



Sojourner TRUTH

(1797 – 1883)

Sojourner Truth campaigned against slavery and championed the rights of women. She is best known for her iconic speech “Ain’t I a woman?”

Sojourner’s Childhood

Sojourner Truth was born Isabella Baumfree in 1797 in Ulster County, New York. Her parents were slaves. Although her birth date was not recorded, historians estimate that she was born around 1797.

The Baumfree family belonged to Colonel Charles Hardenbergh and when he died in 1806, the family was separated. Isabella, aged 9 was sold off a number of times. Finally, she was bought by John Dumont. On his property, she met her husband, an older slave called Thomas. They had 3 children together; Peter, Elizabeth and Sofia.

Sojourner’s Escape

In 1799, the state of New York made it law for all slave owners to release their slaves by July 4, 1827. This was too long for Isabella to wait. Her slave owner John Dumont promised to free her in 1826, if she was faithful to him, but later he changed his mind.

This angered Isabella, and she decided to escape. Taking her daughter Sofia (an infant at the time) with her, she ran to New York. At first, she found refuge with the Van Wagners family and found work as a housekeeper.

Shortly after her escape, Isabella heard that her son, Peter, had been sold illegally to a man in Alabama. She took the matter to court and became the first black woman to win a court case against a white man in the United States.

Sojourner's Rebirth

On June 1, 1843, Isabella changed her name to Sojourner Truth, dedicating her life to Christianity and the abolishment of slavery.

In 1844, she joined the Northampton Association of Education and Industry in Northampton. The community was founded by anti-slavery campaigners. It was the perfect place for Sojourner, and it was here that she met leading abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. Though the community crumbled shortly afterwards, the experience had a lasting impact on her.



Sojourner as a Woman's Right Activist

Sojourner as a Women's Rights Activist

In 1850, her memories were published under the title, 'The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave'. She could not read or write, so she told her stories to her friends Olive Gilbert and William Lloyd Garrison, who wrote them down for her. In the same year, Sojourner began to accompany anti-slavery campaigner George Thompson to educate the people about the horrors of slavery.

Sojourner's approach was a bit different, as she spoke not only of her experience as a slave, but also about her experience as a black woman in slavery. She did this because she feared the Abolition movement would only secure the rights of black men, and not black women. This was the only chance she had to change the minds of the people. In 1851, she gave her iconic speech "Ain't I a woman?" at the Ohio Women's Rights Conference in Akron. It was first published by newspaper owner, Marius Robinson, and was a great hit. The speech was called, "Ain't I a woman?" because the phrase was repeated four times.

Sojourner's involvement in the American Civil War

During the American Civil War, Sojourner helped in the recruitment of black men for the Northern Army.

In 1864, she met President Abraham Lincoln and told him about her experiences and beliefs. After the war ended in 1865, she continued her efforts to improve the


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lives of freed slaves. She championed the idea of providing them with land, so they could become more independent. Sadly, these efforts were in vain, as the idea was never taken up.

Regardless, she kept fighting for the rights of blacks and women, lending her voice to the Women's Suffrage Movement, campaigning for women's right to vote.



Sojourner Truth and Abraham Lincoln, 1864



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