

Sojourner Truth

Isabella Baumfree was born in 1797 in a Dutch settlement in Ulster County, New York. Her parents Betsey and James were slaves who had twelve other children, most of whom were sold to other slavers before her birth. At the age of eleven, she was sold to an English family who forced her to abandon her original Dutch language to learn English. Several years later, she was sold again, and the new master forced her to marry an older slave named Thomas. Isabella and Thomas had five children together, four of whom were sold at auctions. In 1828, Isabella ran away with her infant son and ended up in New York City, where she worked for several religious communities. In 1843, Isabella began her new life as Sojourner Truth. She “sojournered” throughout the north preaching, in both Dutch and English, the “truth” about the conditions of enslavement. She worked with such abolitionists as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lucretia and James Mott, William Lloyd Garrison, Fredrick Douglass, and Olive Gilbert. At the end of the civil war she found herself helping the newly freed slaves, and encouraging the government to give them land of their own. In 1851, she delivered her most famous speech, “Ain’t I a Woman?” in Akron, Ohio.