INTRODUCTION
ALFREDA M. DUSTER

"God has raised up a modern Deborah in the person of Miss Ida B. Wells, whose voice has been heard throughout England and the United States . . . pleading as only she can plead for justice and fair treatment to be given her long-suffering and unhappy people. . . . We believe that God delivered her from being lynched at Memphis, that by her portrayal of the burnings at Paris, Texas, Texarkana, Arkansas, and elsewhere she might light a flame of righteous indignation in England and America which, by God's grace, will never be extinguished until a Negro's life is as safe in Mississippi and Tennessee as in Massachusetts or Rhode Island."[1]

This statement by Norman B. Wood in 1897 was not an unusual description of this fiery reformer, feminist, and race leader during her lifetime and after her death. In newspapers, magazines, journals, and books of the period from 1890 to 1931, Ida B. Wells-Barnett was described over and over again as militant, courageous, determined, impassioned, and aggressive. These were uncommon terms for a person who was born to slave parents—and who was herself born a slave—in the hilly little town of Holly Springs, Mississippi, in 1862. Her mother was a deeply religious woman whose convictions about the essential dignity of man developed under the cruelties of slavery. Her father, a man of independent spirit even in slavery, sought and attained his full independence in the period following emancipation. These qualities of her parents fused to add fire and zeal to the character of Ida Wells.

1 Norman B. Wood, *The White Side of a Black Subject* (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1897), pp. 381–82.

Holly Springs had progressed from a small cotton plantation community of the 1830s until by the time of the Civil War it was described as a small architectural paradise. An iron foundry and the main office of the Mississippi Central Railroad made it a much desired location. Although little fighting took place there during the Civil War, the town changed hands many times. During one period of Union possession, Confederate forces under the command of General Earl Van Dorn rode into town, met with little resistance from the surprised Northerners, and burned and destroyed the business section of town as well as the armory and all federal supplies. Many fine homes were also burned or used by soldiers and wrecked after occupation.[2]

In this relatively peaceful small town, Ida grew up, living in the home built and owned by her father, with the duties and responsibilities of the eldest daughter of a family of eight children. Her father was a skilled carpenter and had plenty of work rebuilding homes, industrial plants, and government buildings destroyed during the hostilities. He was a man of considerable ability and much civic concern, and was selected as a member of the first board of trustees of Rust College.

Rust, originally named Shaw University, was founded in 1866 by Rev. A. C. McDonald, a minister from the North, who served as its first president.[3] In the early days, Rust College provided instruction at all levels and grades, including the basic elementary subjects. Among the more enlightened portion of the white community in Holly Springs there was support for this college, as was evidenced by the annual report for 1875:

> However hostile to the education of the Freedmen the whites may be elsewhere in the South, here both teachers and pupils are respected and encouraged by the most influential of them. One of the first men

2 Hodding Carter, "A Proud Struggle for Grace: Holly Springs, Mississippi," in *A Vanishing America: The Life and Times of the Small Town*, edited by Thomas C. Wheeler (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 61.

3 *Rust College Sentinel*, February 1968, p. 1.

> of this place, an ex-slave holder, has voluntarily taken it upon himself to raise means for us among his people.[4]

Both of Ida's parents stressed the importance of securing an education, and at Rust she had the guidance and instruction of dedicated missionaries and teachers who came to Holly Springs to assist the freedmen. Ida attended Rust all during her childhood and was regarded as an exceedingly apt pupil. On Sundays her religious parents would permit only the Bible to be read, so Ida read the Bible over and over again.

In 1878 a terrible epidemic of yellow fever struck Holly Springs. Two thousand of the town's population of 3,500 fled; most of those who remained contracted the disease, and 304 died.[5] Both of Ida's parents and their youngest child, Stanley, ten months of age, died in this epidemic. Another child, Eddie, had died a few years earlier, and Eugenia, the sister next to Ida, died a few years later. Although friends, neighbors, and other well-wishers offered to take some of the children, Ida, at sixteen, was steadfastly determined to keep the family together. Her father had left some money, and with the help of the Masons, who were guardians, she cared for all of them.

After passing the teacher's examination, Ida was assigned to a one-room school in the rural district about six miles from Holly Springs. As her brothers Jim and George grew into their late teens, they were apprenticed to carpenters and learned the trade of their father, which they followed all their lives.

