



Equality For Women: Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I A Woman"

Dr. Charlotte Thomas

Sunday, Aug. 15 at 7:00 PM EDT

Course Description:

Sojourner Truth's brief speech "Ain't I A Woman?" is a classic piece of early feminist rhetoric. In the speech, Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), an African-American abolitionist and feminist, highlights the hypocrisy of male chauvinism that she experienced. She contends that women are deserving of equal rights as men and that religion cannot be used as a defense for unequal treatment. In this seminar, we will consider the speech in its time and its context. Students will also be encouraged to consider how its arguments are used, and repurposed, in today's political speech.

Guiding Questions:

1. This is a speech about what we now call "intersectionality." How are the arguments made here similar to and different from arguments you have heard about intersectionality?
2. This history of the suffragist movement's relationship to abolition is very complicated. At one point, the suffragist movement split over the issue. Why do you think this might have happened? Could such a divide ever be the right choice?
3. How different is Sojourner Truth's argument from Shylock's in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*? How does each manage the emotions in their speeches? What does each call for as a remedy?

Background:

Read and watch Shylock's speech in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*:

<https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/the-merchant-of-venice/language/if-you-prick-us-do-we-not-bleed#>

“Ain’t I A Woman”

Sojourner Truth

1851

Women's Convention, 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.