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*The Fortune of
Wells: Ida B.
Wells-Barnett's
Use of
T. Thomas
Fortune's
Philosophy
of Social
Agitation as a
Prolegomenon
to Militant
Civil Rights
Activism*

TOMMY J. CURRY



Abstract

Despite the recent rise of attention to race and racism in American philosophy, there is no current scholarship exploring the philosophy of T. Thomas Fortune and his influence on Ida B. Wells-Barnett. The contemporary mode of thinking in American philosophy seeks to establish a bridge between the thought of turn of the century thinkers and 1960 style integrationism. This integrationist tradition is not only the newest, but the smallest tradition in African American thought. Most Black thinkers, as evidenced by the work of Fortune and Wells-Barnett, conceptualized the world from a radical perspective that was pessimistic about the capacity for whites to be morally persuaded against white supremacy and thought that violence against white racist lynchers was the only hope for Black survival in the South. This paper first explores the philosophy of T. Thomas Fortune which held that Blacks must agitate and create disorder in the South, since it was the white race's order that gave rise to lynch mobs, murder, and rape. Second, this paper considers the effect of agitationist philosophy on the anti-lynching campaign of Wells-Barnett. Ultimately, this paper concludes that with the help of Fortune, Wells-Barnett introduced a political philosophy that shares intellectual kinship with the armed militancy popularized by in the 1960's.

Keywords: T. Thomas Fortune, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Agitation, Lynching, white Supremacy, Racism, Afro-American League.

Jesus Christ may be regarded as the chief spirit of agitation and innovation. He himself declared, "I come not to bring peace, but a sword."

T. Thomas Fortune

Introduction

One cannot delve seriously into the centuries of activism and scholarship against racism, Jim Crowism, and the terrorism of lynching without encountering the legacies of Timothy Thomas Fortune and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Black scholars from the 19th century to the present have been inspired by the sociological and economic works of Fortune and Wells. Scholars of American philosophy, however, continue to ignore their writings, their theoretical contributions and their ethical aspirations, preferring instead the insipid declarations of white turn of the century figures, like John Dewey, Josiah Royce, and Jane Addams, figures who are rarely if ever mentioned by their Black counterparts, as the best resources for conceptualizing America's race problem.¹ Fortune (1856–1928), the longtime editor of the preeminent Black newspaper *The New York Age*, was not only respected as the dominant economic theorist of his era, but lent council to Booker T. Washington as an adviser, a ghost writer, and the editor of his first autobiography entitled *The Story of My Life and Work*.² He also served as a mentor to a young W.E.B. DuBois, whose first writing position was as an editor for the *Age*, and continued as such on both Fortune's *New York Globe* and the *New York Freeman*. Fortune was not only the leading and most influential Black radical of the late 19th century, but it was he who brought Wells-Barnett to New York and allowed her to continue her anti-lynching campaign after the destruction of her Memphis paper *The Free Speech* in 1892.³

Next to the rediscovery of Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931) has earned the coveted status of a canonical figure in the America academy. The recent texts dedicated to her life by Paula Giddings⁴ and Mia Bay⁵ not only establish Wells-Barnett's significance as a Black historical figure, but argue that our current study of Black intellectual history is in fact incomplete without her presence. In 1995, Jacqueline J. Royster noted this upward trend in Wells-Barnett scholarship and recognized that "recent research and scholarship in feminist studies and African American studies have made it possible for many women's stories to be recovered."⁶ However, the trajectory of the scholarship which serves as the foundation of Wells-Barnett's canonization has also had a narrowing effect on particular aspects of her thought. This scholarship emphasizes her religious, racially progressive, gendered activism over and against the more radical race conscious aspects of her thinking that run counter to the established academic narrative. The need to legitimate Wells-Barnett canonization by copyrighting her identity as a "Black feminist," "race woman," "pragmatist," and "liberal progressive" has discouraged explorations that look at the influence, support, and cultivation of her thought by radical Black male thinkers at the turn of the century. Claudia D. Nelson notes this dynamic in her article "The Men that Influenced Wells-Barnett: Jim Wells, T. Thomas Fortune and Frederick Douglass":

Ida B. Wells was able to transcend the constructs of race and sex, and subvert the constraints of the Cult of True Womanhood because there were men in her life who encouraged her to step outside the purview of what society believed a woman should do and be. She had a solid support system from the moment she entered the world to the peak of her anti-lynching campaign and civil rights, human rights, and women rights activism. Jim Wells, Tom Moss, T. Thomas Fortune, Jerome B. Peterson, and Frederick Douglass influenced and impacted the life and work of the princess of the press, Ida B. Wells.⁷

Wells-Barnett emerges from an epoch of ethnological contestation, an epoch Gail Bederman points out that “race and gender roles were “nascent civilization-al language” that stand in sharp contrast to how we understand “Blackness,” and “masculinity versus femininity” today,⁸ there is a re-emerging impasse in how Black scholars claim to know, to read, and to understand the lives of our ancestors.

Rather than focus on the aforementioned and problematic categories of interpretation in Wells-Barnett scholarship, this article explores the effect of Fortune’s philosophy of agitation on Wells-Barnett and her anti-lynching crusade. There is a striking similarity between Wells-Barnett’s anti-lynching pamphlets *Southern Horrors* and the *Red Record* and the analyses made in the early works of T. Thomas Fortune concerning the capitalist impulse of white culture, the futility of moral suasion on whites, and the use of lynching to enforce the underclass status of Blacks.⁹ In an effort to read Wells-Barnett outside of our post-civil rights ethos, this work aims to explore the more radical agitationist philosophy adopted by Wells-Barnett that places her criticism of white supremacy outside the now dominant liberal democratic (integrationist) traditions privileged by many in American philosophy. In short, I believe there is ample historical evidence and textual support to suggest that Wells-Barnett was directly influenced by and in support of Fortune’s agitationist philosophy. I also believe that Wells-Barnett held with Fortune that whites are driven by economic interests rather than moral compassion with regard to the race problem and that white society utilizes the crime of rape and the punishment of lynching to cement the destruction of Blacks in the South.

This article begins by describing the relationship between Wells-Barnett and T. Thomas Fortune, a relationship that Wells-Barnett credits with her developing agitationist philosophy, and one which I believe makes the pragmatist reading of Wells-Barnett by Patricia Schechter untenable. In section II, I turn to Wells-Barnett’s economic analysis of lynching in the South. For Wells-Barnett, lynching was a crime of white barbarism that was deployed to intimidate and oppress economic and political progress of Black people, and specifically the militant spirit of Black men. Section III highlights the activism of Wells-Barnett in

Fortune's Afro-American League, an organization that not only predated the NAACP, but was built on the agitationist philosophy of Fortune and rejected the idea that white involvement in Black struggles for social and political rights was useful or desirable. In the last section, I argue that Wells-Barnett holds a realistic pessimism that admits white Americans, especially in the South, are committed to anti-Black racism, a commitment that necessitates armed resistance and the finding of allies outside the United States.

I. Understanding Fortune and Wells: How this Intellectual Union Cultivated Wells-Barnett as a Radical Anti-Lyncher; not a Pragmatist.

Despite Wells-Barnett's initial disappointment in the physical appearance of Fortune,¹⁰ when they finally met in 1888 at the Negro Democratic national conference in Indianapolis¹¹ their meeting was favorably precipitated by the exchange of ideas through correspondence and the reading of each other's work. In 1886, Wells-Barnett wrote a diary entry commenting on her anxiousness to read Fortune's article entitled "Civil Rights and Social Privileges" which appeared in the *A.M.E. Church Review* earlier that year.¹² Giddings notes that in 1886 "it was clear that Fortune's potentially revolutionary notion to decouple class standing and behavior from constitutional rights was beyond Ida's grasp,"¹³ However, Wells-Barnett's later work seems to indicate a derivative cultivation of the spirit captured by Fortune's work for a "dynamitic element in the Afro-American."¹⁴ Like Wells-Barnett, Fortune too conveyed a great respect for her work. In the August 11, 1888 edition of the *New York Age*, Fortune had this to say of their first meeting:

I met 'Iola' at the conference. She has become famous as one of the few women what handles a goose quill with diamond point as handily as any of us men in newspaper work . . . She is rather girlish looking in physique, with sharp regular features, penetrating eyes, firm set lips and a sweet voice . . . She is smart as a steel trap and she has no sympathy for humbug.

