

Writer Exposed Racial Injustice

Ida B. Wells built quite a reputation, even in her day.

Her journalist colleagues considered her the sharpest and toughest of investigative reporters. The black editor, T. Thomas Fortune, said of her: "She's tough as nails, sharp as steel, with plenty of nerve."

For more than 40 years, Wells' editorials and speeches were important forces in bringing world attention to the atrocities Southern Blacks endured.

Wells was born in Holly Springs, Miss., during the Civil War. She was only 16, the oldest child, when her parents died of yellow fever. Determined to support the family, she took an assumed name and lied about her age to get a job as a teacher.

In 1884, she moved the family to Memphis, seeking better economic opportunities. Wells studied at Fisk University and LeMoyné Institute while still teaching. Although slavery had ended, she saw social and economic conditions for blacks getting worse.

Second-class, separate facilities existed in schools and businesses throughout Memphis. Blacks routinely were banned from eating and drinking establishments and denied basic civil rights. But when Wells was thrown off a train for refusing to move to the black car, the incident was anything but routine. Indignant and outraged, she sued the

Chesapeake, Ohio and Southwestern Railroad and initially won \$500 in damages, which was reversed on appeal.

Wells enthusiastically wrote a story for a black church newspaper. The overwhelming reader response convinced her the press was very powerful and could inspire large numbers of people. She wrote, "There is no agency so potent as the press, in reaching and elevating a people."

Thus, the written word became her tool for social change.

She began to write practical articles about everyday problems and articles about Tennessee country and city life. She was not afraid to expose racial injustices. Before long, Wells had established herself as a respected journalist.

Published under the pen name Lola, her articles appeared in a number of prestigious journals. In 1889, she bought a one-third interest in the *Memphis Free Speech and Head Light*, and became its editor.

Wells always spoke her mind. And when her criticism of the racist and inadequate Southern education system caused her to lose her teaching job, her determination to fight for black rights simply grew.

Her colleagues showed their approval by electing her secretary of the Afro-American Press Association. They nicknamed her, "Princess of the Press."

When the Afro-American League was formed in 1891 by T. Thomas Fortune, Wells became its most vocal member. The League was created to support black civil rights and to mobilize the black community. But when it failed to adopt an aggressive approach, Wells condemned its inability to affect change.

Her letter to Fortune voiced her fighting spirit: "Yes, we'll have to fight, but the beginning of the fight must be with our own people. So long as the majority of them are not educated to the point of proper self-respect, so long our condition here will be hopeless."

Wells' focus changed after two events rocked Memphis. A close friend was lynched for "being too successful a business man," and three black grocers were hanged following false accusations.

Wells urged blacks to leave Memphis.

She wrote, "I have no power to describe the feeling of horror that possessed every member of the race in Memphis when the truth dawned upon us that the protection of the law was no longer ours."

She traveled extensively to bring national attention to the problems Southern blacks faced. While in New York, she learned the offices of *Free Speech* had been vandalized, and her life was in jeopardy if she returned to Memphis. Fortune hired



Ida B. Wells

her as a columnist for *The New York Age*, which gave her a new opportunity to investigate lynchings and to expose injustices.

Wells published two influential pamphlets, "Southern Horrors" in 1892 and "A Red Record" in 1895. She lectured in England and Scotland, bringing worldwide attention to disfranchisement, segregation and lynchings in the United States.

Eventually she settled in Chicago, married Ferdinand L. Barnett, and organized women's clubs and anti-lynching committees. She also spent two years as editor of the *Chicago Conservator* before starting her own family. Wells continued her anti-lynching campaign until her death in 1931.

Author Defends Neglect Of Community

seller about Winston-Salem. William Rice, a former history professor at Winston-Salem State University and a founder of the local African-American Historical Society, said Horton leaves his book open to criticism because of its title and the introduction, which gives readers the impression that the book is inclusive.

"It seems to provide a distorted picture of life in the community," said Rice. "You can't isolate and leave out segments of the community, unless you state that's what you're doing up front."

Rice talked about the Goler Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church at

Seventh and Patterson streets, which has been at that location since the late 19th century.

There's only one brief reference to Winston-Salem State University in the book (and that's in the context of "recreational facilities" such as Bowman Gray Stadium), while Wake Forest University is referred to three times. There's also a picture of Wait Chapel, which is on Wake Forest's campus.

"Winston-Salem State just completed its 100th anniversary and that in itself says a lot about the school," said Rice.

"It's very unfortunate that he

didn't mention us, but I'm not at all surprised," said Marie Roseboro, a civic leader and lifelong resident of Winston-Salem. "He's obviously from the old school. They have that mentality. They're just black folk, they don't mind." If he's going to promote Winston-Salem, we ought to be included. We helped to build this city."

Chapter nine of the book is called "Our Diverse Cultural Life," but there is no mention of African Americans.

"I'm not at all surprised," said Larry Leon Hamlin, the artistic director of the N.C. Black Repertory

Company. "It's not the first time we've been omitted from something. We are one of the most important black repertory companies in the world. It's certainly a slap in the face of every African American. What more can we do?"

Horton said he called the company three times "and they never got back to me."

