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Influential African American Leader: Sojourner Truth

Throughout the years, influential people have been changing the world. Whether it was for women's rights or abolishing slavery, they have always tried to make a difference when there was injustice in the world. Many of the inspiring leaders were from African American descent. Such people as Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Harriet Tubman have all received countless recognition for their positive influence on the world as leaders in popular movements. However, many people have not received enough recognition for the differences they made. One influential African American that had an effect on the world was a woman named Sojourner Truth. She does not get as much recognition as she deserves compared to the impact she had on the world. Having survived and escaped slavery, Sojourner Truth was tremendously influential in her lifetime by impacting the country with her brave work in pursuing abolition and creating rights for women.

Isabella Baumfree, who later in life changed her name to Sojourner Truth, was born into slavery. As she grew up, her family was there with her. She was one of twelve children in the family all belonging to a slave owner named Colonel Hardenbergh. When he and his heirs died, the Baumfrees got separated in an auction. Truth was sold for one hundred dollars along with a flock of sheep as if she was an animal. At nine, she lived with her new owner named John Neely. She lived her new life without her parents and siblings doing back-breaking work every day just

to not get whipped. Of course her rights were violated as a slave, but there was one thing that was even worse. Neely didn't allow Truth to love the one she wanted to be with. He forbade it completely. Instead, he matched her with another slave of his choice. Later, Sojourner ran away with her infant child and sought refuge, making the heart-wrenching decision to leave her many other children behind. The hardships that she went through, along with her sacrifices, inspired many to make similar choices in the name of equality and freedom.

After she escaped the clutches of the evil slave owner, she went on to live her destiny as an abolitionist. She had given her opinions on it and had spoken publicly in spite of fear of the consequences. She had joined the Northampton Association of Education and Industry, a group of abolitionists that also covered the topics of Women's Rights and Pacifism as well as slavery. In this organization, she was surrounded by many inspiring African American leaders such as the famous Frederick Douglass. While a member of this group, she did as much as she could to give her views on slavery and inspire those around her to join the cause. As a former slave, her views would be taken seriously due to her experience. Her personal experiences, candor, and natural charisma often got her chosen as a speaker for public gatherings. She spoke in many conventions such as the Abolitionist Convention where she sang a song about her sorrows in slavery. This was a very moving piece of work and a bright light during the civil war. She also spoke at the "Eighth Anniversary of Negro Freedom" where she shared her dreams of having equal rights. It is widely believed that she may have contributed to a turning point in the Civil War and possibly convinced some Confederates to change their opinions.

Sojourner is commonly known for her stance on women's rights in the rather unequal country at the time. Her speech called, "Ain't I A Woman" spoke to people of all kinds,

especially African people and women. She spoke of her life intimately and honestly and how those experiences affected her. It is told that crowds smiled from ear to ear as she spoke and many were moved to tears. Later, that speech became a driving force for the Civil War. It was published for nearly a decade in newspapers. It has been quoted all throughout the United States by civil rights activists. That speech has given hope to all women around the world. It has without a doubt changed the way women have a say in this country. It also changed the way all human beings were looked upon. Little did she know at the time she spoke it, her words changed the world forever.

As her life went on, Sojourner Truth accomplished what could be considered impossible. She survived slavery and escaped from it with success. She had taken her hardships and used them to teach, inspire, and encourage as an Abolitionist and Women's rights activist. Truth not only inspired the many around her, but her words lived on to inspire many who had not seen her in their lifetimes. Slavery might have not been abolished without her contributions to society. Women might not have the rights they have today without her brave words. She was a guiding light during the Civil War and for many moments after. Even though I may not be African American or a woman, I have been inspired to live by my beliefs and act upon them as she did. I have learned how important it is to be brave, speak the truth, do what you believe is right, and to never lose hope. Sojourner Truth did not teach us to find a light in the darkness, but to be the light itself.