IDA WELLS'S PRINT ACTIVISM

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ACTIVISM/WRITING

Activism is a multilayered social practice. It requires bodily acts of public defiance that often include attention-generating performances and theatrical action. It may also mandate various uses of language. Slogans, for instance, can be chanted and put on placards. If an activist practice wants to sustain itself and potentially change the status quo by implementing a binding law, language needs to take the form of writing. According to the *OED*, activism means "the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change."[1] The writing necessary for such "vigorous campaigning" relates to different genres, including manifestoes, memoirs, and petitions. These depend on various channels of distribution, from the street to the store, and publication media, from brochures and leaflets to periodicals and books. As such, the genres of activist writing are embedded in media environments with other texts that perpetuate the status quo.

Activist texts, that is, are both reactive and performative speech acts in the multilayered social practice of activism. Activism identifies and reinforces social schisms, which inform political legislation and are also represented in publications. If activist texts demand change, they always already exist in reaction to other texts. This dialogic quality has been established in text-based theories of public deliberation by scholars such as Michael Warner or Janet Lyon, who build on Jürgen Habermas.[2] If activism needs a cause and exposes schisms, however, it exists in a constellation of Manichean partisanship, which also tests the limits of deliberation. This polar constellation requires the monitoring of the other side. While contemporary reading publics and voting blocs might constitute themselves in autochthon spaces reinforced by algorithmic selection, feeding you the news and views of the like-minded clicker, the monitoring points to a complementary aspect: proponents of a cause are no less invested in reading their opponents. They read and write about other peoples' news, too. If there are metaphorical filter bubbles and echo chambers, they often know of each other's existence. Activist writers cite the other side, deploying a tactic I call re-cycling – a specific iteration of rewriting that repurposes, extends, and comments on a news cycle. Re-cycling, I hold, is a concrete textual tactic of activist media monitoring.[3]

With these reflections and concepts in mind, I want to unfold my case study, which is situated in the United States of the late nineteenth century. Framed by racial segregation, the social conditions for activist practice and writing were partisan to the extreme at this moment of blatant white supremacy. The iterative quality of racist hate crimes and concerted newspaper propaganda in the South

1 "Activism", in: *Oxford English Dictionary*, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/activism_n.

2 Michael Warner: *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York: Zone Books (2002); Janet Lyon: *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press (1999); Jürgen Habermas: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into A Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger, Cambridge: Polity Press (1989 [1962]).

3 The concepts of re-cycling and monitoring result from a collaboration with Curd Knüpfer, a political scientist who analyzes the media conditions of political communication in the digital public sphere.

restricted both activist practice and textual public deliberation. In the general context of serial criminality, Mark Seltzer shows that the public sphere cannot be dissociated from concrete public places, where the threat of deadly violence with its random ubiquity affects bodily mobility and creates a "pathological public sphere."[4] For the specific case of Ida B. Wells, this is crucial. Initially an activist practitioner and investigative journalist on the ground, death threats forced her to give up her newspaper, flee to the North, and recalibrate her investigative print activism as a media criticism. Along these lines, I conceive of her posthumously published autobiography *Crusade for Justice* (1970) as a professional memoir, that is: as the vocational self-presentation of an activist and journalistic entrepreneur. Read this way, her account allows us to distill some generalizable features of activist practice and their relation to writing. Her pamphlets, exemplified by *Southern Horrors* (1892) and *A Red Record* (1895), I read as activist texts that deploy the tactics of re-cycling. Citing from other publications, they monitor the news cycles of a media environment and function as storage media.

OWNERSHIP/VOCATION

The title of Wells's professional memoir, *Crusade for Justice*, may itself suggest a tactic of re-cycling. "Crusade" evokes the cross burnings, which were part of the ritualistic lynch murders perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan and one of the vigilante militia group's general tactics of intimidation, as Robert Kahn shows.[5] In her account, Wells dramatizes her curriculum vitae from working as a schoolteacher to becoming an investigative reporter, newspaper entrepreneur, and media critic. The story of her print activism is thus also a story of professional aspiration, of becoming a writer who can make a living. Rejecting the role of the educator, one of the key occupations assigned to women regardless of the color of their skin, she describes her journalism as "an outlet through which to express the real 'me'."[6] In the chronology of her professional memoir, this Romanticist conception of writing as a means of creative self-expression follows the presentation of an act of public defiance on a train ride. When asked to give up her seat on a train by a conductor, Wells refuses to do so, resists her forceful removal to the smoker's car, where other Black Americans were seated, by biting the conductor's hand, and eventually gets off the train. With Jim Crow laws and segregated cars not yet officially implemented, she decided to sue the railroad company. After her legal counsel, "a colored lawyer," "had been bought off by the road," she hires "a white one" instead and succeeds in receiving "damages of five hundred dollars."[7] When she declines to settle the case, which would have granted her this fairly substantial

4 Mark Seltzer: "Serial Killers (II): The Pathological Public Sphere", in: *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1995), pp. 122–149, p. 124.

