

### **Lesson Overview:**

This lesson plan introduces Ida B. Wells' speech "Lynching, Our National Crime" through guided reading, discussion questions, and extension activities.

Note: Prior to beginning lesson, warn students that they will view images and read accounts of racial violence and torture which are graphic, inhumane, and disturbing. These images and accounts are necessary to honestly study American history and assess its legacy.

### **Warm-up:**

Present students with a photograph of a lynching such as that of [Will Brown in Omaha, Nebraska on September 28, 1919](#). Show the photograph to students and have them analyze it using the following questions.

Level I: Description

1. What do you see in this photograph?
2. Who do you see in this photograph?

Level II: Interpretation

1. What do you think that the crowd is feeling?
2. How can you tell?

Level III: Analysis

1. Why do you think this man is being lynched?
2. What year do you think that this occurred?

Alternatively, students may be presented with [fragments of a photograph](#) and asked the same level I questions after each fragment is revealed. After the whole image is revealed, students may be asked level II and III questions.

Following student discussion, the teacher should read aloud the [context and background of the lynching](#). Here is the [context and background of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith](#).

### **Introducing the Resource:**

Provide students with a background of Ida B. Wells, focusing in particular in her [career as a journalist and campaign against lynching](#). In her 1909 speech "[Lynching, Our National Crime](#)," Wells presents

irrefutable facts concerning the frequency and motivation of lynchings in the United States and calls for an urgent and long overdue national response.

Read "[Lynching, Our National Crime](#)" by Ida B. Wells. While you read, track Well's arguments that lynching is a national crime, as well as her demands. Alternatively, a teacher may [use excerpts of the speech](#).

**Discussion:**

1. Work with a partner to identify the central idea of the speech.

- First, summarize the central idea in your own words.
- Then, find the quote that you think best summarizes the central idea.

2. Share your answer with the class. Did others choose a different quote? How do your classmates' summaries compare to your own?

3. As a class, discuss:

- Wells says that "lynching is a color line murder."
  - What does she mean by "color line murder?"
  - What facts does she offer to support her claim?
- According to Wells, what is the most frequent justification offered for the lynching of African American men?
- What does Wells argue is the real motivation behind the lynchings of African Americans?
- Wells writes that "federal protection of American citizenship is the remedy for lynching."
  - Why does she believe this is necessary? Why have current efforts to stop lynching been ineffective?
  - Through Wells' solution, what will be required of the federal government?
- How does Wells attribute blame for lynchings to local newspapers?
- How does Wells attempt to persuade the nation to act in her closing paragraph?

**Extension Activity:**

**Option 1.** Read about the heroism and [impact of Monroe and Florence Work](#). Then, using the website's interactive map and catalog of lynchings in America answer the following questions:

- Does the data support Ida B Well's claim that lynching was a national crime? What evidence supports your response?
- How did instances of lynching vary throughout the country? In what ways were lynchings different from one another?
- How were all lynchings similar throughout the country? What characteristics did all lynchings seem to share?

**Option 2.** Ida B. Wells and Monroe and Florence Work were far from the only people working to end the use of lynchings as a tool of terror. Read about [other people who fought against lynching](#). Create character sketches for each person, highlighting their accomplishments.

**Option 3.** Lynchings are often presented as past events; something that happened in US history. Based on your working definition of a lynching and your understanding of their purpose and characteristics, do you feel that lynchings still occur in the US today? If so, research a contemporary lynching in the US and alert the public to it through a newspaper article. Much like Ida B. Wells, you will need to raise public awareness and offer a call to action.