

“AIN’T I A WOMAN?”

SOJOURNER TRUTH

Sojourner Truth was born enslaved around 1797 and was later freed. She became a traveling religious preacher and powerful speaker about abolition and women’s rights. She attended the Ohio Women’s convention in 1851 and gave a rousing speech, excerpted here. Audience members were concerned that her unpopular abolitionist ideas would not be well received, but they were proven wrong by the wild applause Truth received at the end.

... 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 bourne thirteen children, and seen them 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 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 git 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.

GENERAL LEE'S FAREWELL

ROBERT E. LEE

Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia on April 9, 1865, at Appomattox Court House in Appomattox, VA. He issued this last order to his troops on April 10 before dispersing.

HEADQUARTERS, ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

April 10, 1865

After four years of arduous service, marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude, the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources. I need not tell the brave survivors of so many hard-fought battles, who have remained steadfast to the last, that I have consented to the result from no distrust of them. But, feeling that valor and devotion could accomplish nothing that could compensate for the loss that may have attended the continuance of the contest, I determined to avoid the useless sacrifice of those whose past services have endeared them to their countrymen. By the terms of the agreement officers and men can return to their homes and remain until exchanged. You will take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of the duty faithfully performed; and I earnestly pray that a merciful God will extend to you his blessing and protection. With an unceasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country, and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous considerations for myself, I bid you an affectionate farewell.

GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863, resulted in about 50,000 casualties. Northerners built a cemetery at Gettysburg to honor the dead and dedicated it on November 19, 1863. President Abraham Lincoln's words of consecration made the Union's cause in the war very clear.

"Fourscore and seven years ago our forefathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work, which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEECH

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Frederick Douglass was born enslaved and escaped to freedom to become a prominent member of the abolition movement. He delivered a speech in Rochester, NY, at a Fourth of July celebration. His 1852 address, excerpted below, stunned his audience.

“Fellow citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? and am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?...

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sound of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants brass fronted impudence; your shout of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanks-givings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy -- a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour.”

LETTER TO COUSIN VIRA

CLARA BARTON

On December 12th, 1862, in the early morning before the Battle of Fredericksburg, Clara Barton, a Civil War nurse who would later found the American Red Cross, wrote her cousin a letter, sadly predicting the outcome of the following day.

My dear Cousin Vira:

Five minutes time with you; and God only knows what those five minutes might be worth to the many-doomed thousands sleeping around me. It is the night before a battle. The enemy... and its mighty entrenchments lie before us, the river between - at tomorrow's dawn our troops will assay to cross, and the guns of the enemy will sweep those frail bridges at every breath...

The moon is shining through the soft haze with a brightness almost prophetic. For the last half hour I have stood alone in the awful stillness of its glimmering light gazing upon the strange sad scene around me striving to say, "Thy will Oh God be done."

The camp fires blaze with unwanted brightness, the sentry's tread is still but quick - the acres of little shelter tents are dark and still as death, no wonder for us as I gazed sorrowfully upon them. I thought I could almost hear the slow flap of the grim messenger's wings, as one by one he sought and selected his victims for the morning. Sleep weary one, sleep and rest for tomorrow's toil. Oh! Sleep and visit in dreams once more the loved ones nestling at home...

Mine are not the only waking hours, the light yet burns brightly in our kind hearted General's tent where he pens what may be a last farewell to his wife and children and thinks sadly of his fated men. Already the roll of the moving artillery is sounded in my ears. The battle draws near and I must catch one hour's sleep for tomorrow's labor...

Yours in love,

Clara

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

WALT WHITMAN

Walt Whitman was born in 1819 and died in 1892. He was a famous American poet who wrote about his time as a Civil War nurse. This mourning poem was written in 1865 was first published in the pamphlet “Sequel to Drum-Taps” with 17 other poems about the Civil War.

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
 But O heart! heart! heart!

O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
 Here Captain! dear father!

This arm beneath your head!
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

(OVER)

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.