About 1882 or 1883, an aunt, Fannie Butler, sister of Ida's father, who lived in Memphis, Tennessee, some forty miles away, suggested to Ida that she move to Memphis and seek a teaching position there. Mrs. Butler, widowed in the epidemic of 1878, offered to care for Ida's younger sisters, who were near the age of her own daughter. Ida accepted and at first taught in the rural schools of Shelby County while she studied for the teacher's examination for the city schools of Memphis.

4 *The Bearcat: Centennial Edition of Rust College Annual*, 1966, p. 10.

5 Carter, "A Proud Struggle for Grace," p. 72.

In May 1884, as Ida was on the way to her school in Woodstock, Tennessee, the conductor on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad told her she would have to ride in the smoking car. She refused. When the conductor and baggage man attempted to force her to ride in the other coach, she got off the train at the next stop, returned to Memphis, and sued the railroad. The case attracted much attention because whereas the law stated that accommodations should be separate—but equal—railroad personnel had insisted that all Negroes ride in the smoking car, which was not a first-class coach. In December 1884, the local court returned a verdict in favor of Ida Wells and awarded her five hundred dollars in damages.[6] The railroad appealed the case.

Ida did not give up her resistance to the railroad's policy of forcing Negroes to ride in the separate but *unequal* coaches. In her diary she wrote about going with three friends on one of the educational excursions for teachers: "Of course we had the usual trouble about the first class coach, but we conquered."[7]

The victory was short, however, for on 5 April 1887 the Supreme Court of Tennessee reversed the decision of the lower court.[8] At the time she wrote:

> The Supreme Court reversed the decision of the lower court in my behalf, last week. Went to see Judge G [Greer, her lawyer] this afternoon and he tells me that four of them [the judges] cast their personal prejudices in the scale of justice and decided in face of all the evidence to the contrary that the smoking car was a first class coach for colored people as provided for by that statute that calls for separate coaches but first class, for the races. I felt so disappointed because I had hoped such great things from my suit for my people generally. I have firmly believed all along that the law was on our side and would, when we appealed to it, give us justice. I feel shorn of that belief and utterly discouraged, and just now, if it were possible, would gather my race in my arms and fly away with them. O God, is there no redress, no peace,

6 *Memphis Appeal Avalanche*, 25 December 1884, p. 4.

7 Entry for 7 June 1886, in the unpublished diary of Ida B. Wells, in the possession of the editor.

8 *Tennessee Reports: 85 Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Tennessee for the Western Division, Jackson, April Term, 1887. Chesapeake & Ohio & Southwestern Railroad Company* v. *Wells.*

> no justice in this land for us? Thou hast always fought the battles of the weak and oppressed. Come to my aid at this moment and teach me what to do, for I am sorely, bitterly disappointed. Show us the way, even as Thou led the children of Israel out of bondage into the promised land.[9]

By the fall of 1884 Ida had passed the qualifying examination and been assigned as a teacher in the Memphis city schools, where she taught for seven years. During these years, she was regarded as a competent and conscientious teacher, devoted to helping young Negroes acquire what she knew was crucially necessary for their future—a good education. She took advantage of every opportunity to improve her own academic skills with private lessons from older teachers and those skilled in elocution and dramatics. She attended summer sessions at Fisk University and traveled on excursions for teachers to places of interest and value.

Outside the classroom Ida was a serious young woman, scorning frivolities and contemptuous of the wiles that other young women used to attract men. At this time in her life, she has been described as "a very beautiful young woman."[10] Her refined and ladylike appearance did not suggest that she was destined to defy mobs and become a vigorous crusader against the injustices that beset the Negro people in the post-Reconstruction days in the South. She had many admirers and enjoyed going to concerts, plays, lectures, church meetings, and social affairs. In the days when Sunday afternoons were social hours, many young suitors called on her and took her for walks or rides. She was called hard-hearted and incapable of loving anyone, but this was a facade; underneath she longed for the true love of a man she could respect and admire.