5 Robert A. Kahn: "The First Amendment Encyclopedia", in: https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1105/cross-burning (2023).

6 Ida B. Wells: *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. by Alfreda M. Duster, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (2020 [1970]), p. 29.

7 Wells: *Crusade for Justice* (2020 [1970]), p. 17.

sum, it is moved to the State Supreme Court, which charges her with the court costs. Conceived as a description of activist practice, the scene conveys a sense of unwavering principledness. If it exposes both the corruptibility of the Black American lawyer and the public relations concerns of a corporation, it also shows that activism strives to be incorruptible. At the same time, activist practice, which by definition has no interest in economic profit, may radicalize a corporate principle: financial compensation would have to be reinvested to further the principled cause.

Importantly, Wells also frames her act of public defiance as a news event. She paraphrases and capitalizes the alliterated racialized headline "DARKY DAMSEL GETS DAMAGES" from a Memphis newspaper. Endowing her case with historical significance, she brands it as "the first case in which a colored plaintiff in the South had appealed to a state court since the repeal of the Civil Rights Bill by the United States Supreme Court."[8] Wells effectively positions her case as a precursor to the landmark decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), with which the Supreme Court will soon declare the southern doctrine of "separate but equal" constitutional and legitimize public segregation. The description of her act of public defiance, as both a news event and landmark case of sorts, serves to set her up as a historical figure, whose ensuing print campaign against lynching can be traced back to the moment when activist practice translates into filing a lawsuit against a corporation.

Joining a lyceum, Wells published her first articles under the pseudonym Iola for a newspaper and a church weekly in Memphis, Tennessee. She attributes the success of her early writing to her "plain, common-sense way," which recognizes the low but growing literacy rates among Black Americans in the aftermath of slavery and defines her style: "I never used a word of two syllables where one would serve the purpose."[9] Under late nineteenth-century conditions, activist writers of color developed a minimalist style that could be read to and understood by those who did not have the privilege of an education in literacy. The linguistic simplicity of Wells's writing preconditioned the circulation of her texts in other Black American newspapers and secured new commissions by editors in both northern and southern states. As her early success in publishing promises a journalistic career, Wells notes that the "monotony of the primary work [i.e., teaching, F.S.] began to grow distasteful" and that "the desire came to own a paper."[10] Activism in print is not merely about publicized writing, but about owning the means of production, especially in a media environment characterized by racial segregation. Teaming up with a pastor and a business manager, she buys a share in the *Free Speech and Headlight* and assumes editorial control in 1890. The more frequent use of possessive pronouns suggests a strong sense of both ownership and professional calling in these pages about the *Free Speech*: "my vocation," "my real

8 Wells: *Crusade for Justice* (2020 [1970]), p. 18; orig. caps.

9 Wells: *Crusade for Justice* (2020 [1970]), p. 22. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (https://nces.ed.gov/naal/lit_history.asp), the percentage of Black Americans aged 14 years and older who could not read was still 56.8% by 1890, down from 70% in 1880. By 1900, 44.5% of African Americans were still considered illiterate.

10 Wells: *Crusade for Justice* (2020 [1970]), p. 29, 32.

vocation," "my paper."[11] After two years, Wells lost her teaching job over one of her editorials, which exposes the dire conditions in schools for children of color. Since she held editorial responsibility, her reputation was damaged, and the board of education denied her further employment. Activist authorship and editorship are precarious. One's signature can draw repercussions, here also from within the local Black community, which Wells claims to represent and holds accountable.

