



## Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930

*By Patricia A. Schechter*

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Pioneering African American journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931) is widely remembered for her courageous antilynching crusade in the 1890s; the full range of her struggles against injustice is not as well known. With this book, Patricia Schechter restores Wells-Barnett to her central, if embattled, place in the early reform movements for civil rights, women's suffrage, and Progressivism in the United States and abroad. Schechter's comprehensive treatment makes vivid the scope of Wells-Barnett's contributions and examines why the political philosophy and leadership of this extraordinary activist eventually became marginalized.

Though forced into the shadow of black male leaders such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington and misunderstood and then ignored by white women reformers such as Frances E. Willard and Jane Addams, Wells-Barnett nevertheless successfully enacted a religiously inspired, female-centered, and intensely political vision of social betterment and empowerment for African American communities throughout her adult years. By analyzing her ideas and activism in fresh sharpness and detail, Schechter exposes the promise and limits of social change by and for black women during an especially violent yet hopeful era in U.S. history.

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### **Review**

[This] is an ambitious interpretive study of Wells-Barnett's career as a reformer. It makes a persuasive case for her importance, even central importance, over a fifty-year period. (Barbara Sicherman, Trinity College)

The depth of insight and sensitivity of the author's analyses of black leadership and gender politics are unsurpassed. (Kevin K. Gaines, University of Michigan)

‘This’ is an ambitious interpretive study of Wells-Barnett's career as a reformer. It makes a persuasive case for her importance, even central importance, over a fifty-year period. (Barbara Sicherman, Trinity College)

This book manages to get behind the African American woman's legendary veil of dissemblance to reveal the struggles of a pioneer who was as often at odds with herself as she was with the whites and men who structured her world. (Deborah Gray White, Rutgers University)

### **Review**

[This] is an ambitious interpretive study of Wells-Barnett's career as a reformer. It makes a persuasive case for her importance, even central importance, over a fifty-year period. . . . Schechter has broken new ground here.--Barbara Sicherman, Trinity College

Through stunning readings of Wells-Barnett's autobiography . . . and meticulous social history, Schechter not only has produced the best and most serious analysis of this protean figure but also has enriched our understanding of the politics of the body.--*Journal of American History*

*Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* is more than a simple biography. It is a multilayered expose of a society molded by racism, a people saddled with sexism, and one woman's public and private struggle with both.--Deborah Gray White, author of *Too Heavy a Load: African American Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*

*Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* manages to get behind the African American woman's legendary veil of dissemblance to reveal the struggles of a pioneer who was as often at odds with herself as she was with the whites and men who structured her world.--Deborah Gray White, author of *Too Heavy a Load: African American Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*

A challenging account of Ida B. Wells-Barnett that emphasizes her role in social reform and race relations. This historical biography of Wells-Barnett's accomplishments and frustrations provides new perspectives on the 'age of reform' in the United States, and it does so without romanticizing the era.--*Journal of Southern*

## History

The research Patricia Schechter exhibits in this book--academically first-rate, readable nonetheless for nonacademic audiences--has no business going unread, unrecognized. Her book is henceforth a benchmark in Wells studies.--*Memphis*

A provocative study that goes far beyond Wells-Barnett as a leader in the anti-lynching movement. . . . Schechter emphasizes the importance of religious faith and religious institutions in all aspects of Wells-Barnett's career. . . . Perhaps the most interesting part of this fascinating book is Schechter's careful analysis and deconstruction of Wells-Barnett's autobiography, unfinished and unpublished during her lifetime.--*American Historical Review*

So profound and insightful are Schechter's analyses of the interwoven dynamics of race and gender both in Wells-Barnett's innovative critiques of lynching and in underlying gender assumptions about African American leadership that I would assess her work on Wells-Barnett as definitive. . . . The depth of insight and sensitivity of her analyses of black leadership and gender politics are unsurpassed.--Kevin K. Gaines, University of Michigan

### About the Author

Patricia A. Schechter is assistant professor of history at Portland State University in Oregon.

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