In 1887 she began writing for a church paper, using the story of her suit against the railroad and its results as her first article. Soon her articles spread to other church papers and then to some of the Negro weeklies. Thus she discovered her journalistic abilities, and when she was offered an interest in and the editorship of

9 Entry for 11 April 1887 in the unpublished diary of Ida B. Wells.

10 Langston Hughes, *Famous Negro Heroes of America* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1958), p. 155.

a small newspaper in Memphis, the *Free Speech and Headlight*, she accepted and invested her savings to become part owner. It is not surprising that her articles criticizing the Memphis Board of Education for conditions in separate colored schools led to her dismissal as a teacher in 1891.

Dismayed but undaunted, she worked diligently on the paper. She shortened its name to the *Free Speech*, and was enjoying her work and travels for the paper when, on 9 March 1892, three young Negro businessmen were lynched in Memphis. She turned her scathing pen on the lynchers and on the white population of the city who allowed and condoned such a lynching. An angry mob wrecked her press and declared that they would have lynched her if she had been found. She had gone to Philadelphia to cover a convention for her paper and was warned not to return. But her pen would not be silenced. She continued her efforts for the cause in the *New York Age*, where she bitterly railed against the evil of lynching. It was about this time that she began to lecture in the Northeast. Through this activity she received an invitation to tell the story in England, Scotland, and Wales. She spent April and May of 1893 in this first crusade abroad.

While informing the English people about lynching in America, Ida B. Wells learned of the progressive activities of English women, and she was very much impressed with their civic groups. When she returned to the United States, she emphasized the activities of British women to her New England audiences. She urged her female listeners to become more active in the affairs of their community, city, and nation, and to do these things through organized civic clubs. The idea found favorable response and thus the first civic club among Negro women, the Women's Era Club, was organized in Boston, Massachusetts, with Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin as president. Miss Wells organized other clubs in New England, and in Chicago she organized the first civic club among Chicago's Negro women. When she returned to England on her second speaking tour, the Chicago group obtained a charter and named the club in honor of Ida B. Wells.

In 1893 she turned from the problem of lynching to the slight

that Negroes had received at the World's Columbian Exposition. Petition after petition for participation in this Chicago World's Fair had been made by individual Negroes and by groups, but all had been denied. Consequently, during July 1893, in conjunction with Frederick Douglass, Ferdinand L. Barnett, and I. Garland Penn, she produced an eighty-one-page booklet: *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition—The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature*. The preface stated:

> *To The Seeker After Truth:*
>
> Columbia has bidden the civilized world to join with her in celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America, and the invitation has been accepted. At Jackson Park are displayed exhibits of her natural resources, and her progress in the arts and sciences, but that which would best illustrate her moral grandeur has been ignored.
>
> The exhibit of the progress made by a race in 25 years of freedom as against 250 years of slavery would have been the greatest tribute to the greatness and progressiveness of American institutions which could have been shown to the world. The colored people of this great Republic number eight millions—more than one-tenth of the whole population of the United States. They were among the earliest settlers of this continent, landing at Jamestown, Virginia in 1619 in a slave ship, before the Puritans, who landed at Plymouth in 1620. They have contributed a large share to American prosperity and civilization. The labor of one-half of this country has always been, and is still being done by them. The first credit this country had in its commerce with foreign nations was created by productions resulting from their labor. The wealth created by their industry has afforded to the white people of this country the leisure essential to their great progress in education, art, science, industry and invention.[11]

In 1894 Ida B. Wells made a second journey and crusade through England. During this tour of six months, the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* regularly published her articles in a column entitled "Ida B. Wells Abroad." Her lectures were well received in England, where the

11 Ida B. Wells et al., *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition—The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature* (Chicago: Ida B. Wells, 1893), p. 3.

press and pulpit gave enthusiastic support to her pleas. An Anti-Lynching Committee was organized which consisted of some of the foremost citizens of Great Britain.

Returning to America in July 1894, she continued the crusade by lecturing throughout the North and organizing anti-lynching committees wherever possible. She took up residence in Chicago and in 1895 published *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892–1893–1894*. In the first chapter, "The Case Stated," she wrote:

> The student of American sociology will find the year 1894 marked by a pronounced awakening of the public conscience to a system of anarchy and outlawry which had grown during a series of ten years to be so common, that scenes of unusual brutality failed to have any visible effect upon the humane sentiments of the people of our land.

It becomes the painful duty of the Negro to reproduce a record which shows that a large portion of the American people avow anarchy, condone murder and defy the contempt of civilization.

