

Speech to the Ohio  
Women's Conference:

# Ain't I a Woman?

INFORMATIONAL TEXT

Sojourner Truth  
1851

## Introduction

Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) was an abolitionist and women's rights advocate who was born an enslaved woman but escaped to freedom in 1826. Twenty-two years later, the first women's rights convention in the United States was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. Many of the attendees signed a document arguing equal rights for women, including the right to vote. The document, called the Declaration of Sentiments, summoned people from around the country to organize conventions that would urge lawmakers, clergy, and journalists to support the cause. Three years later, at one such assembly in Akron, Ohio, Truth gave a rousing and memorable speech. Two accounts of that speech are provided here.

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## "I can't read, but I can hear."

Account by Frances Dana Gage, *Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1863

- 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<sup>1</sup> 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.

1. **ploughed:** to till, in the sense of a field or earth

NOTES

 Skill:  
Reasons and  
Evidence

Truth is arguing for women's rights. She says that the claim that women need to be helped is wrong because she is a woman, and she is not helped. She uses examples that are relevant to her audience's lives.

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

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Account by Marius Robinson, *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, 1851

7 I want to say a few words about this matter. I am for a woman's rights. I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and **reaped** and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal. I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now.

8 As for intellect, all I can say is, if a woman have a pint, and a man a quart—why can't she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much—for we can't take more than our pint'll hold.

9 The poor men seems to be all in confusion and don't know what to do. Why children, if you have woman's rights, give it to her and you will feel better. You will have your own rights, and they won't be so much trouble.

10 I can't read, but I can hear. I have heard the Bible and have learned that Eve caused man to sin. Well, if woman upset the world, do give her a chance to set it right side up again. The lady has spoken about Jesus, how he never **spurned** woman from him, and she was right. When Lazarus died, Mary and Martha came to him with faith and love and besought him to raise their brother. And Jesus wept and Lazarus came forth. And how came Jesus into the world? Through God who created him and the woman who bore him. Man, where was your part?

11 But the women are coming up, blessed be God, and a few of the men are coming up with them. But man is in a tight place, the poor slave is on him, woman is coming on him, he is surely between a hawk and a buzzard.



Circa 1870: Sojourner Truth (1797–1883), freed when New York state abolished slavery, became a campaigner for women's rights and abolition.

**Skill:** Language, Style, and Audience

Truth uses an analogy to show the difficult situation men are in. Hawks and buzzards are birds with sharp beaks and claws that eat meat, so the comparison creates a pretty harsh, serious tone.



First Read



Read "Speech to the Ohio Women's Conference: Ain't I a Woman?" After you read, complete the Think Questions below.

THINK QUESTIONS

- Use details from the text to summarize Sojourner Truth's opinion about men thinking "women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere."
- What information is provided in the text that can tell you why there are two versions of Sojourner Truth's speech? Cite specific evidence from the text to support your answer.
- Refer to two or more details in the text to support the idea that, in some ways, Sojourner Truth thinks women are actually stronger than men. Explain your answer.
- Read the following dictionary entry:  
**oblige**  
o·blige \ə'blɪj\ verb  
1. to bind by law to a course of action  
2. to do someone a favor  
3. to be grateful or indebted  
Which definition most closely matches the meaning of **obliged** as it is used in paragraph 6 of Sojourner Truth's "Speech to the Ohio Women's Conference"? Write the correct definition of *obliged* here and explain how you figured it out.
- Use context to determine the meaning of the word **intellect** as it is used in paragraph 3. Write your definition of *intellect* here and explain how you found it.