Partly making a virtue of economic necessity, partly following her vocation, Wells presents herself as a savvy entrepreneur and communal networker who almost triples the number of issues printed of the *Free Speech* within a year. She travels the borderlands of Arkansas and Tennessee in search of new subscribers and casts herself as a trailblazer, stressing the public perception of her historically novel position as a female agent and newspaper editor. Subscriptions were one method of securing readers. Another was to have so-called "news butchers" sell the paper on trains and in entertainment venues. Wells supplements her discussion of enhanced circulation with the decision to print "the *Free Speech* on pink paper to make it distinctive to a great many people who could not read." The use of pink paper, it would appear, visually distinguishes the publication and may motivate non-readers to become readers. But the choice of paper color produces an ironic twist. Wells relates that "some of the butchers were selling copies of the *Police Gazette* to many of the poor illiterates who wanted the *Free Speech* – they could not read for themselves, so they got to asking for the pink paper."[12] A national illustrated catering to a male audience with true-crime stories, sports reporting, and sexualized gossip, *The National Police Gazette* had switched to the same paper color by 1890.[13] In Wells's anecdote of print sales, activist practice, preconditioned by the perhaps tactical re-cycling of paper color, and successful print activism, preconditioned by reader competence, collide. But the anecdote may not only foreground reader competence, expose activist shortsightedness, and show the news butchers' profit focus. The *Police Gazette*'s entertainment value, for some readers, may also simply have trumped the activist value of the *Free Speech*.

FAILURE/SUCCESS

The paper-color publicity stunt raises the question of activist success and failure. Black American writers were heavily invested in building institutions of print, as Eurie Dahn notes in an important new book focusing on turn-of-the-century conditions of publication. Taking Wells as her opening example, Dahn emphasizes

11 Wells: *Crusade for Justice* (2020 [1970]), pp. 36, 37, 41. The rhetoric of vocation, which Wells cites to express her ambition, originates in Romanticism and may continue to inform the self-positionings of entrepreneurial journalist-novelists in the late nineteenth century. On vocation see Günter Leypoldt: "'Sacred Calling' in Nineteenth-Century Authorship: Wordsworth, Emerson, Thackeray", in: *ESQ: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture* 67/3–4 (2021), pp. 599–637.

12 Wells: *Crusade for Justice* (2020 [1970]), p. 38.

13 Brett McKay, Kate McKay: "America's First Popular Men's Magazine: The National Police Gazette", in: *The Art of Manliness*, www.artofmanliness.com/character/knowledge-of-men/americas-first-popular-mens-magazine-the-national-police-gazette (April 30, 2013).

the dialogic relations between Black presses and their readers, whose experiences under Jim Crow provided the raw material for journalistic activism. She describes these relations as "multiple networks" that leave their mark on intra-, inter-, and extratextual levels.[14] Yet the retrieval of networks and institutions of print may not always be possible. In another recent study, Elizabeth McHenry stresses the many stories of failure that are obscured by the prevalent narrative of Black social uplift: "even those authors we associate with *success* during these years struggled to place their literature" in a volatile publishing environment marked by compartmentalization, instability, and rejection.[15]

The case of the *Free Speech* provides a particularly cruel example in this regard. Wells's investigative reports and outspoken editorials provoked the ultimate form of censorship: the threat of her physical existence. While Wells travels in Mississippi, three of her acquaintances and friends are gruesomely murdered in Memphis, primarily because their grocery store is considered unwanted competition for a white business owner. She writes editorials and public letters that call on Black Americans to boycott white businesses (the boycott being another activist practice) and that monitor the sensationalist coverage of the event in the white press. Still traveling in the aftermath of the lynching, Wells makes plans to move her paper out of Memphis. But on a trip north she soon learns that a return to the South will be impossible. In her memoir, Wells connects the lynching to her professional ambitions. Just when she had proven that her newspaper could be profitable, the killing jeopardized her livelihood. Wells describes how she learned about her new precarious status in Memphis in a conversation with Timothy Thomas Fortune, who had republished some of her articles in his *The New York Age*, the leading Black American newspaper:

> "Haven't you seen the morning paper?" he replied. I told him no. He handed me a copy of the *New York Sun* where he had marked an Associated Press dispatch from Memphis. The article stated that [...] a committee of leading citizens had gone to the office of the *Free Speech* [...], destroyed the type and furnishings of the office, and left a note saying that anyone trying to publish the paper again would be punished with death. The article went on to say that the paper was owned by Ida B. Wells, a former schoolteacher, who was traveling in the North.[16]

The dramatic irony and layers of mediation deserve attention. News of her demotion reaches Wells in the form of a press release from a respected non-profit news agency that is reprinted in one of New York's leading papers. In one sense, the informational neutrality of the Associated Press release recognizes the unlikely story of an educator turned print activist. Beyond that, the demolition of

14 Eurie Dahn: *Jim Crow Networks: African American Periodical Cultures*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press (2021), p. 6.

