

Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth was one of our nation's most moving speakers about the evils of slavery. She well understood the suffering and hardships it caused, because she herself had been a slave for nearly 30 years.

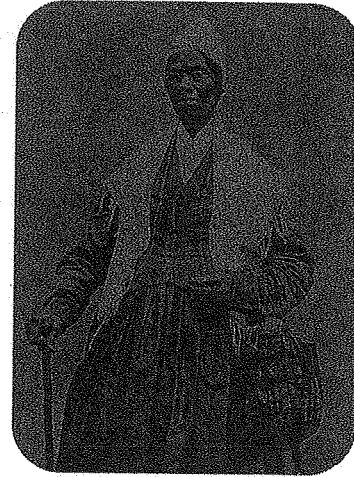
Isabella Baumfree (she later renamed herself Sojourner Truth) was born about 1797 in upstate New York. One of her earliest memories was of sleeping crowded together with her parents and her master's other slaves in a damp, unlighted cellar. When she was about 9 years old, Isabella was taken away from her parents and sold to a new owner for \$100 and some sheep. One day this new owner beat her so hard that she was left with permanent scars on her back.

In 1810, when Isabella was about 13, she was sold to John Dumont. Taught by her mother to be obedient, she tried hard to satisfy her new master. Dumont boasted that Isabella could do the laundry at night and be ready the next morning to work hard in his fields. He was so pleased that he promised to free her in 1826 if she continued to work well. This was one year earlier than the date when she would be officially freed by a New York State law. However, when 1826 came, he refused to honor his promise. Isabella was so **incensed** that, early one morning, she escaped from his farm, leaving her many years of slavery behind her.

A firm belief in God and the power of prayer gave Isabella strength throughout her life. In 1843 it came to her that she was meant to leave New York City, where she was working as a maid, and spread God's word. She set out with her belongings in a pillowcase and, to mark this new beginning, took the name Sojourner Truth. She chose this name, she explained, because she was going to journey from place to place, preaching truth to the people.

Sojourner traveled around the country for nearly 20 years, speaking out against slavery. During these years she met many of the leaders of the antislavery movement and won their admiration and respect. She also met the women who were leading the fight for women's rights, and she added her powerful voice to this cause as well. Almost six feet tall, Sojourner was an inspiring figure. Her speeches were spirited and stirring and often moved audiences to tears. Never **intimidated** by troublemakers, she faced hooters and hecklers with courage, and she quieted them down with her quick-witted humor and strong words of truth.

In 1863 Abraham Lincoln signed an executive order ending slavery in the rebel states of the South. The following year Sojourner was received by President Lincoln in the White House. Although now close to 70, Sojourner began to work tirelessly to help poor, newly freed slaves try to build better lives for themselves. This brave woman, who devoted so many years to the struggle for freedom and equality, died in 1883.



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