

# Sojourner Truth and the Struggle for People's Equality

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*Parts: 5 Total*

*Narrators 1 through 4 (can be combined), Sojourner Truth*

Narrator 1: Long before the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s in which certain Americans demanded that all citizens, regardless of the color of their skin, be treated fairly and with respect...

Narrator 2: Indeed, long before the women's rights movement of the 1960s and 70s in which women demanded their right to be treated justly and with dignity....

Narrator 3: Even years before the start of the Civil War, a war fought to end slavery in the United States.

Narrator 4: There were people who spoke up for the rights of black people and the rights of women. One of those people was

Narrators 1, 2, 3, 4: **Sojourner Truth.**

Narrator 1: Sojourner Truth was a black woman, a Negro, and she was born into slavery in 1797.

Narrator 2: But she was not afraid to speak out for what she thought was right and what she knew was wrong.

Narrator 3: In the years before the Civil War, she spoke throughout the northern and midwestern United States, to whomever would listen to her, about the evils of slavery and the need for all Americans to have equal rights.

Narrator 4: She was a powerful speaker. And since she stood six feet tall, people listened to what she had to say!

Narrator 1: In the 1850s, women in the United States did not have the same rights as men. They could not vote, they could not go to college, they could not own their own property.

Narrator 2: In many ways they were the property of their husbands -- almost like slaves themselves. Men did not think women were strong enough or smart enough to have the same rights as men.

Narrator 3: Many men thought that women were weak, that they needed to be helped into carriages, that they needed to be carried over ditches, that they needed to be taken care of by men.

Narrator 4: Besides, since Jesus Christ was a man, many men felt that that must be proof that men were superior to women and that women did not deserve the same rights as men.

Narrator 1: Women knew that this was not right and they began to speak out about this blatant unfairness.

Narrator 2: They began to organize meetings in which they spoke out about their lack of rights.

Narrator 3: But these meetings were run by white women, mostly from the northern states. Black women were neither welcome nor wanted.

Narrator 4: In 1851, a women's rights convention was held in Akron, Ohio. And many women and men spoke about the rights of women -- white women that is.

Narrator 1: But in the middle of the convention, a tall black woman stood up and demanded to speak. Those at the meeting tried to keep her from speaking. They protested her presence loudly and they demanded that she leave.

Narrator 2: This is a meeting for whites only, get her out of here.

Narrator 3: No Blacks allowed here.

Narrator 4: Let her speak to her own people. Make her leave.

Narrator 1: But Sojourner Truth was not only tall, she was strong in her beliefs. And she made her way to the podium, faced the group of angry white people, waited a few seconds..... and told everyone that the struggle for rights of white women was the struggle for all women, regardless of the color of their skin.

Sojourner: Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that between the Negroes of the South and the women of the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best of everything. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me the best of anything! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm. I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as man --- when I could get it --- and I could bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and have seen most all of them sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Narrator 2: By now the crowd was hushed. Sojourner's strong voice presided over the crowd. A silence descended on the audience. Heads began to nod in response to Sojourner's repeated question – Ain't I a woman?

Sojourner: Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it?

Narrator 3: You mean intellect?

Sojourner: That's it honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or Negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and your holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half-measure?

Then that little man in black over there, he says that women can't have as much rights as men, cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with It.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now that they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

### ***SILENCE FOR A FEW SECONDS***

Narrator 4: And with that, her speech was over. Sojourner Truth left the podium and she walked out of the meeting and into history. Yet her words still ring true today as they did on that day in 1851...

Narrator 1: Ain't I a Woman?

Narrator 2: Even though the color of my skin may be different from yours, inside we are all the same.

Narrator 3: And I too deserve to be treated with equality, respect, and dignity.

FROM: Rasinski, T., & Griffith, L. *American History: Building Fluency through Practice and Performance*. Huntington Beach, CA: Shell Education.