15 Elizabeth McHenry: *To Make Negro Literature: Writing, Literary Practice, and African American Authorship*, Durham: Duke University Press (2021), p. 9; italics in the original.

16 Wells: *Crusade for Justice* (2020 [1970]), p. 53.

the typesetter contrasts with the note that is left behind, which may have been handwritten or typed, and which threatens any attempt of future publication with physical death. Most crucial may be the sentence that identifies her as the owner of the paper. Her publicly known ownership of the *Free Speech* makes her into a news event and subjects her to the ceaseless news cycle of reported lynching. Preceding the Great Migration of the early twentieth century, during which six million Black Americans fled segregation and poverty in the South, the cited reference to her travels echoes the fate of fugitive slave peoples in earlier decades, who had to live in constant fear of being caught and returned. When activists become news themselves, they also become public targets.

It remains difficult to write a success story in the name of Ida B. Wells at her own historical moment. Deprived of her paper, partly forced into self-publishing, and with her professional memoir unpublished during her lifetime, she remained largely barred from impactful institutions. These included the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the most powerful Black American activist institution, which was initially established as an interracial project in 1909. In *The Crusade for Justice*, Wells details the selection process of founding members. She presents her exclusion as the result of a concerted effort, in which W. E. B. Du Bois plays the major role: "Those white men had done all they could to rectify the deliberate intention of Dr. Du Bois to ignore me and my work."[17] The building of durable institutions that consolidate activism has a social component. It collides with personal ambitions that fuel competition for leadership. Both in its printed and infrastructural dimensions, activism is inextricable from internal friction.

As for the *Free Speech*, no issue has survived. Except for articles reprinted elsewhere, its paper trail cannot be reconstructed. Put in general terms: Since print activism is subject to censorship, its capacity to be archived is threatened. At the same time, due to its tactical disposition, print activism is a process. It requires an adaptability to shifting conditions, which might make today's petition yesterday's news.

PAMPHLET/STORAGE

Against this biographical backdrop, Wells's shift to pamphleteering is significant in several respects. As an agent, the pamphleteer is "a solitary figure who addresses everyone" and who "assails the social order as a whole," as Luc Boltanski puts it. The pamphleteer's public engagement, he continues, relies on anchoring "words in a personal existential experience" to legitimize her critique of the institutions she chafes against.[18] While Wells can be regarded as a personification *par excellence* of this figure, the specific function ascribed to the pamphlet

17 Wells: *Crusade for Justice* (2020 [1970]), pp. 274–285, p. 278.

18 Luc Boltanski: *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation*, Cambridge: Polity Press (2011), p. 101. He extrapolates from Marc Angenot: *La Parole Pamphlétaire: typologie des discours modernes*, Paris: Payot (1982).

as a publication medium also deserves attention. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century U.S. literary history, pamphlets were pivotal to a range of discourses including abolitionism, class struggle, national independence, and suffragism. In his classic study on the American Revolution, historian Bernard Bailyn defines the pamphlet as an ideologically inflected publication medium, cheaper and more flexible than a book but more durable than a broadside. According to Bailyn, pamphlets are defined by their explicatory value. They lay bare the "assumptions, beliefs, and ideas" that inform the discursive "positions" created by "the manifest events" shaping a historical moment.[19] Often polemical in tone, the pamphlet accommodates a paper trail. Pamphlets belong to what literary historian Michael Warner in his seminal study of the role of print in eighteenth-century America calls "counterpublic literature." From within a civic culture of letters, pamphlets assume a key function. They present "a published debate [...] as public from two different perspectives." As instances of modern printed publicness, pamphlets transform the personal relation between discussants into the impersonal conduct of debate that constitutes a participatory public of "*in principle unknowable* others."[20]