While this relationship of mutual admiration and respect was dissolved by 1899, before the turn of the century it flourished and was the basis of Wells-Barnett's prolific attacks against lynching after her exodus from Memphis. Following the lynching of her dear friend Thomas Moss, Wells-Barnett was forced from Memphis by the threats of a lynch mob who after finding her the writer of the *Free Speech* declared that "her sex would not save her." It was here that Wells-Barnett accepted the standing invitation to move to New York from Fortune, who had been republishing her works in his New York editorial—the *Age*. As she remarks, "with the splendid help of T. Thomas Fortune and Jerome B.

Peterson, owners and editors of the *New York Age*, I was given an opportunity to tell the world for the first time the true story of Negro lynchings, which were becoming more numerous and horrible. Had it not been for the courage and vision of these two men, I could never have made such headway in emblazoning the story to the world.”¹⁵

Recent scholarship depicts Wells-Barnett as a pragmatist feminist whose interests aligned with the social awareness of white figures like Jane Addams or John Dewey.¹⁶ Such claims are not only revisionist but largely inventions of white American scholars seeking to establish continuity between Black and white figures in an era defined by Jim Crow segregation, lynching and the mass murder of Black citizens. Believing that their “theory” is sempiternal, these scholars have no problem retroactively attributing and/or describing the lives of said thinkers under the conceptual milieu of our present day. As the work of Shawn L. Alexander convincing articulates, the most dominant Black political thinking in the late 1800’s was modeled on nationalism—the need to protect and empower the Black race separate from whites, even more specifically the ideas that defined Fortune’s Afro-American League and Wells-Barnett’s political organization was rooted in racial unity, a consciousness Fortune saw and imitated from the Irish National Land League.¹⁷ One of the most severe misinterpretations of Wells-Barnett is penned by Patricia A. Schechter, who argues that Wells-Barnett was a visionary pragmatist—the central theme of her book entitled *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform 1880-1930*. In this work, Schechter maintains that Wells-Barnett’s social commitments took profound inspiration from her religious faith, and in dealing with the racial and gender frustrations of the social world gave rise to a visionary pragmatism that “sustained a lifetime of agitation for social justice.”¹⁸ Schechter continues,

... like other strands of America pragmatism, visionary pragmatism describes not a European school of philosophy, but rather a style of thought and activism. Visionary links Wells-Barnett to the prophetic traditions in African American religion documented by Cornel West and others. Pragmatism locates her in both the intellectual ferment of the turn of the century Chicago as well as in Black women’s legacy of making a way out of no way for themselves, their families, and communities forged out of slavery.¹⁹

Linking the impetus to work, educate and write with the Chicago progressivism emerging at the turn of the century, Schechter attempts to bring Wells-Barnett into conversation with a philosophically established tradition of social political thought. An interpretative tradition of “Black pragmatic thought,” that despite its radical origins, has shown itself to be a form of cultural criticism that reinforces white supremacy by accepting the ideal that Blacks have always desired and continue to

desire integration and a place in American democracy. It is this ideal that allows Schechter to claim that in “Wells-Barnett’s hands, visionary pragmatism entailed a distinctive view of self and service designed for personal survival and social contestation, for God and community, and for rights and responsibility for all citizens.”²⁰

Schechter claims that the religious convictions responsible for Wells-Barnett’s progressive social criticism stem from her mother Lizzie’s deep religiosity, and her father’s involvement in school and politics. The influence of her parents combined with the Methodist precepts of her childhood which focused on “personal piety, a stress on human agency in the world of salvation, and a stringent but helpful moral code designed for the practical improvement of daily life,” resulted in a profound “Black women’s social gospel” utilized by Wells-Barnett against racism and sexism simultaneously. Schechter argues that “Wells relied fundamentally on religious faith for her sense of self and vision of serve. Anti-lynching’s dual quality as religious vocation and political career derived not from Well’s status as a ‘transitional’ figure in American reform but from the integrity of southern black women’s protest traditions and a visionary pragmatism that blended the imperatives of faith and politics.”²¹ Schechter aims to establish that Wells-Barnett’s “exile,” her refusal to be confined to her place, and embrace a “ladylike quiet,”²² motivated her towards anti-lynching and political activism. Schechter’s argument, supposes a uniqueness of Black women’s religiosity without any historical or textual support. Here work not only neglects the relationships Black women shared with the radical Black Christian traditions of antebellum Black political thought, but insists on a narrative whereby Black male intellectuals had no tangible influence on the political consciousness of their day. The historical treatments of Black radical religiosity have, for the most part, insisted on the understanding how Black men and women both escaped Victorian gender norms, and strengthened dominate views of their times. For example, Gayraud S. Wilmore’s *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People* contends that the focus on survival and humanity has been at the core of the Black Christian tradition’s resistance to racism and global white supremacist theology.²³ Schechter claims that there is a unique Black woman’s social gospel and theology in the works without any attention to the long documented dynamics of sexuality between men and women in the Black Christian tradition in the late 1800’s. Throughout the late 19th century, Black men and women used the Bible to justify the uplift of the race. Along with Fortune, Martin R. Delany, Edward Blyden, Alexander Crummell, who is credited by Anna Julia Cooper for inspiring her well-known 1886 essay “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race,” John E. Bruce, and Arturo Schomburg are but a few well know figures that supported the education, uplift, and protection of Black women’s virtue, and the

work of women for the race.²⁴ Neglecting these relationships allows Schechter to de-radicalize and separate the thought of Black women from the political thinking of their time, only to replace it with a pragmatist/feminist account that continues to disregard the actual historical nuance of Black existence in America.

Schechter articulates a narrative of Black culture in late 1800's where Black social consciousness was ill prepared for the activism and radicality of Wells-Barnett, because she was a Black woman. Ironically, Schechter cites Mrs. N. F. (Gertrude) Mossell's 1904 *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* as proof of a text that "grappled with a changing set of regional, generational, and political relationships within an increasingly diverse and far flung talented tenth," and follows this summation of Mossell's work with a somewhat anachronistic question: "what did it mean for Ida B. Wells to become a leading female thinker of the race?"²⁵ Even the most cursory reading of Mossell's work strongly suggests that Schechter doesn't have a real understanding of Black political culture at the turn of the century. Contrary to Schechter's reading, Mossell begins her work thanking her husband and Fortune for their suggestions in the preparation of her work.²⁶ She then proceeds to contextualize the labors of the Afro-American woman in a chapter entitled "The Work of the Afro-American Woman." In this chapter, Mossell notes that "the men of the race, in most instances, have been generous, doing all in their power to allow the women of the race to rise with them."²⁷ Unlike Schechter's characterization, Mossell argues that Black women, who have graduated from universities, are teachers, doctors, and journalists in Black communities working for the uplifting of the race. Mossell does not write this as a prolepsis of things to come but rather argues quite adamantly that Black women had already taken up the task of race and sex and doing quite well in their pursuits. This is exactly the tone with which she describes Wells-Barnett. According to Mossell, "the greatest work in philanthropy yet accomplished by any woman of the race is that undertaken and so successfully carried out at the present hour [is] by Ida B. Wells."²⁸

To make the case that Black men are not supportive of Black women's political activism and uninformed of Black women's contributions to the race, Schechter points to an August 1892 letter between Frederick Douglass and M.A. Majors, where Douglass says "I have thus far seen no book of importance written by a negro woman and I know of no one among us who can appropriately be called famous."²⁹ There are two problems with Schechter's analysis. First, according to the introduction of Mossell's work, there are three books that were given to the world in 1892 that merit attention: Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South by a Black woman of the South*, Mrs. F. E. W. Harper's *Iola, or Shadow's Uplifted*, and Mrs. W. A. Dove's *The Life and Sermons of W. A. Dove*.³⁰ Pointing to Cooper's text specifically, Schechter assumes that

Douglass should have known that these works would be “famous” books produced by Black women. Second, Douglass is clear that he is familiar with the works of Black women, but unsure that claiming the eminence of Black women is the same as claiming that there were Black people who were indeed famous. He says “we have many estimable women of our variety but not many famous ones . . . We stand too near a former condition to have any famous work in sciences, art, or literature, expected of us.”³¹ Douglass sees this question as a matter of definition, not gender. The Black race simply has not produced famous works in his view from the end of slavery to 1892.

