

## **The Life and Times of Ida B. Wells**

### **Professor Mia Bay**

Summer 2025

### **Course Description**

This course explores the history of African Americans between 1865 and the 1930s by taking a close look at the life of anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells. A member of emancipation's first generation, Wells was born to enslaved parents during the Civil War, and survived a rough childhood to become a teacher, journalist, and trenchant social critic. Most known for her crusade against lynching, she was a social justice warrior whose long career as a civil rights activist illustrates the many challenges faced by African Americans during her lifetime. This course uses Wells's life as a focal point for understanding not only anti-lynching, but also the rise of Jim Crow, the history of early Black civil rights organizations and women's clubs, the Great Migration, the African American experience during the World War I era, and the emergence of New Negro leadership.

### **Course Readings**

1. Bay, Mia. *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2009.
2. Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Project Gutenberg.  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>
3. Washington, Booker T. *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography*. Project Gutenberg.  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2376/2376-h/2376-h.htm>
4. Wells, Ida B. *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*. Edited by Mia Bay and Henry Louis Gates. New York: Penguin Books, 2014.

### **Course Requirements**

- Watch all course lectures
- Complete all course readings
- Submit five short papers (500 words each)
- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page (~3,750 words) research paper or project of appropriate rigor
- Complete a course evaluation (A survey link will be sent to your Gettysburg email during week eleven of the semester.)

## Learning Objectives

1. Learn the history of Reconstruction, Redemption, the Great Migration, the African American experience during World War I, and the New Negro movement
2. Explore the status of American and African American women between 1865 and 1930
3. Examine the development of post-emancipation Black leadership

## Class Schedule

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**Week One:** May 29: Introduction

### Readings

- Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, Chapter 1.
- Heather Andrea Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), Chapter 2. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapters 12 and 14. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week One module.](#))

### Assignments

- Discussion Board One
    - First post due: Sunday, June 1
    - Second post due: Wednesday, June 4
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**Week Two:** June 5: Coming of Age in the Reconstruction South

### Readings

- Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, Chapter 2.
- Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*, Chapters 1–5.

### Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
    - First post due: Sunday, June 8
    - Second post due: Wednesday, June 11
  - Short Paper One due: Wednesday, June 11
    - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor, or to one of your own design.
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### **Week Three:** June 12: Redemption and the Rise of Jim Crow

#### Readings

- Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, Chapter 3.
- Ida B. Wells, *The Light of Truth*, 1–41.
- Barbara Y. Welke, "When All the Women Were White, and All the Blacks Were Men: Gender, Class, Race, and the Road to Plessy, 1855–1914," *Law and History Review* 13, no. 2 (1995): 261–316.

#### Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
    - First post due: Sunday, June 15
    - Second post due: Wednesday, June 18
  - Final Project/Paper Question due: June 18
    - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final project or paper will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the project or paper you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing.
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### **Week Four:** June 19: The Strange Career of Booker T. Washington

#### Readings

- Washington, *Up from Slavery*, Chapters 6–17

#### Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
    - First post due: Sunday, June 22
    - Second post due: Wednesday, June 25
  - Short Paper Two due: Wednesday, June 25
    - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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### **Week Five:** June 26: Anti-Lynching

#### Readings

- Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, Chapter 4–5.
- Wells, *The Light of Truth*, 57–82.

## Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
    - First post due: Sunday, June 29
    - Second post due: Wednesday, July 2
  - Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due: Wednesday, July 2
    1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback AND
    2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final project/paper.
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## **Week Six:** July 3: Organizing for Change

### Readings

- Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, Chapter 6–7.
- Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapters 1, 3–7, 13.
- Wells, *The Light of Truth*, 415–20.

### Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
    - First post due: Sunday, July 6
    - Second post due: Wednesday, July 9
  - Short Paper Three due: Wednesday, July 9
    - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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## **Week Seven:** July 10: World War I

### Readings

- Alice M. Dunbar-Nelson, "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory," *The Crisis*, April 1918, 271–275. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Seven module.](#))
- Horace Pippin's Autobiography, First World War, circa 1920s. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Seven module.](#))
- William Jordan, "The Damnable Dilemma: African-American Accommodation and Protest During World War I," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 4 (March 1995). ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

## Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
    - First post due: Sunday, July 13
    - Second post due: Wednesday, July 16
  - Short Paper Four due: Wednesday, July 16
    - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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## **Week Eight:** July 17: The Great Migration

### Readings

- Wells, *Light of Truth*, 456–494.
- Emmett J. Scott, "Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916–1918," *The Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 3 (1919): 290–340. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989): 912–920. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

## Assignments

- Project/Paper Preview due: Wednesday, July 23
    - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
    - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper.
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## **Week Nine:** July 24: Women Reformers and Ida's Political Vision

### Readings

- Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, Chapter 8.
- Wells, *The Light of Truth*, 432–437.
- Mary Church Terrell, "The Progress and Problems of Colored Women," January 11, 1920. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Nine module.](#))

## Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
  - First post due: Sunday, July 27
  - Second post due: Wednesday, July 30

- Short Paper Five due: Wednesday, July 30
    - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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## **Week Ten:** July 31: Red Summer

### Readings

- Wells, *Light of Truth*, 494–555.
- Claude McKay, *If We Must Die* (1919) ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Ten module.](#))
- Brian K. Mitchell, "Soldiers and Veterans at the Elaine Race Massacre," in *The War at Home: Perspectives on the Arkansas Experience During World War I*, ed. Mark K. Christ (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2020), 129–142.
- Christopher Robert Reed, "Martial Ardor, the Great War, and the Race Riot of 1919," in *Knock at the Door of Opportunity: Black Migration to Chicago, 1900–1919* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2014), 281–302. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

### Assignments

Rough Draft due: Wednesday, August 6

- Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
  - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
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## **Week Eleven:** August 7: The Post-War South

### Readings

- Wells, *Light of Truth*, 556–568.
- Richard Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children: Five Long Stories* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938), 71–166.

### Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine
    - First post due: Sunday, August 10
    - Second post due: Wednesday, August 13
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## **Week Twelve:** August 14: Wells's Life and Legacy

### Readings

- Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, Chapter 9.
- Alex Zamalin, "Ida B. Wells, The Antilynching Movement, and the Politics of Seeing" and "The Future of Resistance" in *Struggle on Their Minds: The Political Thought of African American Resistance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 59–87, 150–159.

### Assignments

- Final Project/Paper due: August 20
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### **Course and Program Policies**

It is the responsibility of students to know, understand, and abide by course and program policies.

For a full overview of program policies, review the Gettysburg College–Gilder Lehrman Institute Student Handbook.

### Course correspondence

Correspondence with faculty and administrators should be formal. Include a subject line, addressee, and closing. Put the name and number of your course in the subject line.

### Plagiarism and AI

This program uses Turnitin to check for instances of plagiarism and AI. Plagiarism and papers composed fully or in part by AI will not be tolerated. This includes self-plagiarism. A student caught plagiarizing or composing papers with AI for the first time may receive a zero on the assignment. A student caught plagiarizing or composing with AI for a second time may be permanently removed from the program.

Your section professor will set the policies for use of AI for research or purposes other than composing your papers.

### Late work

Assignments should be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time on the due date unless otherwise specified by your section professor. If you think you will be unable to submit an assignment on time, it is your responsibility to contact your section professor to ask for an extension before the assignment's due date. Late assignments will be docked 5% if less than a week late, 10% if one week late, and an additional 10% for each subsequent week.

### Grading scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade	Grade Points
A	95%–100%	4
A-	90%–94%	3.67
B+	87%–89%	3.33
B	84%–86%	3
B-	80%–83%	2.67
C+	77%–79%	2.33
C	74%–76%	2
C-	70%–73%	1.67
D+	67%–69%	1.33
D	64%–66%	1
D-	60%–63%	.67
F	0%–59%	0

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### **Assignment Descriptions**

#### **Short Papers** (25% of grade – 5% per short paper)

Students will complete five short papers. Each should be approximately 500 words long. The purpose of these papers is not to merely summarize weekly readings but to demonstrate that you have read them analytically and contextually. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Student-created prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings and be included at the beginning of the paper. If you need help getting started, you can complete one of the options listed below.

Complete a thesis identification - Select one of your assigned readings and focus on identifying the thesis as well as the evidence the authors use to support that thesis.

Complete a primary source evaluation - Evaluate a primary source from the Gilder Lehrman Collection or elsewhere. Primary sources must be relevant to that week's readings. Keep the following questions in mind:

- Who is the author of this document?



- Who was their intended audience?
- How might both author and audience impact the content of the document?
- For what reason was this document created?

Complete a book review - Focus on one of the secondary sources assigned in this course and critique it. Keep the following questions in mind:

- What is the author's argument?
- Does the author adequately support their argument?
- Are you convinced of their argument? If not, why not?
- How does this source fit into the larger discussion of its topic?

Discussion Board Posts (18% of grade – 2% per discussion board)

Students will interact in 9 discussion boards in this course. Discussion boards are led by section professors, who will provide specific instructions for participation in their section. You are required to make at least one post to each discussion board and respond to **at least two other students**.

Question-and-Answer Sessions (15% of grade – 5% per reaction)

Throughout the semester the lead professor of each course will conduct five Q&As. Students **MUST** attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. **In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must attend the session live and complete a 1–2-paragraph Q&A Reaction within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If you cannot attend three of the five Q&As, you may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 500-word review of topics covered for each missed Q&A. **Makeup assignments must be completed within two weeks of the missed Q&A.**

Final Project/Paper (42% of grade)

For the final assignment of each course, you will choose to complete either a research project or 15-page research paper. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts and podcasts, documentary editing and transcription, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans *will not* be accepted. A 5-page paper narrative must accompany the project. Your section professor must approve research projects.

The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred.

Both final assignment options require you to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that you do not yet know the answer to. You will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources,

mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether you choose to pursue a project or paper, finals are scaffolded throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows time to incorporate instructor feedback into assignments.

### Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Project/Paper Proposal (2%)

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final project or paper. This should include a description of the project or paper you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic (answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be super specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing) and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (what is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?)

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (3.5%)

This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor's comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan on utilizing in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3–5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Project or Paper Preview (5%)

This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section professor. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be, at minimum, the first ten pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Final Product (21%):

Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.

Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiography papers.