



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



April 2026 Her Story ENewsletter Journalists



We were fascinated recently when we learned about journalist Fanny Fern. The best paid newspaper columnist during her era, Sara Payson Willis was born in 1811 and grew up in Boston. Journalism ran in her family; her father founded a religious newspaper, and her brother edited a New York newspaper. Although she wrote about “womanly” topics, taking on the name “Fanny Fern,” beneath the surface her articles had political – and feminist – undertones. When she was hired by the *New York Ledger* in 1855, at a per column rate of \$100 (about \$4,000 today), she became the highest paid newspaper columnist in the country. Having been widowed and divorced, she was a fierce advocate of a woman’s right to financial independence.



Two additional journalists of note are profiled in this newsletter – Ida B. Wells and Jovita Idár. A fearless campaigner for rights for all people, **Ida B. Wells** (also known as Ida B. Wells-Barnett) was a slave in Mississippi, freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. When she moved to Memphis, Tennessee she worked as a teacher, and she co-owned a newspaper. Her crusade against lynching led to the destruction of the newspaper’s presses and she was forced to relocate. *The Red Record*, a pamphlet that she authored in 1895, significantly influenced the national debate on lynching.

Wells remained active in the civil rights movement after moving to Chicago and advocated for women’s suffrage. She was one of the founders of the National American Association of Colored People, today called the NAACP. In 1893, she founded The Women’s Era Club, a civic organization for African American women. Wells has been inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame, featured on a U.S. postage stamp, and featured on a quarter coin in the American Women quarter series.



Jovita Idár followed in the footsteps of her father, the publisher of *La Crónica* (The Chronicles) in Laredo, Texas. After earning her teaching certificate in 1903, Idár taught school but resigned due to segregation and poor conditions for Mexican American students. She then joined two of her brothers at the newspaper. She advocated for civil rights and social justice for Mexican Americans. In 1911, she and her family organized the First Mexican Congress to unify Mexicans in fighting for justice. Idár wrote articles promoting women’s suffrage and encouraging women to vote.

Also in 1911, she founded and became the first president of the League of Mexican Women, through which she worked to provide free education to Mexican children. When she moved to San Antonio, she worked as a newspaper editor and publisher. Idár founded her own newspaper, *Evolución*, in 1916. She was known for saying “when you educate a woman, you educate a family.” Idár was featured on a quarter in the American Women quarters series.

Ida B. Wells, and Jovita Idár are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women’s accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women’s stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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