Keeping with the theme of her chapter “Talking through Tears,” Schechter maintains yet again that it is through the religious radicalism of Wells-Barnett and other southern Black women of her generation that we can best understand her pioneering anti-lynching work. Schechter points to an entry in Wells-Barnett’s diary on September 4th, 1886, where Iola describes a “dynamitic article” she wrote to the Grand City Press, “almost advising murder,” in retaliation for the lynching of a Black woman accused of poisoning a white woman she cooked for in Tennessee. Schechter insists that Wells-Barnett’s “dynamitic,” or angry tone deserves a further philosophical investigation. Citing Audre Lorde, Schechter contends that “‘anger is loaded with information and energy,’ crucial for survival, even as racists and other opponents use its expression to discredit, dismiss, or punish Black women.”³² Summarizing the thrust of Wells-Barnett’s visionary pragmatism, an outlook shaped by “a righteous rage that was also part of the work of love,”³³ and synonymous with the theoretical utility of Lorde’s description of anger, Schechter understands anger to be “a grief of distortions between peers . . . and its object is change.”³⁴ As such, agitation is moved by faith in change and an anger with that which resists change. While Schechter goes to great length to convince the reader of the philosophical and conceptual plausibility of her interpretation, a more thorough analysis of her argument reveals it to be more fictive than philosophical. In previous works, I have argued in an effort to institutionalize Black thinkers as disciplinary figures, we, regardless of our scholarly and intellectual criticality, are forced to epistemologically converge, or interpret Black historic thinkers as contributing to humanist knowledge to the extent that we can both mold them into the established traditions that comprise the Eurocentric academic enterprise, and revise their work so that it can be shown to participate in already legitimated (approved) theoretical apparatus.³⁵ While this practice has proved effective in the introduction and institutionalization of Black thinkers—think about the overwhelming number of works on DuBois or Cooper—it nonetheless removes these historical Black thinkers from the genealogical relationships that served as catalysts for their brilliance. Contrary to Schechter’s interpretation, Wells-Barnett’s work was well known by Frederick Douglass, and she was an

acknowledged “woman of race” as demonstrated by her reception by Black women’s clubs, as well as a welcomed ally of both Douglass, and Fortune.³⁶ By simply asserting continuity between Wells-Barnett and Lorde, as a response to the marginalization of Wells-Barnett by her Black male peers and the racism of white society, Schechter removes Wells-Barnett from the actual racial milieu and political organizations that cultivates her thinking about anti-lynching and agitation. As we will see in section II, Wells-Barnett’s dynamic attitude towards lynching and Black civil rights was cultivated by her advocacy of Fortune’s economic analysis of white supremacy.

II. Wells-Barnett’s Realization of the Economic Motivation for Lynching

As mentioned earlier, Wells-Barnett was familiar with T. Thomas Fortune’s essay entitled “Civil Rights and Social Privileges.” In that work, Fortune said, “If any person should ask me in what essential element Afro-American character was most deficient, I would unhesitatingly respond the dynamic element; that is, the element of character which represent an injury promptly, and in a way most characteristic of the *lex loci*.”³⁷ According to Fortune, the African once possessed courage, but the Afro-American is found deficient because 200 years of slavery prior to 1865 made the “object of all law, regulation and custom being to reduce the Afro-American character as much as possible to the condition of a pliant tool in the hands of a cruel but expert master.”³⁸ Whereas the Negro of the past allowed whites to dictate his proper place with adamant disdain for his manhood and enforce through the brutality of lynching and murder his obedience, the Afro-American of his day demand a say in the settlement of the race question. Fortune believed that the time for the Afro-American to assert their place in the world was upon them:

Unlike in times past, we have a voice, and we propose to make that voice heard, in all future phases of the discussion of this race question. The race is here; it will stay here; it is most vitally concerned; and it insists, and will do so more and more, upon its proper share in the settlement of all questions affecting its constitutional and natural rights and its material and other concerns.³⁹

Reflecting on his admiration for the persistent and courageous struggle of the Irish, Fortune regrets that the same vigilance is “not possessed in large measure by our own people in this country.”⁴⁰ Because the Afro-American still revels in silence, seen but not heard, members of the race remain unable to assert themselves and their rights “to be.” “No man respects a coward; he is despised by even the members of his own household. All history teaches that courage and intelligence are the complement of each other, in the obtaining as in the maintenance of freedom;

and this is as true of individuals as of nations or races,”⁴¹ said Fortune. While Fortune seems to have moved away from his 1883 essays published in the *New York Globe* advocating violence against whites, his 1886 work still makes clear that “there are times when oppressed people have no other medium through which to make their protest hear than that of violence.”⁴² Unlike Fortune, Wells-Barnett was still committed to the use of violence against white supremacy throughout the 1890’s. Wells-Barnett was adamant that Blacks should use violence and retaliate not only against white lynchers, but white communities that allow lynching to happen. In an 1891 editorial, Wells-Barnett stated:

The Jackson (Miss) Tribune and Sun, and the Memphis (Tenn) Daily Commercial Appeal are squirming in great shape over the outspoken sentiment of the “Memphis Free Speech” comme[n]ding the retaliatory measures adopted by the Afro-Americans of Georgetown, Ky., in revenge for the lynching of one of its members. The Sun insists that the people of Memphis should proceed to muzzle the “Free Speech,” and the Commercial Appeal drops into philosophy and declares that two wrongs do not make a right; and that while white people should stick to the law, if they do not do so, the blacks can hope for nothing but extermination if they attempt to defend themselves.

This is a cowardly argument. Fundamentally men have an inherent right to defend themselves when lawful authority refuses to do it for them; and when a whole community makes itself responsible for a crime it should be held responsible . . . The way to prevent retaliation is to prevent lynching. Human nature is human nature.⁴³

Much like the position of whites presented in his book, *Black and White* (1884), Fortune’s 1886 essay restated his position that whites are beyond moral suasion; a race that “yields only to the force of circumstances.”⁴⁴ Fortune was solidly committed to an anthropological truth that emerged from his study of whites, namely that “the commercial instinct of the Anglo-Saxon had blunted his every sense of honesty, fair play, and humanity.”⁴⁵ Driven by profit and racial advantage, Fortune took the white race to be beyond understanding the basic reciprocal ideas of a race’s humanity. Because the white race understood ethics through the relationships they shared with their own, those excluded from their communion of whiteness would be subject to economic exploitation. Under the rule of whites, “the established order,” of America was meant to be a mind-numbing socialization for Blacks—a venture dedicated to the inculcation of passivity and the economic designation of Blacks as exploitable labor.

Wells-Barnett’s was particularly astute in applying Fortune’s analysis to the economic conditions of Black people in the South. She was clear that “the Black people of the South were never allowed to get out of debt. Their former masters traded on their credulity and ignorance. The

southern white does not want the black man to leave, for the black man is the greatest wealth producing factor of the south and no one knows it better than the white man.”⁴⁶ Because of this repressive racial economic order, economic competition with whites, especially in the South, brought out the barbarity of the white race. It was this realization of the danger Black manhood’s economic self-sufficiency posed to the economic regime of white Southerners that brought Wells to the truth and freed her from the propagandist lies that held lynching to be a just punishment for the crime of rape. As she confesses in *Crusade for Justice*,

Like many another person who had read of lynching in the South, I had accepted the idea meant to be conveyed—that although lynching was irregular and contrary to law and order, unreasoning anger over the terrible crime of rape led to the lynching; that perhaps the brute deserved death anyhow and the mob was justified in taking his life.

But Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Lee Stewart had been lynched in Memphis, one of the leading cities of the South, in which no lynching had taken place before, with just as much brutality as other victims of the mob; and they had committed no crime against white women. This is what opened my eyes to what lynching really was. An excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property and thus keep the race terrorized and ‘keep the nigger down.’ I then began an investigation of every lynching I read about.⁴⁷

It is important to recognize the vulnerability of Wells-Barnett to the racist thinking of her times. It was not until the lynching of her friend Thomas Moss that Wells-Barnett’s eyes were opened to “what lynching really was—an excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property.” This realization ruptured Wells-Barnett’s previous belief that “the brute [who was accused of the terrible crime of rape] deserved death.”⁴⁸ It was the murder of Black men in general, and her friend Thomas Moss in particular, that led Wells-Barnett to think differently and embrace Fortune’s philosophy of agitation as a response to white racial oppression. Instead of being a spontaneous eruption in Wells-Barnett’s soul, the philosophy of agitation had already been solidified, articulated and debated with others by Fortune. As we will see, the insight of Wells-Barnett was developed not in faith but through Fortune’s political organization—The Afro-American League.

III. The Afro-American League: A Philosophical School of Thought

On October 18th, 1889, Wells-Barnett answered a call for a “consensus of opinion on the league by prominent Afro-Americans.” This call, placed in the *Detroit Plaindealer* was a survey of Afro-American support for the formation of a national league that would eventually become Fortune’s Afro-American League (AAL). The Afro-American League is rarely mentioned today, despite its use of lawsuits, protests, and labor

organization to fight for Black civil rights. Because modern day civil rights history takes as its genesis those events that led to the Pyrrhic victories of integrationism, the all Black Afro-American League is usually ignored in favor of the white philanthropic organization we have come to know as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).⁴⁹ “The NAACP was not, as commonly believed, the first effort of historical Black leadership to establish a civil rights organization.”⁵⁰ Because of its anti-desegregationist stance and its radical (agitationist) philosophy, history has all but forgotten that the league not only acted as a political body but an organized “Black school of thought.”⁵¹ Meetings and publications of the AAL “became the battleground for conflicting Black leadership philosophies [which] provided a debating platform for the seminal leadership ideals of not only Fortune himself, but of W. E. B. DuBois, William Monroe Trotter, Booker T. Washington, Bishop Alexander Walters, Wells-Barnett and several others not so well remembered today.”⁵² Understanding the Afro-American League as an active, organized, and verifiable intellectual school of thought gives present day scholars a much clearer picture of the agitation philosophy endorsed by Wells-Barnett, while simultaneously highlighting the divergent postbellum political theories against integration and white participation in racial struggle.⁵³ In light of the tokenization of the NAACP and its status in the history of the civil rights movement, it is important to remember that “in the end, Trotter, the most radical Negro leader and Mrs. Ida Wells-Barnett who was leading an anti-lynching crusade, refused to join the new organization (the NAACP) being distrustful of white leadership.”⁵⁴

Wells-Barnett’s reply to the call for the AAL titled “The League is a Lever,” is perhaps the best testament we have of her advocacy for the Afro American League, and her adoption of Fortune’s philosophy of agitation as a viable social theory and political practice. Wells-Barnett began her letter to the editor of the *Plaindealer* stating, “with all my heart and soul I believe in the League project and am only too afraid that the dissensions among our leaders will prevent its organization.”⁵⁵ Rather than speak of the League as another potentially beneficial organization in the fight for civil rights, Wells-Barnett seems to endorse the Fortunian principle that constitutes the League itself. She is quite adamant that “someone must take it up on himself, in this as in all other great movements to speak and act for the race; and even show us what is best to be done in the matter of organization.”⁵⁶ At the most basic level, Wells-Barnett took the organization to be a necessary political force behind the philosophy of agitation, and its visceral call to race action:

The League is ours to wield as the lever for the protection and development of your people. Do not let it die. Agitate and act until something is done. While we are resting on oars seemingly content with

expressing our indignation by resolutions at the out rages which daily occur, others are presuming upon this inaction and encroaching more and more upon our rights—nay upon life itself.⁵⁷

At the inaugural convention of the AAL, January 24, 1890 in Chicago, Fortune announced to the crowd that “the spirit of agitation which has brought us together here comprehends in its vast sweep the entire range of human history.”⁵⁸ Much like his earlier thinking on agitation in his 1883 piece, “The Virtue of Agitation,” Fortune indicates that agitation is the countervailing force to the “propensity to tyrannize; the predominant element in human nature.”⁵⁹ This conflict stemming from humanity’s “all absorbing sentiment of self-interest and self-preservation,”⁶⁰ is not ambiguous or perpetual—it requires resolution within our empirical history, and therefore resists any dialectical account of racial contestation. Fortune is adamant on this point:

There is no half way ground between right and wrong. The one or the other must obtain, and prevail. Mental inertia is death. Indifferent acquiescence in wrong is death. Tame submission to outrage is death. Agitation, constant protesting, always standing up to be counted, to be heard, or to be knocked down—this spirit breeds respect and dulls the edge of tyranny. We should learn that the aggressive man, the man who is always ready to contend for what is his, is the man who gets what is his. In politics, in business, in social intercourse, we want to show more manhood, a deeper appreciation of the philosophy of life.⁶¹

Fortune insists that the racial reality of Blacks cannot be negotiated gradually, as a matter of degree and eventual progress. Change comes from conscious and deliberate action against tyrannical forces of white supremacy, not through rhetoric(s), but the manipulation of the historical forces of social change. As history has shown, “the normal condition of mankind is one of perpetual change, unrest and aspiration—a contention of the virtues and vices of mankind.”⁶² The agitator then, like the political force wielded by Jesus Christ, is the interlocutor that brings the message and substance of dissatisfaction to a volatile populace to bring about revolutionary unrest. This is why “the agitator must never be in advance of his times.”⁶³ The friction between the spirit of freedom and the spirit of oppression and tyranny require the agitator to attend to the tide of revolutionary potential in an historical epoch that can energize the people to action. The agitator, then, is a revolutionary sociologist.

As a sociological truth, Fortune maintains that “agitations are inevitable, [and] as necessary to [the] social organism as blood to [the] animal organism.”⁶⁴ The danger of accepting the order established in the spirit of oppression and tyranny, is that acceptance numbs the mind and debilitates the body’s capacity for intelligent action and serious race work. The acceptance of oppression naturalizes the stasis—the institutional

practices of racism—which forbid the aspirations of the race beyond the social confines of their wretched conditions. By consequence, the ordered reality placed before Blacks becomes the only material available to create the illusion of progress and sustain the delusion that the invisibility of Blacks is the only way to ensure their survival and “is actually freedom.” Agitationism insists that the failure of Blacks to realize racial freedom is directly related to what they believe is their natural place and “possibility,” in the reality given to them by whites. The passive inertia of the Black race, or what Wells-Barnett describes as the race sitting still, is opposed to agitation.⁶⁵ Protest, revolt, and sometimes violence are called upon to change social order and the racial order of American society:

The revolutionary intuitions of mankind are fundamental and sleepless . . . It is the discontent, restlessness, the sleepless aspiration of humanity, voiced by some braver, some more far-seeing member of society, some man ready to be a martyr to his faith or wear the crown of victory, which keep the world in a ferment of excitation and expectancy, and which force the adoption of those reforms which keep society from retrograding to the conditions of savage life, from which it has slowly and painfully moved forward. There can be no middle ground in social life. Social growth is the slowest of all growths.⁶⁶

