AP[®] U.S. History

Lesson Plan: Sojourner Truth



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2. Student Activities

MARCO

Duration

One or two class sessions of approximately 40 minutes each

Resources

1. YouTube Video: Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?



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Objectives of Lesson

- To compare two different accounts of the same historical event
- To analyze a source in light of speaker, audience, and rhetorical occasion
- To assess the intersection of gender and race in the history of women's rights in America

College Board Objectives from the 2019–20 CED

- Topic 4.11: The Age of Reform (p. 105)
- Key Concept 4.1.III.C: "A women's rights movement sought to create greater equality and opportunities for women expressing its ideals at the Seneca Falls Convention."
- Topic 4.12: African Americans in the Early Republic (p. 106)
- Key Concept 4.1.II.D: "Enslaved blacks and free African Americans created communities and strategies to protect their dignity and family structures and they joined political structures aimed at changing their status."
- Topic 5.5: Sectional Conflict: Regional Differences (pp. 121-122)
- **Key Concept: 5.2.I.B:** "African American and white abolitionists, although a minority in the North, mounted a highly visible campaign against slavery, presenting moral arguments against the institution, assisting slave escapes, and sometimes expressing a willingness to use violence to achieve these goals."

Student Activities

- Read and annotate two accounts of Sojourner Truth's speech at the 1851 Akron Women's Rights Convention.
- Respond to sourcing questions about these two accounts.
- Hypothesize about the reasons for the differences in the accounts.
- Research what historians have proposed as reasons for the differences in the accounts.

How to Use This Lesson

This lesson can be used to discuss the historical content of the women's rights movement and how it overlapped with the abolitionists' movement. It also can be used to stress the importance and value of sourcing and contextualization in historical analysis. Frances Gage's account of Sojourner Truth's speech at the 1851 Akron Women's Rights Convention has become one of the most widely recognized pieces of oratory in American history. However, what many don't realize is that Gage's account was not published until 12 years after the event and it differs significantly from a newspaper account of the speech that was published just one month after the event. These two different accounts offer an excellent opportunity to apply the skills of historical sourcing in order to understand how sourcing can help historians assess conflicting accounts of the same historical event.

The Process

- **Step 1: Introduce the speech:** Provide students a brief background of the women's rights movement and the Seneca Falls Convention. Give the students a basic introduction to Sojourner Truth and the 1851 Akron Women's Rights Convention.
- Step 2: Read and annotate: Have students read and annotate Frances Gage's 1863 account of Sojourner Truth's speech. You can show the video performance we filmed of the 1863 speech. This is the account that became famous and from which the speech became known as the "Ain't I A Woman" speech. (NOTE: Do not stress to the students the date of Gage's account or the fact that it is published 12 years after the event. See if the students pick up on this and if they think it is significant. Also, do not mention that you will be analyzing the second, 1851 account yet, and don't hand the students that part of the assignment until you are finished with the discussion of Gage's account.)
- **Step 3: Sourcing and analysis:** Have students complete the sourcing and analysis questions for this speech and discuss their answers.
- **Step 4: Read and annotate:** After completing steps 1–3, provide the students with Marius Robinson's 1851 account of the speech from the *Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle*.
- **Step 5: Analyze and source:** Have students complete the sourcing, comparison, and analysis questions and discuss their answers.
- **Step 6: Hypothesize and research:** Have students hypothesize about the reasons and motivations behind the differences in the accounts. If time allows or for homework, have the students research what professional historians have said about the reasons for the differences in the accounts, and have each write a brief summary of what they find in their research.

AP[®] U.S. History Student Activities: Sojourner Truth



Introduction

In 1851, three years after the Seneca Falls convention, a woman's rights convention was held in Akron Ohio. Numerous activisist gave speeches in support of women's rights at this meeting. One of those activists was Sojourner Truth. She was familiar to the people attending the convention because she'd previously published a narrative about her life as a slave. She was not scheduled to speak, but on the second day of the convention she took an opportunity to address the audience. The speech she gave eventually turned into the famous "Ain't I A Woman" speech. While many have heard its title and can recite some lines from it, there's a very complex story behind this famous speech that historians can explore to help us better understand American society then and now.

