

Review/**Television**

Profile of an Early Traveler On the Road to Civil Rights

By **WALTER GOODMAN**

Viewers who don't know as much as they might about black history have the opportunity this evening to meet one of its heroines. "Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice" tells of the brave life and works of the 19th-century journalist, known among black reporters as "princess of the press," who led the nation's first anti-lynching campaign. The hourlong program, on Channel 13 at 10 and Channel 49 at 9, is a strong start to a second season of "The American Experience."

Wells's long battle against the repression that followed the withdrawal of Federal troops from the South after the Civil War is traced to the day that the 22-year-old Memphis

schoolteacher was thrown off a train for refusing to leave the all-white "ladies car," an incident that calls up comparisons with the 1960's.

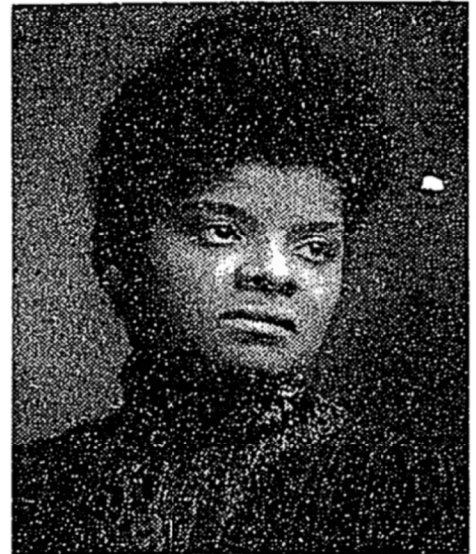
Wells's newspaper accounts of her case led her to the post of editor and co-owner of The Memphis Free Speech, which she used to protest the murder of three friends, young black men who opened a grocery store that competed with a white-owned store. She wrote powerful condemnations of the white mob, and at her urging thousands of blacks packed up and moved to the newly opened Oklahoma Territory. She remained in Memphis, where she supported a boycott of the city's trolley system, another forerunner of this century's civil-rights struggle.

Among its other virtues, tonight's program draws attention to the black middle class that managed to emerge between the Civil War and World War I despite all manner of obstacles.

When Wells had the audacity to suggest in print — in Memphis, in the 1880's! — that white women and black men might be sexually attracted to one another, a mob destroyed her presses. She settled in the North, first in New York and then in Chicago.

This account, based on Wells's memoir, "Crusade for Justice" — excerpts from which are impressively read by Toni Morrison — portrays a sophisticated fighter whose prose was as tough as her intellect. She understood the economic aspect of the assaults on blacks and wrote resoundingly about it. She called lynching "an excuse to get rid of Negroes who are acquiring wealth and property and thus keep the race terrorized — and keep the nigger down."

Wells was an inventive tactician. On a visit to London, she tried, with some success, to apply economic pressure on the South's cotton interests by arousing Britain, a major cotton market, against lynchings. Back in America, she joined the Suffragist



Ida B. Wells

movement, but criticized Susan B. Anthony for participating in a segregated meeting. She sided with black radicals like W. E. B. Du Bois in their clash with "accommodationists" like Booker T. Washington, and was in on the founding of the N.A.A.C.P. Marriage and a sizable family seem not to have slowed her down. At the age of 60, she returned to the South to help obtain the release of 12 black farmers in Arkansas who had been sentenced to die for defending themselves against a mob.

The narration, written by the producer, William Greaves, and read in a heavy-handed way by Al Freeman Jr., suffers by comparison with Wells's direct and unaffected style. Mr. Greaves and his co-producer, Louise Archambault, have been more successful in finding and using still photographs — many grim, some grisly — that document the barbarities this indomitable woman devoted her life to fighting.

Independent Spirit

IDA B. WELLS: A PASSION FOR JUSTICE, written and directed by William Greaves; produced by Mr. Greaves and Louise Archambault; edited by Gary Winter and Nina Schulman; music composed and conducted by Kermit Moore; narrated by Al Freeman Jr. with memoir excerpts read by Toni Morrison.

**Weekdays
at 5:25 P.M.**

THE TOPIC IS WINE

**Frank Prial
of
The New York Times
reports.**

**Sponsored in part by
The Wine Enthusiast.**

WQXR 96.3 FM 1560 AM

The Radio Stations of The New York Times