



The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) and Olive Gilbert (1801-1884)

Read by:	Multiple readers	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Genre:	Biography and Autobiography		

The subtitle of *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* is “A Northern Slave” reminds us that slavery pervaded the entire country until individually abolished by each of the northern states. Born a Dutch-speaking slave in the town of Esopus, NY, 95 miles north of New York City, her narrative describes the world of northern slavery: the squalid living conditions, the disruption of families, her sale at auction, and the cruel treatment by owners. In 1826 she escaped to freedom, became the first black woman to win a court case against a white man when she sued to recover her son in 1828, and soon after became a devout Christian, which led to a move to New York City in 1929, where she worked as a housekeeper and pursued charitable

activities. She reached another turning point in 1843, when she became a Methodist, changed her name to Sojourner Truth, and was “called by the spirit” to preach the abolition of slavery. She dictated her memoirs to her friend Olive Gilbert, which were published in 1850 as the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*. In that same year she spoke at the first National Women’s Rights Convention and bought a home in Northampton, Mass.

Truth was a fearless and mesmerizing public speaker. She became famous for a speech given extemporaneously at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention in Akron in 1851 that came to be known as “Ain’t I a Woman?,” both for its powerful and earnest message and for the evident differences between the first reported version of the speech reported and a bowdlerized version published some twelve years later with new material and dialect characteristic of Southern slaves. She traveled constantly and delivered hundreds of speeches advocating equal rights for blacks and for women in the 1850’s, and is remembered for speeches given at the Mob Convention in New York in 1853, the American Equal Rights Association in 1867, and the Eighth Anniversary of Negro Freedom in 1871 .

She moved to Battle Creek, Michigan in 1857 but continued to work as a speaker and advocate for equality. She helped recruit black soldiers for the Union Army. While working at the Freedman’s Hospital in Washington DC in 1865 she met President Abraham Lincoln and rode streetcars to help force desegregation. In 1870 she started a movement to obtain land grants for formerly enslaved people and met with President U. S. Grant. In 1872, she tried to vote in the presidential election in Battle Creek but was turned away.

Her exceptional life story and accomplishments have achieved increasing recognition and acclaim over the years following the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the awakening of the women’s movement. Commemorations and honors range far and wide, from a US postage stamp and bust in the Capitol to the naming of Interstate Highway 194 and Asteroid 249521. Most recently she was named by the Smithsonian to their list of 100 Most Significant Americans and chosen as one of five women who will be represented on the back of the \$10 bill.