These pages are written in no spirit of vindictiveness, for all who give the subject of lynching consideration must concede that far too serious is the condition of that civilized government in which the spirit of unrestrained outlawry constantly increases in violence, and casts its blight over a continually growing area of territory. We plead not for the colored people alone, but for all victims of the terrible injustice which puts men and women to death without form of law. During the year 1894, there were 132 persons executed in the United States by due form of law, while in the same year, 197 persons were put to death by mobs who gave the victims no opportunity to make a lawful defense. No comment need be made upon a condition of public sentiment responsible for such alarming results.

The purpose of the pages which follow shall be to give the record which has been made, not by colored men, but that which is the result of compilations made by white men of the South. Out of their own mouths shall the murderers be condemned. For a number of years the *Chicago Tribune*, admittedly one of the leading journals of America, has made a specialty of compilation of statistics

touching upon lynching. The data compiled by that journal and published to the world January 1st, 1894, up to the present time has not been disputed. In order to be safe from the charge of exaggeration, the incidents hereinafter reported have been confined to those vouched for by the *Tribune*.[12]

A booklet of one hundred pages, the *Red Record* was not only the statistical record of lynchings in the United States, but a detailed history of the lynching of Negroes—and others—since the Emancipation Proclamation. Her alarm over the growth of mob violence had prompted her to appeal to world opinion. In her crusades in the United States and Great Britain and in her writings, she hoped to eradicate this form of barbarism.

The decision to make Chicago her home was influenced by a romantic interest in Ferdinand Lee Barnett, founder of the *Conservator*, the first Negro newspaper in Chicago. Mr. Barnett was a graduate of the law school which later became affiliated with Northwestern University. Years later, Langston Hughes recorded the marriage and noted the mutual interests of the Barnetts as follows:

> In 1895 Ida B. Wells married another crusader, a Chicago newspaper man, Ferdinand L. Barnett, and together they continued their campaign for equal rights for Negro Americans. They broadened their field of their activities, too, to include every social problem of importance in the Windy City where they lived.[13]

Attorney Barnett was a widower. His first wife, Molly Graham Barnett, died when their children, Ferdinand L. Barnett, Jr., and Albert Graham Barnett were four years and two years of age. Barnett's mother had lived with him and cared for the boys during the seven years before his marriage to Ida B. Wells. Four children were born to this union. Charles Aked, born in 1896, was named for one of the leaders of the anti-lynching crusade in England, the Rev. Charles F. Aked. Herman Kohlsaat, born in 1897, was named for H. H. Kohlsaat, a famous restaurateur and one of the strongest

12 Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892–1893–1894* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, 1895), p. 7.
13 Hughes, *Famous Negro Heroes*, p. 161.

supporters of the Barnetts' civic activities and their newspaper the *Conservator*. Ida B. Wells, Jr., was born in 1901, and Alfreda M. was born in 1904.

After the birth of their second son in 1897, Ida B. Wells-Barnett gave up the newspaper and devoted herself to the tasks of homemaker and mother. She firmly believed in the importance of the presence of a mother in the home during her children's formative years. She did not take any work outside the home until the youngest child was eight years old and able to attend school alone. Even then, she arranged for her daughters to spend the noon hour at home under the watchful guidance of a cousin.

She was a kind and loving parent, but firm and strict. She impressed upon her children their responsibilities, one of the most important being good conduct in her absence. There was never any need to be concerned when she was present. She did not have to speak; her "look" was enough to bring under control any mischievous youngster.

Both parents emphasized education for their children. Ferdinand, Jr., was graduated from Armour Institute (now Illinois Institute of Technology). Albert G. graduated from Kent College of Law, and in his later life was city editor of the *Chicago Defender*. Charles Aked was a student at Wendell Phillips High School when an altercation with one of the teachers caused him to quit school. He left home and secured a job as a chauffeur in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Later he had his own printing business and worked as printer and layout specialist for other printing firms. Herman became his father's associate in the law firm of Barnett & Barnett. In the Depression days he left Chicago, "went West," and served in the California State Employment Service until retirement. Ida was her father's secretary and companion until his death in 1936. Alfreda received the Ph.B. degree from the University of Chicago in 1924, was active in parent-teacher associations, social and civic organizations, and was on the staff of the Division of Community Services of the Illinois Youth Commission until her retirement in 1965.

