



Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931)

by Jayden Franke, Public History 3308

Ida B. Wells-Barnett was an African American woman who not only advocated for racial justice but also for women's suffrage. She never backed down from a fight; no effort was too great. She marched alongside her white colleagues in the Illinois section of the 1913 parade for women's suffrage when she was told to march in the back with other African American women. She was a prolific writer and owned an African American newspaper, and in 1913, founded the Alpha Suffrage Club.

Excerpt from "How Enfranchisement Stops Lynching," *Original Rights Magazine*, June 1910

The flower of the 19th century civilization for the American people was the abolition of slavery, and the enfranchisement of all manhood. Here at last was squaring of practice with precept, with true democracy, with the Declaration of Independence and with the Golden Rule. The reproach and disgrace of the 20th century is that the whole of the American people have permitted a part, to nullify this glorious achievement, and make the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution play things, a mockery and a byword; an absolute dead letter in the Constitution of the United States. One-third of the states of the union have made and enforce laws which a bridge the rights of American citizens. Although the Constitution specifically says, no state shall do so, they do deprive persons of life, liberty and property without due process of law, and do deny equal protection of the laws to persons of Negro descent.

When this bewildered race turned in dazed appeal to the Government which gave it freedom and the ballot, awaiting explanation and beseeching protection, it was told that the Government had made a mistake in enfranchising them; that it had offended the south by so doing, and was now busy repealing the civil rights bill, affirming Jim Crow legislation, upholding disfranchising state constitution, and removing in every way possible the constitutional guarantees to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, removing everything, in fact, which was offensive to those who had fired on the flag and tried to break up the union, and the Negro must now look out for himself.

This he has done for the past 30 years as best he could. He was advised that if he gave up trying to vote, minded his own business, acquired property and educated his children, he could get along in the south without molestation. But the more land and houses he acquired, the more rapidly discriminating laws have been passed against him by those who control the ballot...

With no sacredness of the ballot there can be no sacredness of human life itself. For if the strong can take a weak man's ballot, when it suits his purpose to do so, he will take his life also.