As budding historians, you will take up this task. As you get started, there are a few things you should understand about the context of this speech. This was not a prepared speech. It was extemporaneous, and recording devices were not yet invented. In fact, Sojourner Truth could not read or write so she was unable to write out this speech in her own words. However, by all accounts it was a very powerful speech, and consequently it was covered by a local newspaper. The speech was memorable, and as the women's rights and abolitionist movements continued through the 1850s and 1860s, Sojourner Truth remained an active spokesperson for the movements. Eventually, this lead to a republication of her speech in 1863 in an account by Frances Gage. Gage was the president of the Akron Women's Rights Convention, and in 1863, she read an article published by Harriet Beecher Stowe that described Sojourner Truth. Gage decided to expand on this story and retell the events of the Akron Convention that had happened 12 years earlier. In this retelling of the story, Gage wrote out the "Ain't I A Woman" speech that you will analyze below.

Part 1

Read and annotate the account of the speech according to the instructions.

Annotation instructions:

- 1. Highlight or underline any information within the prompt or passage that relates to the context.
- 2. Circle any evidence that reveals something about the audience.
- 3. Bracket any information that is revealed about the speaker.
- 4. Write notes in the margins about important or confusing vocabulary, as well as questions or insights that you have about the text.

Source: "Sojourner Truth" by Mrs. F.D. Gage, *Independent* April 23, 1862

The second day the work waxed warm. Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Pres- byterian, and Universalist ministers came in to hear and discuss the resolutions brought forth. One claimed superior rights *Line* and privileges for man because of su- perior intellect; another because

- 5 of the manhood of Christ. If God had desired the equality of woman, he would have given some token of his will through the birth, life, and death of the Savior. Another gave us a theological view of the awful sin of our first mother. There were few women in those days that dared to "speak in meeting," and the august teachers of the people, with long-
- 10 winded bombast, were seeming to get the better of us, while the boys in the galleries and sneerers among the pews were enjoying hugely the discomfiture, as they supposed, of the strong-minded. Some of the tenderskinned friends were growing indignant and on the point of losing dignity, and the atmosphere of the convention betokened a storm.

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- 15 Slowly from her seat in the corner rose Sojourner Truth, who, till now, had hardly lifted her head. "Don't let her speak," gasped a halfdozen in my ear. She moved slowly and solemnly to the front; laid her old bonnet at her feet, her great speaking eyes to me. There was a hissing sound of disapprobation above and below. I rose and an- nounced
- 20 "Sojourner Truth," and begged the audience to keep silence for a few mo- ments. The tumult subsided at once, and every eye was fixed on this almost Amazon form, which stood nearly six feet high, head erect, an eye piercing the upper air like one in a dream. At her first word there was a profound hush. She spoke in deep tones, which, though not loud,
- 25 reached every ear in the house, and away through the throng at the doors and windows. "Well, chillen, whar dar's so much racket dar must be som'ting out o' kilter. I tink dat, 'twixt the [negroes] of de Souf and de women at de Norf, all a-talking 'bout rights, de white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking 'bout? Dat man over dar say
- *30* dat woman needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to have de best place eberywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud-puddles, or gives me any best place;" and, raising herself to her full height, and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked, "And ar'n't I a woman? Look at me. Look at my arm," and she bared
- 35 her right arm to the shoulder, showing its tremendous muscular power. "I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me - and ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man, (when I could get it,) and bear de lash as well - and ar'n't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chillen, and seen 'em mos' all sold off into
- 40 slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard -and ar'n't I a woman? When dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head. What dis dey call it?" "Intellect," whispered some one near. "Dat's it, honey. What's dat got to do with woman's rights or [negroes'] rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint and yourn holds a quart, wouldn't ye be mean not to
- 45 let me have my little half-measure full?" and she pointed her significant finger and sent a keen glance at the minister who had made the argument. The cheering was long and loud. "Den dat little man in black dar, he say woman can't have as much right as man 'cause Christ wa'n't a woman. Whar did your Christ come from?"
- 50 Rolling thunder could not have stilled that crowd as did those deep wonderful tones, as she stood there with outstretched arms and eye of fire. Raising her voice still louder, she repeated,

"Whar did you Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had noting to do with him." Oh! what a rebuke she gave the little man.

- 55 Turning again to another objector, she took up the defense of Mother Eve. I cannot follow her through it all. It was pointed and witty and solemn; eliciting at almost every sentence deafening applause; and she ended by asserting "that if de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn de world upside down all her one lone, all dese togeder," and she
- 60 glanced her eye over us, "ought to be able to turn it back an git it right side up again, and now dey is asking to, de men better let 'em." (Long continuous cheering.) "'Bleeged to ye for hearin' on me, and now old Sojourner ha'n't got nothin' more to say."

