

Speech Entitled "Ain't I a Woman?"

by Sojourner Truth

Delivered at the 1851 Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. 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?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] 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 yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

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.

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

Questions:

1. According to Truth, what evidence is there that something is "out of kilter"? What does the first paragraph suggest about Truth's opinion on the issue of inequality? Use phrases from the paragraph to support your answer.
2. How does she contradict the first two reasons given against woman suffrage? What do her arguments tell you about her character and about her own struggle?
3. How does Truth refute the "religious" arguments against woman suffrage? What does this indicate about the importance of religion to Truth? Explain, using details from the selection.
4. How does truth end her speech? What impression of the speaker does this ending leave you with?
5. What repetition does Truth use in her first argument? What effect does the repetition have on the effectiveness of the speech?
6. What allusion to the Bible does Truth make in the final paragraph before her closing statement. Evaluate the impact of that allusion to her message.
7. How does Truth introduce the antislavery message into her speech? Do you think this

message adds to or detracts from her argument? Explain.

8. Identify the qualities that you think makes this speech effective. Would those qualities appeal to a contemporary audience? Use details to support your answer.

9. Who is Sojourner Truth trying to persuade? In what way does she want them to change the way they think or act?