

**Second Place Winner**  
**Division I – 7-9<sup>th</sup> Grades**  
***86 Years of Pure Courage***  
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Slavery was one of the most tragic periods in U.S. history and as an African American woman, it was especially excruciating. The lack of respect and decency towards women during this age, singularly African American women, was common. Sojourner Truth was one of the many incredible African American females to overcome the struggles of slavery and lack of women's civil rights to change the world around her. Sojourner Truth displayed a great deal of moral courage throughout the course of her existence as she successfully escaped slavery, petitioned to liberate all slaves from slavery and the slave trade after her escape, traveled across the nation speaking up for women's rights, and became the first African American woman to take a white man to court and win.

Sojourner Truth exhibited moral courage by overcoming her own barriers as an African American woman in the early 1800s while also fighting for her children and combating female stereotypes. Truth ignored the risks and consequences that could come from her actions to continue to help herself and others. Sojourner Truth successfully escaped slavery in 1826 when she fled from her master John Dumont.<sup>1</sup> Many slaves were afraid to disobey their masters knowing severe consequences, including death, could be inflicted upon them if they were caught. This prevented many slaves from attempting to escape. However, knowing this, Truth ignored those worries and did what was best for her and her future.

After Truth gained her freedom from slavery she still continued to display moral courage in many of her everyday actions. In 1851 Truth went on a nation-wide lecture tour where she gave her memorable, "Ain't I a Woman," speech. During this time period women were not granted the same rights as men and the two sexes were not treated equally. "Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights?"<sup>2</sup> This was one of the many powerful lines in her, "Ain't I a Woman," speech. It acquired loads of moral courage for Truth to stand up in front of such an immense crowd, as a woman of color that experienced slavery, and speak on behalf of all women globally. These two actions Sojourner Truth took in history were only a few of the times she has displayed moral courage.

Sojourner Truth's actions helped contribute to abolishing slavery and liberating the slaves trapped in the slave trade. Truth was an antislavery activist and conveyed her opinions on the brutality and unfairness of slavery through speeches she gave to the public.<sup>3</sup> Truth also worked with both blacks and whites all across the country to terminate slavery and in 1857 she moved to Battle Creek, Michigan where she became active in helping African Americans escape to freedom on the Underground Railroad.<sup>4</sup> The devotion and hard work Truth put in to ending slavery impacted the world around her because it eventually helped free all slaves and resolve the injustice of slavery.

The bravery and moral courage Sojourner Truth's actions' possessed not only impacted the world positively, but has also influenced me. She showed me it is possible for an ordinary person, like myself, to make a change, large or small, in the world. Truth started out as an ordinary person and arguably even less than ordinary because of her race and gender, but she was able to combat the stereotypes and make a difference globally. As we continue to fight for women's rights, I recognize that I may be personally impacted now and in the future. Females are often looked at as less than or weaker than males, which can diminish our confidence and make us feel insecure and insignificant. When I am confronted with these uncomfortable situations I can speak for myself and other women in the room. In our modern society, reproductive rights and the wage gap are only two of the many struggles I will face as a woman in our modern society. As a way to combat these issues of inequality, I can participate in rallies and protests in my city. In addition, with the latest changes in our presidency and the effects of this on many minority groups, I can take the lessons I learned from Sojourner Truth and take action in reversing these outcomes for the better good. Like Sojourner Truth, I too can rise above the hardships and stereotypes I may be labeled with because I am a young female that chooses to take action in order to do what is best for me and my future despite challenges and obstacles.

The moral courage in Sojourner Truth's actions has impacted the world and made our country a little safer and just for all people. Her actions have influenced numerous amounts of people including myself. However it is crucial to keep an eye out for any acts of moral courage around us in our daily lives. Any person has the ability to conquer their fears and challenges and take part in advancing the community around them or possibly even make a difference globally. Thus it is important to recognize those actions in others large or small.

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1. Dr. Burton W. Folsom, "Black History Month: The Crusade of Sojourner Truth." Mackinac Center, Published on Feb. 1, 1999, <http://www.mackinac.org/article.aspx?ID=1649>
  2. Painter, Nell Irvin, "Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol", New York, NY: Norton, 2007.
  3. Brezina, Corona, "Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" Speech: A Primary Source Investigation", New York: RosenCentral Primary Source, 2005.
  4. Dr. Burton W Folsom, "Black History Month: The Crusade of Sojourner Truth", Feb. 1, 1999