IV. A Kinder, More Gentler Agitation: Wells-Barnett’s Civilizational Argument against white Humanity.

Following the revelation spurred by the murder of her three Black male friends in Memphis, Wells-Barnett began her assault on “the race question” with an attack on the justifications that whites use for the practice of lynching, namely the animal-ity of the Black race. “The Afro-American is not a bestial race,” says Wells-Barnett.⁶⁷ The Afro-American is a victim of the myth of wretchedness that justifies in the white mind and white soul that which is lynching. By announcing to the world that it the white woman who consents to the sexual relations with the Black man, Wells-Barnett believes her pamphlet *Southern Horrors* to be a defense for the “Afro-Americans Sampsons who suffer themselves to be betrayed by white Delilahs”⁶⁸ that exposes the charge of rape as the concoction of white women aiming to nourish the ambrosia of white superiority. The order preserved by anti-miscegenation laws, or the artifices that justify mob rule to preserve white racial purity, are attacks against the social viability of the race’s manhood. Wells-Barnett is very clear that,

the miscegenation laws of the South only operate against the legitimate union of the races; they leave the white man free to seduce all the colored girls he can, but it is death to the colored man who yields to the force and advances of a similar attraction in white women.

White men lynch the offending Afro-American, not because he is a despoiler of virtue, but because he succumbs to the smiles of white women.⁶⁹

Instead of being an impassioned assault on the barbarity of the practice itself, Wells-Barnett exposed the barbarism of white morality. She is interested not only in the destruction of the institutions that enforce lynching, but the cruelty, the alleged civilization, of white American society. Anti-lynching is therefore a philosophical assault on the viability of white civilization, and the deliberate refutation of whites' claim to humanity through the exposing of white barbarism. In an annotated editorial of a speech she gave in 1894, Wells-Barnett seems to approve the restating of her anti-lynching philosophy in the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*. According to that editorial:

The American citizen in the South is at heart more a barbarian than the negro whom he regards as a savage. Miss Wells gave some terrible instances yesterday of wholesale massacres, awful cruelties, persistent persecutions and judicial murders in which blacks were victims. Lynch law is fiendishly resorted to as a sort of sport on every possible opportunity, and the negroes are butchered to make a Yankee holiday. At one time hanging and shooting were the favorite methods of depriving negro offenders (real or supposed) of their lives, but the Americans have grown weary of this tame past time, and are now showing a preference for refined and long continued torture such as maiming and roasting. Miss Wells says that the negroes cannot look for justice.⁷⁰

A similar view is expressed by Wells-Barnett in the *Red Record*. Wells-Barnett is clear that takes the anti-lynching crusade announces to the world the barbarism of the white race, and serves to remind us that,

it is the white man's civilization and the white man's government which are on trial. This crusade will determine whether that civilization can maintain itself by itself, or whether anarchy shall prevail; whether this Nation shall write itself down a success at self government, or in deepest humiliation admit its failure complete; whether the precepts and theories of Christianity are professed and practiced by American white people as Golden Rules of thought and action, or adopted as a system of morals to be preached to heathen until they attain to the intelligence which needs the system of Lynch Law.⁷¹

Wells-Barnett understands that white civilization uses race as the stragem of order, and claims lynching to be that necessary practice that demarcates and forces the "Negro" to stay in (his) place in society.

By exposing the malicious character of white women and their supposed moral guardians, the threat of violence used to coerce these white

women to charge rape against Black men, and the fact that the only rapist driven by racial antipathy are the “majority of the superior white men who are the fathers of mulatto children,”⁷² Wells-Barnett aimed to show that the white woman “was a willing partner in the victim’s guilt, and being of the superior race must naturally be more guilty.”⁷³ Wells-Barnett believes that these empirical facts, while they do little to transform whites, are of vital importance to the so-called race question, “which should properly be designated an earnest inquiry as the best methods by which religion, science, law and political power may be employed to excuse injustice, barbarity and crime done to a people because of race and color.”⁷⁴ Because the race question is framed by the manipulation of the instruments of “justice,” Blacks can only work outside the entities found in a white supremacist society.

Like Fortune, Wells-Barnett believes that whites are tyrannical by the nature of the civilization they claim entitles them to their alleged racial superiority. In his 1884 work, *Black and White: Land, Labor, and Politics in the South*, Fortune argues that regardless of the sacrifices Blacks have made next to whites in every revolution for freedom in hope that their humanity and natural rights would be respected,

The spirit of injustice, inborn in Caucasian nature, asserted itself in each instance. Selfishness and greed rode roughshod over the promptings of a generous, humane, Christian nature, as they have always done in this country, not only in the case of the African but of the Indian as well, each of whom has in turn felt the pernicious influence of that heartless greed which overleaps honesty and fair play, in the unmanly grasp of perishable gain.⁷⁵

According to Fortune, “Caucasian human nature—that human nature which seldom rises above self interest in business or politics,”⁷⁶ places them outside the reach of human compassion. Wells-Barnett too acknowledges that “the white man’s dollar is his god,”⁷⁷ but believes this realization empowers the Black laborer to organize for their benefit against the South and its injustices. “The South owes its rehabilitation to Northern capital and Afro-American labor, if labor is withdrawn, capital will not remain.”⁷⁸ Much like the abolition thesis introduced in the 1940’s by C. L. R. James and Eric Williams or Derrick Bell’s interest convergence theory of the 1980’s,⁷⁹ Wells-Barnett conveys a historical truth about whites which has the utmost importance, namely that “the appeal to the white man’s pocket has ever been more effectual than all appeals ever made to his conscience. Nothing, absolutely, nothing, is to be gained by further sacrifice of manhood and self respect.”⁸⁰

In understanding Wells-Barnett’s arguments about the philosophical anthropology of the white race, it becomes easy to see why she embraces both the use of violence and the “shame” of the United States by

Britain to deal with the problem of lynching. At the most fundamental level of political activity, Wells-Barnett understood that the immorality of whites meant they would not be moved by the suffering they committed against Blacks. The gun as an instrument of self-defense has a special place in her political philosophy:

... a Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give. When the white man who is always the aggressor knows he runs as great a risk of biting the dust every time his Afro-American victim does, he will have greater respect for Afro-American life. The more the Afro-American yields and cringes and begs, the more he has to do so, the more he is insulted, outraged and lynched.⁸¹

As in the agitationist logic of Fortune, there can only be the triumph of one side of history, the oppressor or the oppressed. Wells-Barnett understood the irreconcilable deficiency in the humanity of whites, recognized the intellectual naivety of reciting the empty humanist rhetoric of Afro-American personhood. The more the Afro-American appealed to the non-existent humanity of whites, the more whites, in displaying their power and the normality their (tyrannical) power had in the established order of things, terrorized the Afro-American. It was only when whites had their lives to lose would their "self-interest" arrest their propensity for violence and lynching. For Wells-Barnett, self-defense against whites was a form of political engagement stemming from the philosophical or conceptual analysis of the reality created by white supremacy. Insofar as white justice is terrorism against those Blacks, especially Black men, who threaten the myth of white superiority, economically or sexually, white justice cannot be "just" when enforced in an effort to coerce Afro-American obedience to the white supremacist order of things.