Within the city of Chicago, the Barnetts exerted influence in

most civic affairs. They were perhaps the first Negro family to move east of State Street, when in 1901 they bought a home at 3234 Rhodes Avenue. Although there was no violence when they moved there, they were subjected to various displays of hostility. The white family next door would get up from seats on the front porch whenever the Barnetts appeared, shake their rugs with disgust, and go into their house, slamming the door with displeasure. Within the next decade, as the number of Negro families in the area increased, the Barnett boys and other Negro boys were regularly attacked by the Thirty-First Street gang. As a protective measure, they organized all the Negro boys of the area into a tight group which then met fisticuffs with fisticuffs. On one occasion, when a large number of white youths followed the boys home and stood outside the house jeering and threatening, Mrs. Barnett repeated the assertion that she frequently made during her anti-lynching crusades: that she had but one life to give, and if she must die by violence, she would take some of her persecutors with her. She kept a pistol available in the house and dared anyone to cross her threshold to harm her or any member of her family.

Ida Wells-Barnett never gave up her militancy or dedication to the cause of helping right the wrongs against Negroes. She urged the young men in a Sunday school class she taught at Grace Presbyterian Church to form an organization for this purpose. It was called the Negro Fellowship League and was located at 2840 South State Street in the area of the largest incidence of crime, wholesale arrests, and "third degree" methods of obtaining confessions. In the three-story building, the league utilized the lower floor for the center and the upper floors for sleeping rooms for men without homes—at twenty-five cents a night. In 1914 the league moved to 3004 South State Street, utilizing only one large room for activities for the center, for meetings, religious services on Sundays, and an employment office on weekdays. Even this activity closed down early in 1920, as lowered income and Mrs. Barnett's failing health necessitated longer absences from the offices.

In 1910 when she established the Negro Fellowship League,

Mrs. Wells-Barnett hoped for support from middle- and upper-class Negroes with education, ability, and influence. She sought the kind of financial help and cooperation from these Negroes that Jane Addams was able to secure from whites for Hull House. In this she was disappointed. Although her friends and associates in clubs, churches, and social life admired her dedication and hard work, they were not willing to venture into the area of Twenty-Eighth and State Streets to work among the recent migrants—uneducated, unemployed, and living in such undesirable neighborhoods. Some individuals and some of the federated clubs, such as the Gaudeamus Civic and Charity Club, did give assistance, but it was most inadequate for the urgent needs.

Added to her differences with the upper-class Negroes over service to the unfortunate was her disdain for the crudities she observed among some of them. She felt that the upper class should consist of persons of refinement, good breeding, and good manners. Thus, she resented the entrance of persons of questionable morals who had enough money to pay their way into society.

In like manner, Ida B. Wells-Barnett had high standards for ministers of the gospel and felt that they should be above ordinary men in their personal and professional lives. Any hint of scandal in their personal habits or handling of finances was enough for her to withdraw her respect and support. She thought that ministers had a very special opportunity to reach large numbers of people and that they had a responsibility to use their contacts for the good of those people. She believed that they should assist them in their improvement in this world as well as prepare them for the next world. Many ministers felt that she meddled too much in their sphere of influence, although they admired and respected her dedication to the causes she espoused. In many instances they allowed her to use their facilities for mass meetings and civil assemblies.

She continued to fight—with voice and pen—every form of injustice and discrimination in Chicago and anywhere in the United States. During the years of the race riots, whenever reports of them appeared in the daily press she went into action. First she would

appeal to organized groups such as the Equal Rights League, the Afro-American Council, the People's Movement, founded by Oscar De Priest, either or both of the political party organizations, the daily press, and the weekly press. She would call mass meetings at churches, at the headquarters of the Negro Fellowship League, or at any hall available to her. Then, with funds secured from personal sources or raised by public subscription or advanced by newspapers—principally the *Chicago Defender*—she would travel to the scene of the riots, make her investigation, and return to Chicago to report the facts as she had gathered them. Her reports appeared in the Negro papers such as the *Defender*, *World*, *Broad Ax*, and *Whip*, and in the pamphlets printed and distributed by the Negro Fellowship League. Unfortunately these pamphlets and other letters and documents gathered during her long and eventful career were lost in a fire in her home, and efforts to find copies have proved fruitless. Some of the most notorious of the incidents she covered were the Springfield, Illinois, riot, the Elaine, Arkansas, riot, the Helena, Arkansas, riot, and the riot in East Saint Louis, Illinois.

