

Portugal, Nicholas
Period A7
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AP Language

“Ain’t I A Woman” OPR

Sojourner Truth’s inspiring, extemporaneously delivered speech on December 1851, named *Ain’t I a Woman*, was inspired by women’s rights and abolitionist movements during the mid-nineteenth century. At the time, the United States maintained the social system of patriarchy from European traditions, and slavery would not be abolished until after the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation. Sojourner Truth believed strongly in challenging African-American women’s, subordinate position in society, and how biblical allusions justify her statements. In addition, Truth employs a number of rhetorical devices to connect with her audience and relay her feminist perceptions with such novelty and fervency, including pathos, reference to the “plain folk,” ethos, logos, allusion, juxtaposition, and anaphora. By equating her struggles and burdens as being able to hold a quart compared to the predisposed pint, since two pints equals a quart, Truth depicted how women could bear just as much as men.

While Truth’s intended purpose was to garner support specifically for women’s rights and abolitionism, her speech failed to represent the position of the general African American population, as her mentions of ‘man over there’ and ‘women’ in the beginning of the second paragraph resonate ambiguity. It seems as if she is trying to only portray the well-to-do lives of the upper quartiles of the white population, considering women are demonstrated as helpless. In the consecutive statement, “Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me the best place,” Truth attempts to validate the underrepresented status of African-American women; however, she fails to show that African-American men are also disregarded when it comes to instances such as bondage, escape endeavors, and military participation. At the same time, she does utilize pathos and logos when she displays her battered arm and refers to the ‘lash,’ sympathizing with the audience to show how women bound to involuntary servitude bear painful burdens, therefore being worthy of recognition as women, and not merely tools people should afflict with slave labors.

In terms of biblical references, Truth alludes to the relationship between God and Mary of Nazareth, who, in the Bible, was the mother of Jesus Christ. Since mortal men weren’t directly involved in the conception of Jesus, Truth justifies that women had always been regarded on a godly level, so they should receive the same number of rights as men, if not additional. Truth states, “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!” By employing the word “again,” Truth implies that due to the Mary precedent, who made one of the most profound differences to the world, the women of the 1850’s should also take action to seek a sense of involvement and substantiation in society. The problem with this comparison is that in the time and place of Jesus Christ, women were certainly not treated as equals to men, though Mary was chosen by God’s divine reason to produce the human nature of Jesus Christ, thus being an exception. The exception cannot be necessarily compared with the majority in this way, because then it becomes a generalization. As Truth suffered burdens significantly during her life with the imposition of slavery and children being sold off into slavery, such pains were mostly limited to African-American women, not to white women. In conclusion, while I agree with her statement in the second paragraph, comparing her burdens to those of men and deserving of recognition, I do not entirely agree with her corollaries of women and biblical rationalization.