

UP FRONT



AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLECTION

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Campaign Against Racial Violence

In the late 19th-century Memphis, Tennessee, newspaper publisher Ida B. Wells began a campaign against lynching after three successful businessmen and friends, Thomas Henry Moss Sr., Calvin McDowell, and William Stewart, were lynched by a White mob after hostile encounters occurred between White and Black men around the grocery store that they owned. In addition to the killings of Moss, McDowell, and Stewart, Wells's newspaper office was firebombed, and personal threats were made against her. Fortunately, Wells was not in town at the time and never returned to Memphis because of the threats made upon her life. Instead, she moved to New York and eventually Chicago all the while continuing her journalistic attack against lynching.

By October 1892, Wells began publishing her research on lynching in a pamphlet titled, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*. The pamphlet examined many cases of lynching and concluded that consensual sexual relations between Black men and White women were falsely charged as rape to excuse the real reasons for lynching—Black economic and social progress. White society called out for the protection of White

female chastity when there was not a real threat from Black men. Lynching was used as a method of terror to open the way for the disenfranchisement of Black voting and other rights. The clutches of Jim Crow and the terrorist threat of lynching renewed White suppression of Black freedom since the antebellum period.

In 1895 Wells published a second pamphlet titled, *A Red Record*, a 100-page detailed account of lynching since the Emancipation of 1863. (She also was married in 1895 and thereafter went by Wells-Barnett.) Beyond the excuse of protecting White female virtue, lynching was symptomatic of White indifference with Black progress and new-found freedom. Wells-Barnett's research became popular across the country but was not unanimously accepted. Booker T. Washington

took issue with her reports because it threatened his agenda of getting support from wealthy White industrialists for the Tuskegee Institute and his other enterprises.

Wells-Barnett was not only a crusader against lynching but also a suffragist. Her anti-lynching campaign gathered momentum and picked up supporters in Pittsburgh. She visited Pittsburgh in January 1900 to help organize interest in the anti-lynching campaign and recruited both men and women to join the cause. Simultaneously with the women's suffrage movement, the anti-lynching campaign gathered momentum as the 1910s proceeded. It would soon gather national allies from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which added the anti-lynching campaign to its national agenda. The NAACP

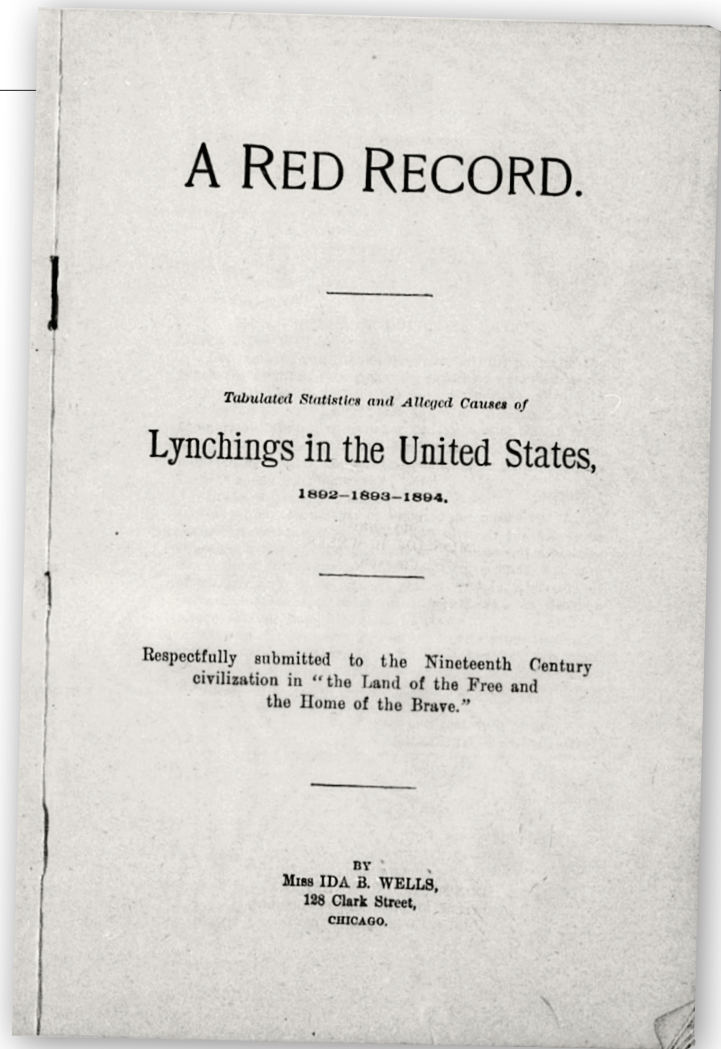


Ida B. Wells in a c. 1893 photograph by Mary Garrity, adapted from a photographic card.
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Anti-lynching button made for the 1920s NAACP campaign that is part of a collection belonging to civil and women's rights activist Daisy Lampkin.

HHC Collections, gift of Earl Douglas Childs, 2010.32.4.



A Red Record by Ida B. Wells, 1894.

Library of Congress, Frederick Douglass Papers.

was virtually founded as a response to a lynching in Springfield, Illinois, in 1909. In January 1919, Daisy Lampkin presided over an anti-lynching campaign meeting with Francis Riley Bolling, Robert L. Vann, and Rev. C.H. Trusty among others. Lampkin helped found the Pittsburgh NAACP in 1915 and would serve as its regional secretary before her appointment in the 1920s as the national field secretary. For Lampkin, the anti-lynching campaign would consolidate local organizing under the NAACP.

In 1919 the NAACP officially supported the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill. Sponsored by Missouri Congressman Leonidas Dyer, the bill stipulated that any state, county, or municipality where a lynching had taken place could face federal charges and fines up to \$10,000.00 and the district court had

jurisdiction to prosecute the offense. The Dyer Bill would pass the House of Representatives in 1922 but filibustered in the Senate. Subsequent bills like the Costigan-Wagner Bill of 1935 called for charges against any law enforcement officers who failed to exercise their responsibilities during a lynching incident. President Franklin D. Roosevelt would not support the bill for fear of alienating Southern White voters. Increasingly anti-lynching campaigns recognized the power and influence of political, social, financial, and legal authorities complicit in these crimes.

In support of the 1922 Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, the NAACP distributed buttons. Lampkin and other Pittsburgh branch members wore them during meetings and social gatherings. One of those buttons

that belonged to Lampkin is in the History Center collection and can currently be seen in the exhibition, *American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith*.

The issue of lynching continues today and recent attempts to get legislation passed have been blocked by Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky. In the 21st century, police killings of African Americans have been termed modern-day lynchings. Like the campaigns of the 1910s–20s, the contemporary campaign still involves the NAACP with the addition of the Black Lives Matter movement that protests incidents of police brutality and all racially motivated violence against Black people. 🌟

Logo: *Spirit Form* Freedom Corner Monument, Pittsburgh, Pa., © artist Carlos F. Peterson.