The specific context of African American letters partly dovetails with Warner's argumentation. But it also requires some modification, since the status of pamphlets in Black American literary history is different. Peter Newman, Patrick Rael, and Phillip Lapsansky, who consider African American pamphlets before the Civil War, stress the versatility of the medium, which they situate, with Bailyn, between book and broadside. As a publication medium, the pamphlet "could be used by all manner of activists" and assemble different genres, including "an argumentative essay, a short narrative of events, or a bare-bones sketch of an organization's proceedings." Situated between argument, chronicle, and protocol, this textual pragmatics of the printed pamphlet, the editors note, "did little to displace the use of the spoken word" in Black American social circles.[21] Involvement in the printed public sphere remained crucial nonetheless. In the context of abolitionism, it preconditioned claims to citizenship and the right to equal participation in public life. More fundamentally, as Henry Louis Gates argues, Enlightenment discourse considered writing as "the *medium* of reason's expression." Demonstrating the ability "to write and publish imaginative literature," to write and publish to begin with, Black Americans could and had to claim their status as humans.[22]

19 Bernard Bailyn: *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press (2017 [1967]), p. xxviii.

20 Michael Warner: *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1990), p. 40; orig. italics.

21 Peter Newman, Patrick Rael, Philip Lapsansky: "Introduction: The Theme of Our Contemplation", in: *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790–1860*, ed. by Peter Newman, Patrick Rael, Philip Lapsansky, New York: Routledge (2001), pp. 1–31, p. 2, 3. On the importance of antebellum Black American literary societies to compensate for low literacy rates, see Elizabeth McHenry: "'Dreaded Eloquence': The Origins and Rise of African American Literary Societies and Libraries", in: *Harvard Library Bulletin* 6/2 (1995), pp. 32–56.

22 Henry Louis Gates: "Editor's Introduction: Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes", in: *Critical Inquiry* 12/1 (1985), Special Issue: "Race," Writing, and Difference, pp. 1–20, p. 9; orig.

Wells's mentor, the charismatic orator and former slave Frederick Douglass, with whom she collaborated to challenge the exclusion of African Americans from the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, publicly performed many of his texts.[23] While always mindful of the still substantial numbers of illiterate Black Americans, Wells belonged to a different media environment. Her pamphlets stage that shift textually by publishing a private letter of endorsement she had received from Douglass. The enclosed letter positions her as his legitimate successor and authorizes her pamphlets as updated print activism. Already in the paratext, then, Wells conceives the pamphlet as a storage medium. By printing the letter it stores the legacy of Black activism and guarantees its transgenerational continuity in her name. But it also marks a shift. In contrast to the slave narratives published by Douglass and others, which had to be authenticated by white editors, paratexts of postbellum texts could now be legitimized by Black American peers.

MONITORING/RE-CYCLING

The storage function of the pamphlet also includes Wells's own writings. She makes clear as much in the first sentence of the preface to *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*: "The greater part of what is contained in these pages was published in *The New York Age* of June 25, 1892, in explanation of the editorial which the Memphis whites considered sufficiently infamous to justify the destruction of my paper, *The Free Speech*."[24] Published as an imprint of *The New York Age*, the pamphlet is introduced as the expanded edition of a previously published report. Its explicatory value relates to a previous news cycle, which revolved around the "editorial" that had provoked the "destruction" of her publishing outlet. Wells's print activism is one of archival reprinting, to the extent that it preserves a media history of the violence of censorship. The pamphlet is positioned as a publication medium that affords durability compared to the fleetingness of the periodical news cycle. Wells goes on to note that since her report had been printed in the New York newspaper "requests have come from all parts of the country that 'Exiled,' (the name under which it appeared) be issued in pamphlet form."[25] Generating a sense of nationwide demand and influence, Wells endows her individual authorship with a sense of historical importance. The engraving of her likeness on the title page contributes to that. It conveys a sense of self-assertiveness and self-exposure. As she makes clear in her professional memoir and in a dedication that follows the preface to her pamphlet, the republication and the recognition of her authorship

