Sojourner Truth
1797 - 1883

Sojourner Truth commanded the stage with a powerful voice and humor, advocating women’s rights and racial equality.

“You may hiss as much as you please, but women will get their rights anyway.”
— Sojourner Truth to hecklers

From Isabella to Sojourner

Born into slavery in upstate New York, “Isabella” took the name Sojourner Truth at the age of forty-five. She had been sold five times before “walking” away from slavery, one year before it was officially abolished in the state. (In her Narrative, she emphasized “I did not run away, I walked away by daylight.”) Although she never learned to read or write, Truth became a powerful itinerant evangelist, stressing religious themes at first.

Turning Point

As “Sojourner Truth” she joined a utopian community in the Florence section of Northampton, Massachusetts. There she met William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass and developed an interest in abolitionism and women’s rights. Retaining her religious sensibility, she stressed the moral imperative of reform.

Sojourner Truth dictated, and later revised her Narrative, working with sympathetic friends. She supported herself, in part, from sales at speaking engagements. Library of Congress

“ Ain’t I a Woman?”

Sojourner Truth was an early advocate of women’s suffrage and equal pay. She urged that women should be lawyers, judges, and members of Congress, noting that many elected officials drank heavily and treated women with disdain “for their own amusement.” In an 1851 Akron, Ohio speech Truth compared her abilities to those of men. It is legendary that she used the phrase “ Ain’t I a Woman” after each example.