In December 1920 she was hospitalized and underwent surgery. She attempted to get about too soon and had a relapse which kept her quiet for most of that year. As she regained her strength, however, she moved again into the mainstream of civic, political, and, to a lesser extent, social life in Chicago. She became an active member of the National Equal Rights League and the local Chicago chapter. She was elected again—after a lapse of thirty years—as president of the Ida B. Wells Women's Club, which she had organized in 1893. In addition, she began a campaign of lecturing to enlist support for a most active, dynamic, and effective National Association of Colored Women. This program met with some success, but also with much opposition. In her zeal to effect change she did not mince words or spare the feelings of those whom she decided were "do-nothings."

In 1924, at the club's convention in Chicago, she entered the race for president against Mary McLeod Bethune, who had served as vice president, but was unable to gain enough support to be elected. Disappointed, but still conscientiously concerned about the club

work among women, she continued to participate in the Ida B. Wells Club, the American Rose Art Club, the Chicago and Northern District Association of Club Women, and the State Federation. She also maintained her connection with the club work among white women of the city through the Cook County Federation of Club Women.

She continued to lecture to groups throughout Illinois and the country whenever requested to do so. From Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1920 she wrote:

> They have arranged for me to speak here tomorrow (Sunday) night at one of the churches. The conference of Charities and Corrections which I came to attend is moving along smoothly. I was at the State School for the Blind, also for the Deaf yesterday, and was greatly interested. [I spoke] at a meeting arranged for me last night. They had a good house, and they want me to stay over and make another speech. I cannot get out of here until Monday morning which will keep me traveling most of the day, reaching home in time for dinner Monday night with my loved ones.[14]

Throughout her life she had great faith in the power of the ballot and worked unceasingly to stir citizens to register and vote. Although women's suffrage was still only a hope, she urged men to use the ballot for their defense and protection. As early as 1910 she wrote an article "How Enfranchisement Stops Lynching" in the *Original Rights Magazine*. When the opportunity was given the women of Illinois by the general assembly, a very limited franchise which allowed women to vote for trustees of the University of Illinois, she was among the first to urge women to take advantage of this right of citizenship. She organized the first suffrage club among Negro women on 30 January 1913, calling it the Alpha Suffrage Club. In the small one-sheet newsletter, the *Alpha Suffrage Record*, she wrote:

> Chicago, as we have said many a time before, points the way to the political salvation of the race. Her colored men are colored men first—

14 Letter of Ida B. Wells-Barnett to her family, October 1920, in possession of the editor.

> Republicans, Progressives and Democrats afterwards. In the last twenty years, on but one spot in this entire broad United States has the black man received anything like adequate political recognition and that one spot is Chicago. The corollary of this proposition is that on only one spot on this broad United States have colored citizens demanded anything like adequate political recognition and that one spot is Chicago.[15]

Both Ferdinand L. Barnett and Ida B. Wells-Barnett were politically loyal to Charles S. Deneen, a leading Illinois Republican. When he was state's attorney, Deneen had appointed Mr. Barnett assistant state's attorney—he was the first Negro to hold such a position, and he kept it for fourteen years. Meanwhile Mr. Deneen progressed to become governor, then United States senator. He split with the regular Republican organization and headed the Deneen faction of the Republican Party until his death in 1940. The Barnetts believed that the Deneen faction had higher principles than the regular organization. However, in 1930 Ida B. Wells-Barnett became a candidate for state senator, running as an independent against Warren B. Douglas, who was supported by the Deneen faction, and Adelbert H. Roberts, who was supported by the regular Republican organization. She came in a poor third. She stated, "Few women responded as I had hoped." Again disappointed, but undaunted, she wrote in her diary:

> Have been unable to have a conference with my backers, so we may profit by lessons of the campaign. . . . Am issuing cards for Tea Sunday 5 – 25 [1930] which is also a letter of thanks to those who helped. . . . Spoke at Orchestra Hall to a large white meeting, and at the La Salle [Hotel] to a luncheon at which all the candidates spoke.[16]

A business card identifies her as national organizer, Illinois Colored Women, and on the reverse side in her handwriting a form for a proposed ticket to "The Women's Republican League Whist Party."