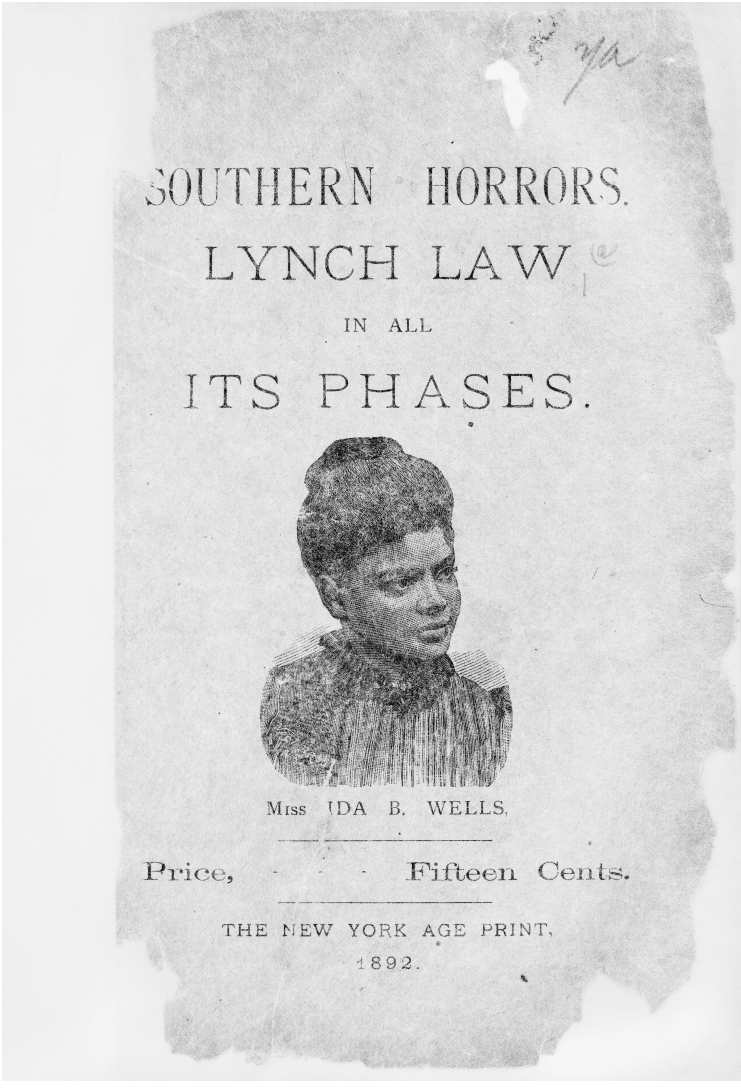
italics; p. 8.

23 For a commented edition of the relevant texts in this collaboration, see Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, Irvine Garland Penn, Ferdinand L. Barnett: *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not Included in the World's Columbian Exposition*, ed. by Robert W. Rydell, Urbana: University of Illinois Press (1999).

24 Ida B. Wells: "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases [1892]", in: idem: *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, ed. by Mia Bay, New York: Penguin (2014), pp. 57–82, p. 58.

25 Wells: "Southern Horrors [1892]" (2014), p. 58.

resulted from the efforts of Black American women based in New York. With the dedication, this authorship is thus embedded in an alliance of Black female northern urbanites.



1 Miss Ida B. Wells: *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases*, New York: The New York Age Print (1892), cover.

The retitling of the piece compared to the newspaper report is no less significant. While "Exiled" suggests an autobiographical account, the new title pairs the literary mode of the gothic ("Southern Horrors") with the historiographic one of a chronicle that traces the development of unlawful vigilante justice ("Lynch Law

in All Its Phases"). The chronicle and the gothic, I hold, complement the parodist tactics that Jacqueline Goldsby ascribes to *Southern Horrors*.[26] As a mode of historiography, the chronicle recounts and stores a succession of events. For Wells, it covers both the story of the enforcement of lynching and the fate of her career. As a mode of literary presentation, the gothic in nineteenth-century African American letters, according to Maisha Wester, resonates with the collective traumas of antebellum slavery and postbellum lynching.[27] Wells frequently cites at length the detailed descriptions of lynchings in southern papers, exposing her readers time and again to representations of these horrific scenes. In the late nineteenth century, the gothic is also tied to discourses of degeneracy and monstrosity, as Stephan Karschay demonstrates for the British context.[28] Wells's preface relates as much when it spells out its opening thesis, "The Afro-American is not a bestial race," which requires a complementary call upon "the conscience of the American people to a demand for justice to every citizen, and punishment by law for the lawless."[29] Here Wells's rhetoric effectively turns the tables, exposing the unlawfulness of the titular lynch law and suggesting an inversion: the bestial manifests itself in white vigilante violence. Simone Davis shows how Wells's text operates with similar inversions of "binary models."[30] As a structural principle and rhetorical device, this operation formalizes the Manichean inclination of activist writing in general.

