**“Ida B. Wells” Manuscript**

Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King. All three were champions of civil rights and racial justice.

But there’s another name that should ring just as loudly as these famous figures; another name that should roll off the tongue of every student in this country: Ida B. Wells.

Wells stares at us out of the past—her eyes strong, her face resolute, her mind made up. Although Wells lived long ago—from 1862 to 1931—her contributions to society persist. Today, I commemorate her for those contributions—for the courage to stand up, for the courage to speak up, for the courage to stay up.

Ida B. Wells had the courage to stand up—to stand up for herself and for equality under the law. Born in muggy Mississippi in the dark days of the Civil War, Wells faced segregation every day, but she refused to accept it.

In 1883 she bought a first-class ticket for a train ride from Memphis to Nashville. Even though she paid just as much as the white first-class passengers, and had already taken her seat, crew members told her to move to the crowded, run-down smoking car reserved for blacks.

When she refused and stayed in her seat, she was dragged away and forcibly removed from the train. Seventy years before Rosa Parks ignited the civil rights movement by refusing to give up her bus seat, Wells stood up for equality—also by staying seated.

Ida B. Wells also had the courage to speak up—to speak up for her friends and for justice. With powerful pen and soaring voice, she denounced the injustices of segregation.

Her primary platform was the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*, the newspaper of which she was the editor and part-owner. In 1892, while Wells was living in Memphis, three of her friends were lynched by a white mob. In her paper, she condemned the lynching and the mob who carried it out.

Afraid of the power of her pen, another mob destroyed her newspaper office in an effort to silence her. It didn’t work. Like the great abolitionist speaker and writer Frederick Douglass, Wells lent her voice to the cause of justice regardless of opposition.

Finally, Ida B. Wells had the courage to stay up—to stay up and keep fighting for future generations. Because of her commitment to equality and justice, she created organizations that would long outlive her.

To champion the right of women to vote, she helped create the first suffrage organization for African-American women. To unite African-American women in common purpose, she helped create the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs. To advance civil rights for all African Americans, she helped create an organization I’m sure you’ve heard of—the NAACP.

Just as Dr. Martin Luther King created civil rights organizations that would continue long after his death, Wells brought people together for lasting change.

Ida B. Wells—I hope it’s a name you will remember alongside Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King. For her courage to stand up for equality, for her courage to speak up for justice, for her courage to stay up for all of us, Wells deserves recognition and respect.

As she stares at us out of the past, her undaunting gaze serves as a reminder that the quest for justice cannot be abandoned.

Thank you.