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# First Things First: Writing Strategies

Marilyn L. Grady

## Ida B. Wells-Barnett: To Write is to Have a Voice

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931) is a fine example of the voice a writer has. Born in Holly Springs, Mississippi, she was born into slavery. Her parents died of yellow fever when she was young. As a result, she became the head of her family and took a teaching position near her home to support the family. She moved to Memphis in 1881 because there were more teaching jobs there (Myers, 2008).

She witnessed many lynchings as part of life in the South. On one occasion, she sued the railroad when she was removed from a train car because she was black. She won the lawsuit and was awarded \$500.00. She did not receive the settlement but she did, however, write about the incident.

Ida wrote under the pen name Iola and was called the “Princess of the Press.” In 1889 she stopped teaching and began to write full time. She became part owner of the newspaper, *Free Speech and Headlight* (Myers, 2008). She wrote about the poor treatment of black people, especially black men, and about lynching. She left Memphis and moved to Chicago and began writing for the *New York Age*.

The themes of her writing and her life were equal justice and freedom for all. Her associates included W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Jane Addams, Susan B. Anthony, and Frederick Douglass. She was one of the founders of the National Association of Colored Women (1896) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (1909). The books she wrote document her involvement in the critical issues of her times. Ida B. Wells-Barnett has left a great legacy through her writing. Her voice continues to be heard through these writings.

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