Because racism in white society determines as a matter of necessity the superior value of white life over all other lives, Wells-Barnett understood it was this false idealization of white existence that made the terror of the racist Southern order the necessitated counterpart of Black inferiority. It would not be until 1962 that Robert F. Williams would articulate this connection, made obvious by Wells-Barnett, within a Black civil rights organization. According to Williams,

When an oppressed people show a willingness to defend themselves, the enemy, who is a moral weakling and coward is more willing to grant concessions and work for a respectable compromise. Psychologically, moreover, racists consider themselves superior beings and they are not willing to exchange their superior lives for our inferior ones. They are most vicious and violent when they can practice violence with impunity.⁸²

When a social order enforces a racist hierarchy, disorder becomes a critical philosophical rupture in the naturalized superiority of white existence. Armed Blacks, because it is psychologically inconceivable by the alleged racist superior, shatters the illusion of white omnipotence, and it is this new reality birthed by the sheer impossibility of the “armed Black,” in a white supremacist society that makes agitation not only practical, but philosophically and politically useful in the staving off of murder. By reorienting the calculus of white mob violence, Wells-Barnett’s prioritization of the “alleged inferior life” over and above the “presumed white superior life,” refutes the reified calculus of white violence. In her call to resist the mob logic of lynching, she calls for Afro-Americans to deny the omnipotence of white life. In other words, in calling for the extinguishing of white life, she demonstrates that the alleged racial inferior is in fact capable of killing the illusory superior white. But Wells-Barnett’s call for Afro-American self-defense was only one part, the most immediate part of her activist strategy. While self-defense would arrest assault by lynchers, by itself it would not vitiate the cultural and civilizational motif of white supremacy that justified lynching. To do this, Wells-Barnett would aim to “shame” and display as inferior the brutish civilization of white America to the world.

In those brief moments of her anti-lynching crusade’s success, Wells-Barnett was not swayed by the illusion of change in whites’ hearts and minds. It is precisely because of the resistance that whites had in hearing and listening to the “cry of men, women and children whose dying groans ascended to heaven praying for relief, not only for them but for others who might soon be treated as they,”⁸³ that Wells-Barnett held that cultural and/or civilizing change must come from those other than the voiceless victims of white supremacy. She reflectively states that:

Since the crusade against lynching was started, governors of states, newspapers, senators and representatives and bishops of churches have all been compelled to take cognizance of the prevalence of this crime and to speak in one way or another in the defense of the charge against this barbarism in the United States. This has not been because there was any latent spirit of justice, voluntarily asserting itself, especially in those who do the lynching, but because the entire American people now feel, both North and South, that they are objects in the gaze of the civilized world and that for every lynching humanity asks that America render its account to civilization and itself.⁸⁴

This pessimistic view of whites’ capacity for moral change is a key aspect to Wells-Barnett’s thinking about race and racism. Again echoing Fortune’s aforementioned stance, Wells-Barnett’s position on racial transformation is about the threats the Afro-American poses to white economic interests. Despite the veracity of these words written by

Wells-Barnett herself, some contemporary scholars find this position untenable given her travels to Britain in 1894. One might ask “why did she go to England if she believed that whites could not change?” The answer is quite simple, and again demonstrates the consistency and depth of Wells-Barnett’s thinking about the capacity of whites to be morally persuaded on this matter.

In the April 24th, 1894 edition of the *Daily Inter Ocean* newspaper, Wells-Barnett began what would become one of many editorials about the sympathy England shared with the cause of the African race. What is particularly interesting about this editorial is that Wells-Barnett affords little time to the descriptions of the people hosting her and supporting her anti-lynching campaign, but takes great effort to describe the commercial and economic interests held by the businesses of Liverpool and Manchester. Noting that Liverpool has “few manufacturing interests, [whose] importance is derived from her situation as a seaport,”⁸⁵ while Manchester is an “enormous manufacturing center,”⁸⁶ dependent on cotton, Wells-Barnett observed that the feeling condemning American lynching “which developed in Liverpool during the American civil war was shared in large measure and for the same reasons (the injury to the cotton trade) by the people of Manchester.”⁸⁷ What Wells-Barnett saw in Britain was a disposition already formed against lynching stemming from Britain’s abolition of slavery in the early 19th century. Like a good agitationist sociologist, she believed her tour in Britain could motivate the English to sanction and condemn the actions of America and expose the horrors of lynching the United States continued to deny internationally.⁸⁸ Wells-Barnett saw the receptivity of Britain to be linked with their economic stake in maintaining trade and imperial prestige, not some unrequited moral compassion for the Negro’s humanity. Following the agitationist logic of Fortune, Wells-Barnett, did not pursue the failed strategy of moral suasion, but choose to utilize stratagems which appealed to the economic and imperial gains of Britain. By appealing to Britain’s interest in being the world superpower, Wells-Barnett was able to effectively conduct her assault against the United States’ image and negate its claim to a superior government and democracy.⁸⁹ Despite her realization of the economic stake Britain historically held in ending slavery, Britain’s receptivity to her plight could be used against white Americans as proof of Britain’s moral and civilizational superiority and white America’s lawlessness.⁹⁰ This “agitationist” thinking that accepts the “demonstrable nature” of imperial governments as the basis of anti-racist social activism makes the political a philosophically engaged outcome of critical observation. By looking to the empirical, Wells-Barnett’s activism captures the philosophically intriguing purview of racist nations that are cemented by their history and reflected by their civilization.

V. Agitation and Political Theory—A Concluding Sentiment

Reading Wells-Barnett's deployment of Fortune's agitationist philosophy expands the theoretical and historical imagination of the American philosophical project. Because these voices and works remain segregated and institutionally excluded from the literature that constitute the philosophical and theoretical discourse of our time, Fortune's and Wells-Barnett's thinking about the rise of the American empire is predetermined to be historical and journalistic by the dominate white philosophical enterprise. Reading Wells-Barnett's social activism as the product of both her organizational membership in the Afro-American League and her study of Fortune's work offers political theorists access to a turn of the century social theory that sought to engage America in its dynamism and energize oppressed populations beyond an idealist hope in the humanity of whites and the eventuation of integrationism.

The reality that continues to confront African descended people in America calls for a constructive political theory that meets the present day challenges and the evolution of racism, neo-colonialism, and the ethos of white supremacy normalized as liberalism and racial impartiality. Unlike previous works that value Wells-Barnett purely for her status as a pragmatist or feminist, her work demonstrates a political sensibility that theorizes agitation in the context of unadulterated racial brutality that supersedes our dominant political categorizations. She is and reveals herself to be for the race, not the category of race or identity, but for the same people that have remained oppressed, disheartened and confused to this very day. In Wells-Barnett's philosophy, we have more than an icon constrained by our mundane academic interests, but a figure who analyzes the structural and civilization-al ontology of white justice. This radicality, which questions our earnest and our presumed honesty in believing and supporting the dogmas of integrationism in our scholarship, should be the cornerstone of our developing political thought.

Texas A&M University
T-curry@philosophy.tamu.edu

NOTES

1. For a discussion of this phenomenon in American philosophy, see Tommy J. Curry, "Concerning the Under-specialization of Race Theory in American Philosophy: An Essay Outlining Ignored Bibliographic Sources Addressing the Aforementioned Problem," *The Pluralist* 5, no. 1 (2010): 44-64. This tendency of excluding Black thinkers in American philosophy can be readily seen in the recent attention to Josiah Royce's call for Southerners to stop lynching Blacks, since they would be better controlled by British style colonial administration, see Tommy J. Curry, "Royce, Racism and the Colonial Ideal: White Supremacy and the Illusion

of Civilization in Josiah Royce's Account of the White Man's Burden," *The Pluralist* 4, No.3 (2009):10-38.

While I have found no contemporary references to the anti-lynching campaign of Wells-Barnett, or John E. Bruce's *The Blood Red Record* (Albany: The Argus Company, 1901) in American philosophy journals, there has been noticeable attention to Royce's rhetorical condemnation of lynching in the works of white scholars like Jacquelyn Kegley and Elizabeth Duquette.

2. See Charlotte D. Fitzgerald, "The Story of My Life and Work: Booker T. Washington's Other Autobiography," *The Black Scholar* v.21.4 (2001): 35-40.

3. See Seth Moglen, "Introduction," in *Black and White: Land, Labor, and Politics in the South* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2007), v-xxix.

4. Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions, Ida B. Wells and the Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008).

5. Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009).

6. Jacqueline J. Royster, "To Call a Thing by Its True Name: The Rhetoric of Ida B. Wells," in *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1995), 167-184, 168.