Amid roars of applause she turned to her corner, leaving more than 65 one of us with streaming eyes and hearts beating with gratitude. She had taken us up in her great strong arms and carried us safely over the slough of difficulty, turning the whole tide in our favor.

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Part 2

Answer the following historical sourcing questions. One set of questions asks for you to analyze the sourcing information for the original speech. The other set asks you to analyze the sourcing of Gage's account of the speech. The background information at the beginning of this assignment as well as your own knowledge of this era will be helpful in addressing these questions.

Set 1

1. What was the historical context for the Akron Women's Rights Convention and Sojourner Truth's speech?

2. Who was the intended audience for Sojourner Truth's speech in Akron, Ohio in 1851?

3. Describe the point of view of Sojourner Truth as she delivered the speech in 1851.

4. Describe Sojourner Truth's purpose in delivering her speech.



Set 2

1. What was the historical context for the publication of Gage's article on Sojourner Truth, published in 1863?

2. Who was the intended audience for Gage's article on Sojourner Truth?

3. Describe the point of view of Frances Gage as she wrote her article in 1863.

4. Describe Frances Gage's purpose in writing her article in 1863.

5. Write a paragraph in which you explain why any of the answers that you have given above might affect our historical understanding of the "Aint I a Woman" speech.

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Part 3

There are always riddles for historians. You've read and annotated the speech as it was reported by Francis Gage, but what about the contemporaneous account that was written back in 1851? Fortunately, we have a copy of that for you to analyze. This account was published in the *Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle* in Ohio on June 21st, 1851. You should know that the author of the article, Marius Robinson, was a friend of Sojourner Truth, and it is documented that he reviewed it with her and she approved it before it was published.

Read and annotate this 1851 account of the speech following the same instructions that you used for Gage's account.

Annotation instructions:

- 1. Highlight or underline any information within the prompt or passage that relates to the context.
- 2. Circle any evidence that reveals something about the audience.
- 3. Bracket any information that is revealed about the speaker.
- 4. Write notes in the margins about important or confusing vocabulary, as well as questions or insights that you have about the text.

By Marius Robinson, Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle, June 21, 1851

One of the most unique and interesting speeches of the Convention was made by Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave. It is impossible to transfer it to paper, or convey any adequate idea of the effect it produced *Line* upon the audience. Those only can appreciate it who saw her powerful

- 5 form, her whole-souled, earnest gestures, and listened to her strong and truthful tones. She came forward to the platform and addressing the President said with great simplicity: May I say a few words? Receiving an affirmative answer, she proceeded; I want to say a few words about this matter. I am a woman's rights [sic]. I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and
- ¹⁰ husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal; I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now. As for intellect, all I can say is, if a woman have a pint and a man a quart -why cant she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid
- ¹⁵ to give us our rights for fear we will take too much,-for we cant take more than our pint'll hold. The poor men seem to be all in confusion, and dont know what to do. Why children, if you have woman's rights give it to her and you will feel better. You will have your own rights, and they wont be so much trouble. I cant read, but I can hear. I have heard the bible and
- 20 have learned that Eve caused man to sin. Well if woman upset the world, do give her a chance to set it right side up again. The Lady has spoken about Jesus, how he never spurned woman from him, and she was right. When Lazarus died, Mary and Martha came to him with faith and love and besought him to raise their brother. And Jesus wept and Lazarus
- 25 came forth. And how came Jesus into the world? Through God who created him and woman who bore him. Man, where is your part? But the women are coming up blessed be God and a few of the men are coming up with them. But man is in a tight place, the poor slave is on him, woman is coming on him, and he is surely between a hawk and a buzzard.

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Answer the following historical sourcing questions.

1. What is the historical context for the publication of the speech in this article?

2. Who was the intended audience for this article?

3. What was the point of view of Marius Robinson as he recounted the speech in this article?

4. What was Marius Robinson's purpose as he wrote the article?



Analyze these accounts as a historian.

1. Describe the similarities in these two accounts of Sojourner Truth's speech.

2. Describe the differences in these two accounts of Sojourner Truth's speech.

3. Hypothesize about why the differences exist.

4. Explain the ways these two different accounts of the speech alter our understanding of:

- Sojourner Truth
- Frances Gage
- The Women's Rights movement
- The Abolitionist movement

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Secondary research: Professional historians have written extensively on this speech, its significance, and the motivations of Gage and Sojourner Truth. Research this topic on the internet and investigate whether or not your hypothesis is supported by published historians. Write a paragraph summarizing what you learn in this research.