



February 2017 Her Story ENewsletter Journalists

The recent passing of British journalist Clare Hollingworth, who reported the outbreak of World War II, reminds us that women have played key roles in reporting news. Although the role of newspapers is diminishing today, for a long time people got their information from the iconic newspaper. Women's participation was important and effective. In this ENewsletter, we learn about two historical women journalists: Ida B. Wells-Barnett (commonly called Ida B. Wells) and Nellie Bly (Elizabeth Cochran Seaman).

Ida B. Wells was born a slave in 1862 in Mississippi. After graduating from Rust College, she moved to Memphis, Tennessee. Her activism against the Jim Crow laws of the South is first well documented by her refusal to move out of a first class railroad car. Wells hired a lawyer who sued the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. The case was fought all the way to the Tennessee Supreme Court which ordered her to pay the court costs. She began to write editorials in black newspapers; she then bought her own newspaper where she could continue her activism to advance the rights of African Americans. After three of her friends were lynched, she wrote a pamphlet titled *Southern Horrors* and later a book, *A Red Record* (1895), through which she spoke out against lynching. A mob destroyed her newspaper offices and she was forced to leave Memphis. She later settled in Chicago where she was active in the causes of civil rights and women's suffrage. Wells has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



Ida B. Wells

Credited as the pioneer of investigative journalism, **Nellie Bly**, whose real name was Elizabeth Cochran Seaman, began her career as a teenager by writing under a pseudonym. She wrote to protest a misogynistic column in the Pittsburgh Dispatch (Pennsylvania) in 1880. She so impressed the editor that he hired her! At the paper she focused on the plight of working women and she did not appreciate being pushed to the society pages. After a brief time in Mexico as a foreign correspondent, she returned to Pittsburgh but again became discouraged by the placement of her articles. Hired by Joseph Pulitzer's New York World in 1887, she feigned insanity and was committed to New York's Women's Lunatic Asylum. Her expose of the terrible and often brutal conditions resulted in significant changes in the treatment of the mentally ill. In 1889-1890, she undertook to emulate Jules Verne's journey--Around the World in 80 Days - 72 days later she had circumnavigated the globe; this was a world record at the time. She was an inventor and a leading industrialist as well, until there was employee embezzlement. In 1913, as a reporter she covered the Women's Suffrage Parade.



Nellie Bly

Nellie Bly and Ida B. Wells are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Their accomplishments inspire us and remind us as well how important it is to continue to tell women's stories.

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