15 *Alpha Suffrage Record*, 18 March 1914, p. 1.

16 Entry for 19 May 1930 in the unpublished diary of Ida B. Wells.

At Metropolitan Community Church, which she joined immediately upon its founding in 1920 by Rev. W. D. Cook, former pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church, Mrs. Wells-Barnett was teacher of an adult Sunday school class and president of the Forum. The Sunday evening Forum presented outstanding speakers and engaged in discussions of religious, civic, and social importance. After the Rev. Mr. Cook's death, she continued to carry on many programs under the ministry of Rev. Joseph Evans.

By 1925 both sons and the younger daughter had married and established homes elsewhere. Young Ida, unmarried, still lived at home and worked as her father's secretary in his office at 111 South Dearborn Street. The fourteen-room house on Grand Boulevard, renamed South Parkway,[17] was too large for the family of three; so they took a five-room apartment at 326 East Garfield Boulevard.

In 1927 or 1928, Ida B. Wells-Barnett became increasingly aware of the importance of recording the facts concerning her activities during the anti-lynching crusade and the troubled times from 1893 to 1927. So in 1928 she began to write her autobiography. Painstakingly she wrote, rewrote, revised, and corrected the manuscript. The first third she wrote by hand, then, securing the services of the secretary of her son, Attorney Herman K. Barnett, she dictated the rest, carefully proofreading and revising. The final chapter of her autobiography illustrates the fact that every item of injustice or discrimination brought the militant and crusading spirit to the fore and made her move to "do something" about whatever the matter happened to be.

On 21 March 1931, she went downtown to do some shopping. In the evening she complained of not feeling well and spent Sunday in bed. On Monday morning she was incoherent and obviously very ill. After a hurried family conference, she was rushed to the Dailey Hospital where Dr. U. G. Dailey and a group of consulting physicians attempted to save her life. Uremic poisoning had progressed too far, and without regaining consciousness, she died on Wednesday, 25 March 1931, the birthday of her eldest son, Charles. In tribute to

17 This is now Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive.

her memory, the *Chicago Defender* described the woman Chicago had known as "elegant, striking, always well groomed . . . regal."[18]

The few papers and diaries and the autobiography on which she had been working have remained in the possession of her family since her death.

Ida B. Wells will be remembered most for her fight against the lynching of Negroes, and for her passionate demand for justice and fair play for them. In the preface to her autobiography, she mentions that a young lady compared her to Joan of Arc. The analogy is, at best, strained, but the odds against her were in many ways even greater. True enough, Joan was a peasant girl in a time when peasants and girls had nothing to say to the ruling class of France. But Ida B. Wells was a black woman born into slavery who began openly carrying her torch against lynching in the very South bent upon the degradation of the blacks. Joan had the advantage of rallying a generally sympathetic French people to a common patriotic cause. Ida Wells was not only opposed by whites, but some of her own people were often hostile, impugning her motives. Fearful that her tactics and strategy might bring retribution upon them, some actually repudiated her.

The memory of Ida B. Wells-Barnett has been kept alive in several ways. There are Ida B. Wells Clubs in various parts of the country. In 1950 the city of Chicago designated her as one of the twenty-five outstanding women in the city's history. The followers of this leader of women spearheaded the drive which secured for her the most significant recognition that she has yet received. In 1940, through an intensive campaign conducted by women's clubs and civic and social organizations, the Chicago Housing Authority changed the name of the South Parkway Garden Apartments to the Ida B. Wells Garden Homes. Covering forty-seven acres and housing seven thousand persons, the Ida B. Wells Homes primarily serve that portion of the population that she had served throughout her lifetime.

The most remarkable thing about Ida B. Wells-Barnett is not that

18 Hughes, *Famous Negro Heroes*, p. 162.

she fought lynching and other forms of barbarianism. It is rather that she fought a lonely and almost single-handed fight, with the single-mindedness of a crusader, long before men or women of any race entered the arena; and the measure of success she achieved goes far beyond the credit she has been given in the history of the country.