

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Primary Source Document Collection

MISSION 2: "Flight to Freedom"

Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I A Woman?" Speech (1851)

Sojourner Truth was born into slavery in New York around 1797 and escaped to freedom the year before New York State's emancipation process was complete on July 4, 1827. In 1843 Truth took on the name Sojourner Truth and began traveling around preaching for abolition of slavery and women's rights. In 1851 she spoke at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio. Her speech was well received and described in anti-slavery newspapers of the time, but no written version of the entire speech existed. Twelve years later in 1863, Frances Dana Barker Gage, an abolitionist and feminist who was present at the Akron conference, published a version of the speech that has become the most widely reprinted. The following excerpt is from Gage's version.

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed 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 a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all 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? ...

Then that little man in black there, he says 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 Him.

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 they is asking to do it, the men better let them. . . .

Source: Internet Modern History Sourcebook, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>