



March is Women's History Month

Ida B. Wells and Her Fight for Equal Rights

Ida B. Wells brought the nation's attention to the horrors of racial supremacy and lynching through various newspapers during her lifetime. She was an author, owned a newspaper, and an activist for equal rights of African Americans and women, making her one of the most notable African American women of her time. Despite her success, Ida B. Wells' life was a constant struggle; however, her unwillingness to accept the status-quo gave her the strength to overcome those obstacles.

Wells was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi in 1862 to an enslaved family. After the Civil War, her parents were able to support their family by her father's carpenter skills and her mother's cooking. The first major struggle in Wells' life came at the age of 14. An epidemic of Yellow Fever hit Holly Springs and killed her parents. Wells got a job as a teacher and was able to secure enough money to take care of her siblings.

Wells moved to Memphis, Tennessee to attend a teacher's college. While in Memphis, she began her lifelong fight against segregation. In 1884, a train conductor ordered her to move into a segregated train car but she refused. She was forcibly removed from the train and later sued the train company for discrimination. The case went all the way to the Tennessee Supreme Court where the court sided with the railroad company.

Newspapers from around the country wanted to hear the story of the young teacher who literally fought injustice, both physically and legally, and it began her



A portrait of Ida B. Wells in her mid-thirties, around the time of her marriage to F. L. Barnett, an attorney from Chicago. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

career as a journalist. By 1889, she became part owner of the *Free Speech and Headlight* newspaper and she was able to leave her job as a teacher.

In 1892, three of her friends were lynched by a white mob because their business was competing with white businesses. Through her newspaper, she brought the nation's attention to the horrors of lynching and the injustice of racial supremacy in the south. Her paper was so influential that a white mob destroyed her newspaper office in an attempt to keep her from writing about racial injustice. She fled from Memphis to Chicago but never stopped writing.

In Chicago, she continued to write for newspapers and even published books about racial intolerance in the south. In addition, she also formed a women's

suffrage organization. In 1895, she married an editor of a Chicago newspaper and changed her name to Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

Wells co-founded the NAACP in 1909. She was one of only two women to sign "the call" to form a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The NAACP was the leading organization to fight segregation in the courts. Forty-five years after its founding, the NAACP won a major victory in the fight against segregation on May 17, 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed school segregation, effectively overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Unfortunately, Ida B. Wells was not able to witness the major victory against segregation. She passed away in 1931 in Chicago at the age of sixty-nine, 23 years before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to end segregation in public schools.

Classroom Activity: “Read All About It”

Grade Level: 6th-12th

The purpose of this activity is for your students to write a newspaper editorial about a current issue in American society. Ida B. Wells brought America's attention to the horrors of the effects segregation has on society by using her newspaper. Her editorials helped persuade Americans away from the status quo of segregation and into a society that was willing to help end segregation. Editorials are still very powerful today and are essential in the democratic process.

Objective:

- Students will be able to write persuasively.
- Students will become familiar with newspaper editorials and understand the media's impact on democracy.

Procedure:

Allow your students to write about a current event/issue, either one you choose or allow them to choose their own. It can be an issue at school, the rising cost of college tuition, or raising gas price, whatever you or your students decide.

Once the students finish their editorials, gather the class together to form an editorial committee. Have the class vote to decide which editorials they will print in a mock newspaper for the class.

Kansas Standards:

Based on 8th Grade Standards

Writing: Benchmark 4-The Student writes persuasive text using the writing process.

Civics-Government Standard:

Benchmark 4-The student identifies and examines the rights, privileges, and responsibilities in becoming an active civic participant.

“Right On Time”: Special Exhibit On Baseball’s Buck O’Neil

Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site will host *Buck: Right On Time*, an exhibit on the legendary baseball figure starting April 1 until April 30.

John Jordan O’Neil, more famously known as “Buck” O’Neil, was born November 13, 1911 in Carrabelle, Florida. Buck O’Neil began his baseball career as first basemen for the semi-pro Miami Giants in 1934. O’Neil’s stellar performance landed him a position in the big leagues of segregated African American baseball, the Negro League, for the Memphis Red Sox in 1937.

Major League Baseball refused to allow African Americans to play, therefore, the Negro League was the only outlet for outstanding African American baseball players. Despite the minor league status of the league, Buck O’Neil made the best of it. In 1938, O’Neil began playing for the Kansas City Monarchs and helped them establish a dynasty in Negro League baseball. From 1939-1942, the Kansas City Monarchs won four straight pennants. O’Neil took two years off baseball and joined the Navy during World War II but he returned to the Monarchs after his tour of duty. Upon his return, he earned the 1946 Negro League batting title for his superior batting average.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson broke the colored barrier in Major League baseball when he became a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Soon, other Negro League greats would follow Robinson into the Major Leagues but Buck O’Neil never did as a player. Despite being an excellent baseball player, he was past his prime; however, his talents did not go unrecognized. O’Neil became a scout for the Chicago Cubs and became the first African American coach in Major League Baseball in 1962.

O’Neil was well known within the baseball community, but he became even more

famous after his interviews were featured in Ken Burns’ *Baseball*, a documentary on baseball as the nation’s pastime. O’Neil became the voice of the Negro League and earned the unofficial title of “Ambassador of Baseball” for his impressive interview on the Ken Burns documentary and his contributions to baseball history. He went on to do more interviews on late night television shows, such as *Late Night with David Letterman*.

Despite his contributions to Major League Baseball and the Negro League, O’Neil never made it into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. He was nominated for the Hall of Fame in 2006, but he did not receive the votes necessary for entry.

Buck O’Neil was a fixture in the Kansas City community and he helped establish the Negro League Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri. O’Neil died October 6, 2006 in Kansas City but he is far from forgotten. To honor O’Neil, the Baseball Hall of Fame created a lifetime achievement award named after Buck O’Neil and it will be presented to a player every three years.



Buck O’Neil managing the Kansas City Monarchs. Photo courtesy of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum.