

Sojourner Truth “Ain’t I a Woman?”

Sojourner Truth, an African American woman prominent in both the abolitionist and early feminist movements, delivered her famous speech at a women’s rights convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851. The version below was first published twelve years later in the *Anti-Slavery Standard* by Frances Gage, a celebrated antislavery fighter and president of the Convention. Although recent scholarship questions the exact wording of the speech, it made a great impact at the time and has endured as a classic statement of women’s rights.

... I think that ’twixt the Negroes of the South and the women at 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 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? ...

Elizabeth Cady Stanton Address to the Legislature of New York

In 1854, Elizabeth Cady Stanton presented this speech to the New York State Legislature. She addressed the inequalities faced by all women under the state laws and discussed the specific challenges met by mothers, wives, and widows.

... Gentlemen, in republican America, in the nineteenth century, we, the daughters of the revolutionary heroes of ’76, demand at your hands the redress of our grievances—a revision of your State Constitution—a new code of laws. Permit us then, as briefly as possible, to call your attention to the legal disabilities under which we labor.

1st. Look at the position of woman as woman. . . . We are persons; native, free-born citizens; property-holders, tax-payers; yet are we denied the exercise of our right to the elective franchise. We support ourselves, and, in part, your schools, colleges, churches, your poor-houses, jails, prisons, the army, the navy, the whole machinery of government, and yet we have no voice in your councils. We have every qualification required by the Constitution, necessary to the legal voter, but the one of sex. . . .

2nd. Look at the position of woman as wife. . . . The wife who inherits no property holds about the same legal position that does the slave on the Southern plantation. She can own nothing, sell nothing. She has no right even to the wages she earns; her person, her time, her services are the property of another. . . .



▲ Sojourner Truth