7. Claudia D. Nelson, "The Men the Influenced Ida B. Wells-Barnett: Jim Wells, T.Thomas Fortune, and Frederick Douglass," *Making Connections: A Journal for Teachers of Cultural Diversity* v.10 no.1-2 (2006): 25-44.

8. Gail Bederman, "'Civilization,' the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness, and Ida B. Wells's Anti-Lynching (1892-1894)," *Radical History Review* 52.5 (1992): 5-30. This chapter was also revised as the second chapter in Bederman's 1995 book, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). In that work the chapter was titled, "The White Man's Civilization on Trial: Ida B. Wells, Representations of Lynching and Northern Middle Class Manhood." In both works, Bederman highlights the complexity of the race/gender nexus and argues that just as we assume femininity is/was constructed throughout history, so too was white masculinity. These sexual ideals were the basis of gender roles and were intimately connected with Anglo-Saxon claim to civilization, and by effect the denial of civilization to Africans and Indigenous peoples the world over. From this perspective, contemporary gender discourse assumes categorical opposition whereas past gender roles depended on its complimentary function within racial and civilizing science.

9. Timothy Thomas Fortune has long appeared in the annals of Black American philosophical thought. While the authoritative text on his life and work by Emma Lou Thornbrough, *T. Thomas Fortune: Militant Journalist*, was written in 1972, recently Shawn L. Alexander has republished his writings in *The Afro-American Agitator: A Collection of Writings, 1880-1920*, and marked him and his social political organization, the Afro-American League, as the predecessor of the NAACP. For more on the importance of the Afro-American League, see Emma Lou Thornbrough, "The Afro-American League 1887-1908," *Journal of Southern History* 27.4 (1961): 494-512, and Shawn L. Alexander, "The Afro-American Council and its Challenge to Louisiana's Grandfather Clause," in *Radicalism in the South Since Reconstruction*, ed(s). Chris Green, Rachel Rubin, & James Smethurst (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 13-36.

Additionally, Fortune has recently been engaged for its radical critiques of American liberalism by legal theorists. See Susan D. Carle, "Debunking the Myth

of Civil Rights Liberalism: Visions of Racial Justice in the Thought of T. Thomas Fortune, 1880-1890,” *Fordham Law Review* 77 (2009): 1479-1533.

10. See Ida B. Wells, “Thursday, March 11,” in *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells: An Intimate Portrait of the Activist as a Young Woman*, ed. Miram Decosta-Willis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 51-53, 52. Wells first saw T. Thomas Fortune from a picture in his newspaper the New York Freeman. According to Wells, “His picture adorned the paper last week. My curiosity is satisfied but I am disappointed in him. With his long hair, curling about his forehead and his spectacles he looks more like the dude of the period than the strong, sensible, brainy man I have pictured him. But then, as I told Charlie Morris, one should not judge a person by the cut or rather uncut of his hair any more than by his clothes” (52).

11. See Emma Lou Thornbrough, *T. Thomas Fortune: Militant Journalist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 94.

12. See Ida B. Wells, “Thursday, January 21,” in *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells*.

13. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 124.

14. T. Thomas Fortune, “Civil Rights and Social Privileges,” in *T. Thomas Fortune: The Afro-American Agitator, A Collection of Writings from 1880-1928*, ed. Shawn Leigh Alexander (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 119-131, 119.

15. Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 63.

16. Maurice Hamington, “Public Pragmatism: Jane Addams and Ida B. Wells on Lynching,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 19.2 (2005): 167-174.

17. See Chs. 1-2 in Shawn L. Alexander, *An Army of Lions: The Civil Rights Struggle Before the NAACP* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

18. Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

19. *Ibid.*, 3.

20. *Ibid.*, 3.

21. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells Barnett and American Reform*, 34.

22. *Ibid.*, 35.

23. Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990). I find it interesting that Patricia A. Schechter’s book does not cite this work despite her historical claims about Black religion and its resistance to white supremacy. While her bibliography does suggest she is familiar with Gayraud S. Wilmore, since she cites his 1989 anthology, *Afro-American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Durham: Duke University Press), she remains unfamiliar with the central premise of Wilmore’s work. Like Schechter’s argument concerning Wells, Wilmore argues: “What we may call “white Christianity” in Europe and North America has made a deep and lasting impression upon black everywhere, including Africa. But blacks have used Christianity not so much as it was delivered to them by racist white churches, but as its truth was authenticated to them in the experience of suffering and struggle, to reinforce an enculturated religious orientation and to produce an indigenous faith that emphasized dignity, freedom and human welfare” (4).

24. The primary and secondary literature on these figures is enormous. For some examples of these Black men’s views on the education and uplift of Black

women, see Tabiti Asukile, "Arthuro Alfonso Schomburg: Embracing the Black Motherhood Experience in Love of Black People," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* (2006): 69-97, and Tolagbe Ogunleye, "Dr. Martin R. Delany, 19th Century Africana Womanists: Reflections on His Avant Garde Politics Concerning Gender, Colorism and Nation Building," *Journal of Black Studies* v.28.5 (1998):628-649.

25. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells Barnett and American Reform*, 38.

26. Mrs. N. F. Mossell, *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* (Philadelphia: Geo. S. Ferguson, 1908), 5.

27. *Ibid.*, 10.

28. *Ibid.*, 32.

29. Dorothy Sterling, (ed.), "Letter to M.A. Major from Frederick Douglass," in *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 436.

30. Mossell, *The Work of the Afro-American Woman*, 3.

31. Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, 436. The full text of the letter from Douglass to Major reads:

We have many estimable women of our variety but not many famous ones. It is not well to claim too much for ourselves before the public. Such extravagance invites contempt rather than approval. I have thus far seen no book of importance written by a Negro woman and I know of no one among us who can appropriately be called famous.

This is in no way a disparagement of the women of our race. We stand too near a former condition to have any famous work in science, art, or literature, expected of us. It is not well to ship the paddle wheels before we have the steam to move them. You will therefore pardon me if I don't fit it consistent to enlarge the list of famous negro women. Many of the names you have are those of admirable persons, cultivated, refined, and ladylike. But it does not follow that they are famous. Let us be true and use language truthfully.

32. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells Barnett and American Reform*, 13-14.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, 14.

35. For a discussion of epistemic convergence, see Tommy J. Curry, "The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy: How African American Philosophy Fails to Contribute to the Study of African Descended People." *Journal of Black Studies* 42.3 (2011): 314-333.

36. For evidence of Douglass's support and introduction of Wells-Barnett to her British audience see the correspondence between Wells-Barnett and Frederick Douglass from March 18, 1894 to May 22, 1894 in *Ida From Abroad* (Chicago: Benjamin Williams Publishing, 2010): 97-124. See *The Historical Records of Conventions of 1895-1896 of the Colored Women of America* (Boston: 1902), where the 1895 convention states as "resolved, that we, the representative women of our race in the United States, have witnessed with great admiration the noble and truthful advocacy of Mrs. Ida B. Wells Barnett, defending us against the lying charge of rape, and we take this opportunity of congratulating her upon her marriage, and are glad to hail her, in the face of her assailants, as our noble 'Joanna of

Arc” (11-12). It is relevant to note that throughout this report over 1895-1896 there are resolutions acknowledging the work of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Kelly Miller and T. Thomas Fortune, since several of the reports not only report the local Afro-American League activities, but adopt Fortune’s term “Afro-American,” as a racial designation.

37. T. Thomas Fortune, “Civil Rights and Social Privileges,” 119.

38. *Ibid.*, 120.

39. *Ibid.*, 127.

40. *Ibid.*, 125.

41. *Ibid.*, 125-126.

42. *Ibid.*, 125.

43. Ida B. Wells, “The Lyncher Winces,” *New York Age*, September 19, 1891.

44. *Ibid.*, 124.

45. *Ibid.*, 119.

