legal training, she won the case.

Despite all this, when Wells was hospitalized and bedridden for several weeks in 1920, she felt dissatisfied when reflecting on her life. "All at once the realization came to me that I had nothing to show for all those years of toil and labor." It is sobering to read this from someone who, by any imaginable measure, had accomplished a stunning amount in her life, not only for herself but for her people. And yet her sentiment is understandable. Generations after the passing of Ida B. Wells, her battle continues. We still fight in defense of Black people's basic humanity, our right to a fair application of the laws of the land, and our right to not be brutally murdered in public. In light of this continued struggle, maybe we don't need more moving oratory or another inspirational fable about mythological people. Maybe we just need the whole truth.

The Wells-Barnett family just before Ferdinand L. Barnett Jr. left for overseas duty in World War I. Standing: Hulette D. Barnett (wife of Albert G. Barnett), Herman Kohlsaat Barnett, Ferdinand L. Barnett, Jr., Ida B. Barnett, Charles Aked Barnett, Alfreda M. Barnett, and Albert G. Barnett; seated: Ferdinand L. Barnett Sr. (husband of Ida B. Wells), Beatrice Barnett, Audrey Barnett, Ida B. Wells-Barnett; foreground: Hulette E. Barnett, Florence B. Barnett. Ferdinand L. Barnett's children from a previous marriage are Ferdinand Jr. and Albert. The children of Ferdinand Barnett and Ida B. Wells are Herman, Ida B. Barnett, Charles, and Alfreda. The four little girls are the children of Albert and Hulette Barnett (1917). Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center.