Much of the textual composition of the pamphlet can be described as a press review and analysis of various news cycles, prompted by incidents of lynching and often underlying incidents of miscegenation. In the first of five chapters, Wells assembles the printed reactions to the *Free Press* editorial, which had tracked lynchings in several southern states between two issues of the paper and which had led to her demise. Her tactical re-cycling of newspaper clippings creates the textual effect of a collage that monitors the white southern press for its incisive rhetoric and exposes it as a metaphorical echo chamber. The chapter closes with a comment on miscegenation laws that leads into chapter two, where Wells recycles clippings from a fraction of the "thousands of such cases throughout the South," in which social pressures and racist prejudice criminalize romantic love and sexual relations across the color line.[31] Directing the attention of her readers to quotations from white women's confessions and testimonies as cited in the newspapers, her tactic of re-cycling reveals a complex psychosocial portrait of

26 Jacqueline Goldsby: *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (2006), pp. 71–80. Goldsby reads Wells's *Southern Horrors* as a parody of the autobiography, more precisely the slave narrative, and of stunt reporting, a news-generating tactic deployed by writers such as Nelly Bly and Stephen Crane involving undercover reporting and media criticism.

27 Maisha L. Wester: *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2012), esp. pp. 67–99.

28 Stephan Karschay: *Degeneration, Normativity, and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle*, Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan (2015).

29 Wells: "Southern Horrors [1892]" (2014), p. 58.

30 Simone W. Davis: "The 'Weak Race' and the Winchester: Political Voices in the Pamphlets of Ida B. Wells-Barnett", in: *Legacy* 12/2 (1995), pp. 77–97, pp. 85–86.

31 Wells: "Southern Horrors [1892]" (2014), p. 63.

these women's anxieties that oscillate between racist prejudice, social pressures, and interracial desire. Accordingly, phrasings such as "These are her words" or "Note the wording" indicate that her print activism also relies on a conception of language as full of slippages and in need of interpretation.[32]

While Wells conveys a sense of historical self-importance, *Southern Horrors* did not resonate much, certainly not with a white audience. Lecture tours to Great Britain gave her some prominence and reception. In her professional memoir, the chapters on her time abroad not only rely on anecdotes and travelogue. They also reprint some of her newspaper writings (letters and editorials) and copy other press accounts of her public appearances. Once again, she stages herself as a media event and public persona, now writing for the white-owned *Inter-Ocean*, the "one journal in the United States [...] brave enough to print at length the doings, impressions, and reactions of a colored woman who was in another country pleading for justice in her own."[33] Wells's indictment of the press here reaches beyond the racial prejudice of the white southern papers. She also holds northern periodicals accountable for ignoring lynching, as well as for denying her the space to publish and advance her career.

In her next pamphlet, *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892–1893–1894*, self-published in Chicago in 1895 after her return from abroad, she deploys a different tactic of re-cycling. As its subtitle indicates, the pamphlet draws on the sociological method of statistics.[34] Tabulation also became a mode of presentation in the informational strand of newspaper reporting. *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Wells notes, "has made a specialty of the compilation of statistics touching upon lynching."[35] She uses the reputation of the newspaper to push back against potential disputes of the names and numbers. Binding the authority of her account to the numerical accounting of the *Tribune*, she declares:

> The purpose of the pages which follow shall be to give the record which has been made, not by colored men, but that which is the result of compilations made by white men, of reports sent over the civilized world by white men in the South. Out of their own mouths shall the murderers be condemned.[36]

Based on reports by white southern individuals, the "compilations" expose a media environment and bureaucratic machinery that keeps track of its committed crimes. The perpetrators record the evidence for their own potential conviction. If only there were a jury that deserves the name. In keeping "Judge Lynch's Record,"

32 Wells: "Southern Horrors [1892]" (2014), p. 63, 65.

33 Wells: *Crusade for Justice* (2020 [1970]), p. 108–109.

34 The context of Chicago is important since the city "was to American sociology what Manhattan was to American journalism", as Goldsby phrases it. See Goldsby: *A Spectacular Secret* (2006), pp. 71–80, p. 82.

35 Ida B. Wells: "A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States [1895]", in: idem: *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, ed. by Mia Bay, New York: Penguin (2014), pp. 220–312, p. 229.