Horton said he has been criticized by members of the Forsyth Country Club for not including a picture of their building as he did of Old Town Country Club. When asked why he included a photograph of a club that doesn't allow minorities as

members, he said that the club is the site of many functions.

Horton said that another white person told him that the book was a "typical white male elitist approach to the community." Horton laughed and said that the reason the book's postscript includes an address is for those readers who would like to suggest changes or additions.

Ford Motor Co Investigates Crash

born. He said they were called by the Winston-Salem police department to assist in the investigation.

"The car caught fire, and most of the time that doesn't happen, but this time it did," said Capt. Franklin Holman of the department's special operations division. "We're looking for what caused the fire."

The State Bureau of Investigation and the Winston-Salem Fire Department are also involved in the investigation.

The officer's widow, Sonja Jennings, said she, too, wishes she had answers.

"My main concern is why the car exploded," she said. "I know it's not going to bring my husband back, but it will give me peace of mind."

Jennings said she was aware that Ford officials were in town to investigate the cause of the fire, but that she hasn't been contacted by anyone connected with the investigation.

Dr. John Butts, the state's chief medical examiner, said that Jennings, 30, was knocked unconscious

by the car's impact, but it was the fire that killed him. The toxicology reports showed no drugs or alcohol in his bloodstream, Butts said.

Jennings and Officer Timothy Rayvon Wilson, 27, were traveling south on Winston Lake Road in their patrol car around 6:30 p.m. that Friday evening when Jennings lost control of his patrol car at the crest of a hill where the road curves. Tread marks on the road, a sign of brakes being applied, indicate that Jennings lost control of the car about 82 feet before the car hit a tree on the east side of the road.

Holman told the Chronicle last week that excessive speed was the cause of the accident, but the department hasn't been able to determine the car's exact speed.

Jennings said her husband was a safe driver, and didn't have a habit of speeding. "They keep saying he was speeding, but I don't believe that," she said.

Shortly after the car hit the tree, it burst into flames, Holman said. Wilson, who was released from

Forsyth Memorial Hospital last week, suffered a broken hip and head lacerations. He has been unavailable for comment since the accident. Both officers were wearing their seat belts, Holman said, and the Ford Taurus is equipped with driver-side air bags. The car had a full tank of gas, Holman said.

Holman said that the department had experienced no problems with its new Ford Taurus and he said he thought they were "okay" as patrol cars.

Lt. J. G. Hippert, who manages the fleet for the police department, said that the department is currently using 65 1992 Ford Taurus, and has an additional 66 1993's on order. The Taurus marked the first time the department has used front-wheel drive vehicles as patrol cars, compared to their previous use as unmarked surveillance vehicles.

Hippert said that the car Jennings was using had less than 1,600 miles on it and had never required servicing.

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Sorors Recently Honored

Members of Mu Sigma, the local chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. recently honored sorors who have been Sigma Gamma Rho women for 50 years or more.

At the chapter meeting in Janu-

ary, the fifty year sorors were pre-



Virginia Barsley
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January Fiction

- YOUR BLUES AIN'T LIKE MINE by Bebe Moore Campbell (G.P. Putnam's Sons). \$22.95, 0-399-13746-7. A novel of murder, love and passion in the Mississippi Delta.
- WAITING TO EXHALE by Terry McMillan (Viking Penguin, \$22, 0-670-83980-9). Four successful African American women come to terms with middle age and their continuing search for an ideal romantic relationship.
- EROTIQUE NOIRE: BLACK EROTICA edited by Miriam DeCosta Willis, Reginald Martin and Roseann P. Ball (Doubleday Anchor Books, \$27.50 hc, 0-385-42308-X, \$14 pb, 0-385-42308-8). An anthology of black erotica featuring stories and poems by prominent black writers.
- BAILEY'S CAFE by Gloria Naylor (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$19.95, 0-15-110450-8). A group of misfits share their stories in Naylor's "magical" cafe.
- DISAPPEARING ACTS by Terry McMillan (Pocket Books, \$8.95, 0-671-70843-0; Viking Penguin, \$18.95, 0-670-82461-5). A sometimes joyous, sometimes tragic story of an African American man and woman in love.

NONFICTION

- THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X edited by Alex Haley (Ballantine, \$2.00, 0-345-35088-5). The rise of the charismatic black leader in his own words.
- THE MEASURE OF OUR SUCCESS: A LETTER TO MY CHILDREN AND YOURS by Marian Wright Edelman (Beacon Press, \$15, 0-807-03102-X). The founder of the Children's Defense Fund shares her insights and advice on teaching values to America's children.
- LIVE YOUR DREAMS by Les Brown (William Morrow, \$20, 0-688-118895). A positive thinking book on day-to-day living.
- BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY: THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF THE MAKING OF MALCOLM X by Spike Lee with Ralph Wiley (Hyperion, \$12.95, J-56282 913-0). Lee's personal account of his exploration into the life and death of Malcolm X and the director's long struggle with Hollywood to produce the film.
- THE JUDAS FACTOR: THE PLOT TO KILL MALCOLM X by Karl Evansz (Thunder's Mouth Press, \$21.95, 1-56025-048-8). A theory on the truth behind the assassination of the powerful and controversial black leader.

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