



## SOJOURNER TRUTH

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***O God,** whose Spirit guides us into all truth and makes us free: Strengthen and sustain us as you did your servant Sojourner. Give us vision and courage to stand against oppression and injustice and all that works against the glorious liberty to which you call all your children; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

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**S**ojourner Truth was born Isabella “Belle” Baumfree in Ulster County, New York, to James and Betsy Baumfree around 1797. Colonel Hardenbough sold Belle away from her parents for \$100. She was sold four more times before 1815.

Around 1815, she married and over the course of several years, gave birth to five children. Her owner, John Dumont, promised Belle her freedom. However, he later went back on the agreement, citing that Belle had cost him additional money owing to an injury she had sustained. In 1826 Belle left the Dumont property with her youngest daughter, having been convinced by a vision of Jesus that it was time to seek freedom.

She sought refuge in New York City until New York’s slave emancipation was complete and she could be reunited with her children. She discovered that her five-year-old son had been illegally sold to a planter in Alabama by Dumont. She filed a lawsuit to petition the courts for the return of her son, and she won. This marked the first time a black woman won a civil court case in US Federal Court.

In 1843 Belle had a profound religious experience and changed her name to Sojourner Truth, dedicating her life to the abolition of slavery. She began dictating her memoirs (published in 1850 to wide acclaim) and launched a speaking tour of the United States. In May 1851, in Akron, Ohio, she gave the speech that came to be known as “Ain’t I a Woman?” Even within the abolitionist community, Truth was a radical. She pushed for equal rights for women, especially black women, alongside the total eradication and abolition of slavery. She recruited black soldiers for the Union army during the Civil War, and after the war ended, she moved to Washington, DC, to counsel former slaves.

Truth tried to end streetcar segregation by sitting in the whites-only section in 1865. She petitioned Congress for slavery reparations and land grants for freed slaves, who had been freed only to face destitution. Until her death in 1883 in Michigan, she worked to abolish the death penalty, achieve prison reform, and establish equal rights for all Americans.

— MEGAN CASTELLAN