36 Wells: "A Red Record [1895]" (2014), pp. 228–229.

as the column in the edition of January 1, 1895 phrases it, the *Tribune* positions itself as a storage medium to the extent that it provides a criminological index, primarily organized by the chronology of months.undefinedFor her pamphlet, Wells reclaims a different storage modality. *A Red Record* may, as Goldsby suggests, follow "the layout style of the *Tribune's* annual report."[37] But Wells's re-cycling of the newspaper's collected records also reorganizes them under the rubrics of alleged crimes. The function of these rubrics is ambivalent. On the one hand, they direct attention to the contingencies involved in the construction of the punishable offenses, which they index. On the other hand, the catalog of keywords can be read as a parodist imitation of sensationalist newspaper headlines, with the exclamation points excluded. Wells not so much provides a parody of "the seeming neutrality of numbers."[38] After all, the names of individuals, their racialized identities, and the dates of their executions are retained in both the *Tribune* columns and *A Red Record*. Her critique of the *Tribune* can rather be found in the prominence her re-cycled tabulations give to the alleged causes. She exposes the arbitrary language of conviction that dominated the news cycles and the vigilante violence in the South. The implicit charge against the Chicago paper is different: the northern press may keep track of lynchings, but it does not properly account for them because it fails to analyze the social pathologies that legitimize these public spectacles of violence. Carrying out this work in her print activism,[39] Wells supplements the news cycles, which her pamphlets monitor and store. This specific use of the publication medium may be her lasting achievement in the history of print activism. Her professional memoir, in turn, provides an account of elements of activist practice that are valid also beyond their historical situatedness, not least because it relates these elements to publicist entrepreneurship in a changing media environment.

37 Goldsby: *A Spectacular Secret* (2006), pp. 85–86.
38 Goldsby: *A Spectacular Secret* (2006), p. 83.
39 For a succinct discussion of the lines of argument that constitute Wells's political theory see Alex Zamalin: *Struggle on Their Minds: The Political Thought of African American Resistance*, New York: Columbia University Press (2017), pp. 59–87.

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2 *Projet de l'impôt patriotique, donné par Mad. de Gouges, dans le mois de sept.re 1788*, [Paris] ([1789]), Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, collection Hennin, 10181, http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40257593r. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

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2 Robert Seymour, *The March of Intellect* (ca. 1828), London: British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum

REPRODUCING FREDERICK DOUGLASS

1 Unknown, *Frederick Douglass* (ca. 1877), Washington, D.C.: Brady-Handy photograph collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Online: https://loc.gov/item/2017895330/.
2 Unknown, *Howard Univ., Washington, D.C., ca. 1900 – Law library* (ca. 1900), Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Online: https://loc.gov/pictures/collection/anedub/item/2001705791/.
3 Frances Benjamin Johnston, *African American Schoolgirls in Classroom, Learning to Sew* (ca. 1899), Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.
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BORN-TRANSLATED MANIFESTO

1 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *The Communist Manifesto*, adapted by Martin Rowson [Graphic Novel], London: SelfMadeHero (2018), pp. 13–14. Reproduced by permission of selfmadehero. Artwork © Martin Rowson.
2 Stefanie Kremmel, *Der Lebenslauf der Übersetzung. Die Transkulturalität des Kommunistischen Manifests*, Vienna: University of Vienna (2022), p. 325. © Stefanie Kremmel.
3 [Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels:] *The Communist Manifesto*, published by the International Workingmen's Association, New York: Schaerr & Frantz (1883), pp. 30, p.3–4. Reproduction by Biblioteca Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milan.

MATERIAL FOR AGITATION

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MASS VIOLENCE IN PAMPHLETS

1 2014 propaganda poster urging Crimeans to vote in the Crimean status referendum. Source: Andrew Lubimov, AP images.
2 Eugène Atget, *Rue de la Montagne – Sainte Geneviève*, Paris (n.d.). Source: ImageZeno.org, ID-no. 20001850032, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=64881668.
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5 Juliane Prade-Weiss, Mural in front of bombarded Serbian state TV headquarters, Belgrade (15 August 2021). © Juliane Prade-Weiss.
6 Juliane Prade-Weiss, Monument commemorating the death of employees during a 1999 NATO air raid (15 August 2021). © Juliane Prade-Weiss.
7 Unknown, *Querdenker* protesting anti-COVID-19 policies. © picture alliance / SULUPRESS.

IDA WELLS'S PRINT ACTIVISM

1 Miss Ida B. Wells: *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases*, New York: The New York Age Print (1892), cover, in: Ida B. Wells, *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, ed. by Mia Bay, New York: Penguin (2014), p. 57.