46. Editorial, “Never Allowed to be Dear,” *The Chicago Times*, September 3, 1893.

47. Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 64.

48. *Ibid.*

49. W.E.B. DuBois, “The NAACP,” in *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers, 1997).

50. Harold Cruse, *Plural but Equal: A Critical Study of Blacks and Minorities and American Plural Society* (New York: William Morrow, 1987), 8.

51. *Ibid.*, 10

52. *Ibid.*

53. It is of the utmost import to see Black organizations as schools of thought that dedicated their research, inquiry, and scholarship towards specific methods for investigating and resolving the race question. Organizations like the Afro-American League, the American Negro Academy, the International Congress for Women of the Darker Races, and the National Association of Colored Women are but a few of the organizations that I believe deserve further attention in understanding their political, social, and philosophical commitments in their approach to the study of the race problem. For many Black philosophers, intellectual history has failed to be of central concern, since the relevance of Black political reflections have been seen as valuable by the extent to which they converge and reaffirm the pre-existing theoretical traditions valued as “real philosophy.” The exploration of Black intellectual history, what I have analyzed as the constructive project of *conceptual genealogy*, is necessary to test the accuracy of not only how we interpret historical Black figures, but also how we gauge the distance Black thought has to Eurocentric and foundationally racist theories like idealism, pragmatism, and feminism that arose at the turn of the century. Understanding the political organizations and political activism founded on the theories of these historic Black thinkers as “schools of thought,” is central to the philosophical exercise of mining through the thought, the history, and the activity of Black thinking. What these thinkers *actually* advocated, *actually* thought, and *actually* believed, should be the criteria that places them within certain traditions. Their association with white philosophers is not that measure.

54. DuBois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 254. There has been some controversy surrounding this event in the literature and academic discourse

surrounding the exclusion of Wells-Barnett's name from the National Negro Committee's "List of Forty." The National Negro Committee (what would eventually be known as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) was a bi-racial effort controlled primarily by white philanthropist Oswald Garrison Villard. The debate around Wells-Barnett's exclusion has primarily been waged by Black feminists arguing that this is an example of Du Bois's masculinist politics. The evidence of this interpretation is the entry in Ida B. Wells-Barnett's autobiography entitled *Crusade for Justice* where she argues that it was "the deliberate intention of Dr. Du Bois to ignore me and my work" (326). What is interesting about this charge however is that Du Bois saw himself working against Villard's agenda of de-radicalizing the organizations Black constituency, someone who Wells-Barnett seems to trust and appeals to for remedy. Additionally, Mia Bay has made clear that it was not Du Bois, but Villard who left off Wells-Barnett's name as she was a detractor of Booker T. Washington. For more on this issue, see Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (2009), 271.

55. Iola, "The League is a Lever," *Detroit PlainDealer* 7.2 (Oct 18, 1889). Paula Giddings also has an excellent historical account of this call in *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 159-160. It is also important to distinguish the mission and scope of the Afro-American League. From its inception, it was thought to be a league of the Afro-American people that represented all the ideological, class, and differing concerns raised by manhood and womanhood within the race. Booker T. Washington in a reply to the call for opinions on Fortune's National League in the *Detroit PlainDealer* entitled "Not the Mountain Peaks," urged this focus. He argued,

An organization of the kind I am sure can be made to serve a good end of if it can in some way be made to reach and interest the masses of colored people. Most of our conferences, conventions, etc. heretofore have reached only the "mountain tops," leaving "the great Alpine range of humanity and activity below" (*Detroit PlainDealer* 7.23 [Oct 25, 1889]).

A decade later in 1899, DuBois compared in "Two Negro Conventions," two Black political organization meeting in Chicago, Illinois at the same time; the National Association for Colored Women (NACW) and the inaugural meeting that resulted from a call to re-establish the Afro-American League as the Afro-American Council. The NACW meeting that focused on the necessity of work among children garnered much attention. DuBois said of that meeting, "undoubtedly, the women assembled at Chicago were rather above the average of the race, and represented the aristocracy among the Negroes. Consequently, there evident intelligence and air of good-breeding served also to impress the onlookers" (in *Writings by DuBois in Periodicals edited by Others, 1891-1909*, ed. Herbert Aptheker [New York: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1982], 60-63, 61). When comparing the meeting of the Afro-American Council, DuBois commented that "its scope and aims are far wider, and in its attendance it was more faithfully representative of the rank and file of the American Negroes" (*Ibid.*, 62). What is vastly interesting about the Afro-American League/Council was its commitment to the intellectual, philosophical and class diversity of its agenda a decade after its dissolution and reconstitution.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. T.Thomas Fortune, "Afro-American League Convention Speech," in *T.Thomas Fortune: The Afro-American Agitator*, 135.
59. T.Thomas Fortune, "The Virtue of Agitation," in *T.Thomas Fortune: The Afro-American Agitator*, 115.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., 116.
62. T.Thomas Fortune, "Afro-American League Convention Speech," 136.
63. Ibid., 137.
64. Ibid., 138.
65. Ida B. Wells, "The Reign of Mob Law," *New York Age*, February 18, 1893.
66. Ibid., 139.
67. Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster (Boston: Bedford, 1997), 50.
68. Ibid., 53.
69. Ibid., 53-54.
70. Wells-Barnett states "the Birmingham [illegible] gave columns and reports of our meetings, and splendid editorials." Editorial, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, May 18, 1894.
71. Ibid., 155.
72. Ibid., 57.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. T.Thomas Fortune, *Black and white: Land, Labor, and Politics in the South* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2007), 2.
76. Ibid., 8.
77. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*, 68.
78. Ibid.
79. There are many texts that argue that white morality and the ideals of humanism were not the motivating factors behind racial change in the United States or the world over. For a discussion of the economic interests that motivated whites to end slavery, see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Overture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1938) and Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994). For a discussion of these economic interests during the Civil Rights Movement, see Derrick Bell, *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1987) and Derrick Bell, "Racial Remediation: An Historical Perspective on Current Conditions," *Notre Dame Lawyer* 52 (1976/7): 5-29.
80. Ibid., 69.
81. Ibid., 70.
82. Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (New York: Marzani and Munsell Publishers, 1962), 40.
83. Ibid., 131.
84. Ibid., 133.
85. Ida B. Wells, *Ida From Abroad: The Timeless Writings of Ida B. Wells from England in 1894*, ed. Michelle Duster, (Chicago: Benjamin Williams Publishing, 2010), 31.
86. Ibid.

87. *Ibid.*, 34.

88. See Wells-Barnett's July 7th, 1894 reply to the controversy over the Memphis *Daily Commercial*, where the newspaper called her a "negro adventuress," in *Ida Abroad*, 84-96. Because "Americans have always boasted of their free country, where there is no class distinction," Wells-Barnett believed her exposure of America's lynching would refute this claim. She says, "this crusade is revolutionizing entirely the standards by which American leaders, moral and philanthropic are being judged and many of them will be called on to prove their professions by their work against wrong and outrage upon the negro" (96).

89. There is also a secondary support for my interpretation of Wells-Barnett's work in Great Britain; see Troy Duster, "Two Weapons in One Hand," in *Ida From Abroad: The Timeless Writings of Ida B. Wells from England in 1894*, ed. Michelle Duster (Chicago: Benjamin Williams Publishing, 2010), 1-7.

90. "The pulpit and press in our own country remain silent . . . the voice of my race, thus tortured and outraged, wherever lifted in America in a demand for justice is stifled or ignored. It is to the religious and moral sentiment of Great Britain we turn. They can arouse the public sentiment of America so necessary for the enforcement of law . . . They can . . . pray, and write and preach and talk and act against civil and individual slavery; against the hanging, shooting, and burning alive of a powerless race. America cannot and will not ignore the voice of a nation that is her superior in civilization which makes this demand in the name of justice and humanity" (Ida B. Wells, "Lynch Law in the U.S," Birmingham Daily Post, May 14, 1894).