

## CRUSADE FOR JUSTICE EXCERPT

*Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931) was a journalist, activist, and researcher who reported on the living conditions of African Americans in the South. She often reported on lynchings. She formed the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, which focused on suffrage for women and civil rights. She also attended the Niagara Falls convention, which led to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).*

### **Autobiography of Ida B. Wells, on the response to rioting in Springfield, Illinois, in 1908**

During this time the riot broke out in Springfield, Illinois, and raged there for three days. Several daily papers called me up to know if we were going to hold an indignation meeting or what action, if any, was to be undertaken by us. The only church in which we had been wont to have such meetings would not, I was sure, give permission for me to hold one there and I felt sure that no one else would undertake it. . . .

I had such a feeling of impotency through the whole matter. Our race had not yet perfected an organization which was prepared to take hold of this situation, which seemed to be becoming as bad in Illinois as it had hitherto been in Georgia. As I wended my way to Sunday school that bright Sabbath day, brooding over what was still going on at our state capital, I passed numbers of people out parading in their Sunday finery. None of them seemed to be worried by the fact of this three days' riot going on less than two hundred miles away.

I do not remember what the lesson was about that Sunday, but when I came to myself I found I had given vent to a passionate denunciation of the apathy of our people over this terrible thing. I told those young men that we should be stirring ourselves to see what could be done. When one of them asked, "What can we do about it?" I replied that they could at least get together and ask themselves that question. The fact that nobody seemed worried was as terrible a thing as the riot itself.

One of the young men said our leaders ought to take some action about it, and I said, "That does not absolve you from responsibility." He replied, "We have no place to meet," and I quickly answered, "If there are any of you who desire to come together to consider this thing, I here and now invite you to my home this afternoon."

Three out of those thirty responded to my invitation! We discussed the situation from every angle and decided that we ought to try to get an organization among the young men which would undertake to consider such matters. Every one of the three was doubtful as to whether we could get such an organization going, but I urged them to try and see if each could report next Sunday with at least one other person.

That was the beginning of what was afterward to be known as the Negro Fellowship League.

## Sources:

Norwood, A. R. (2017). *Ida B. Wells-Barnett*. National Women's History Museum. <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/ida-b-wells-barnett>

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