



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

SOJOURNER TRUTH



UNESCO Series on Women in African History





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UNESCO specialist responsible for the project: Sasha Rubel
Editorial and artistic direction: Edouard Jouveaud

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Cover illustration: Y. Sanders

A grayscale illustration of Sojourner Truth, an African American abolitionist and orator. She is depicted from the waist up, wearing a headscarf and a long, light-colored dress. Her right arm is raised, with her fist clenched, and she has a determined, shouting expression on her face. Her left hand is also clenched in a fist, positioned near her chest. Heavy chains are attached to her wrists, with one chain extending upwards and to the left, and another extending downwards and to the left. The background is a plain, light color.

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Illustrations: Y. Sanders
Script and text: Obioma Ofoego



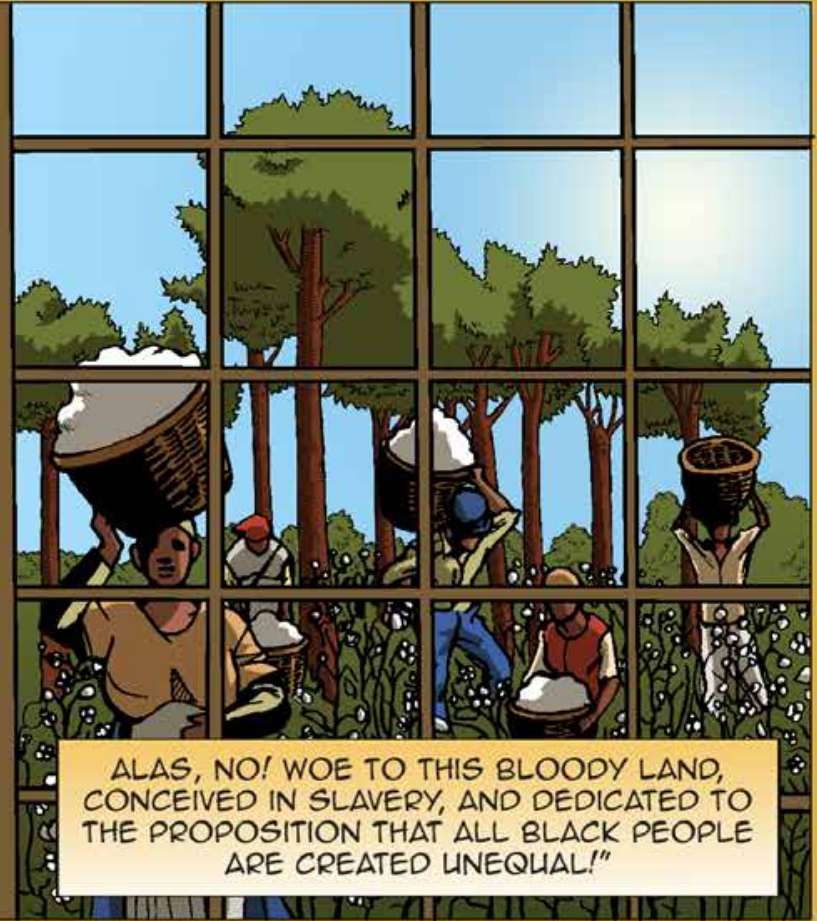


"...BUT BE NOT FOOLED. FOR IN THAT DREAD
BEAUTY ARE VEILED THE NAMELESS,
NUMBERLESS GRAVES OF OUR ANCESTORS,
EXTINGUISHED DURING THAT GRIEVOUS VOYAGE
FROM THE AFRICAN CONTINENT."



"AND THOSE WHO AVOIDED THE DEATHLY WATERS? WHAT FATE AWAITED THEM? DID LIBERATION FROM THE BRITISH CROWN LOOSEN THEIR CHAINS OF BONDAGE? HAS THE ABOLITION OF THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE QUELLED THE APPETITE FOR SLAVERY ON THESE SHORES?"

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.
The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.



ALAS, NO! WOE TO THIS BLOODY LAND, CONCEIVED IN SLAVERY, AND DEDICATED TO THE PROPOSITION THAT ALL BLACK PEOPLE ARE CREATED UNEQUAL!"



"STILL WE ARE TRADED AS CHATTEL, AND HUNTED AS ANIMALS; STILL WE ARE BRANDED FLUGITIVE CRIMINALS,

WHEN IT IS NOTHING BUT THE LASH OF OPPRESSION WHICH WE FLEE! SOME ESCAPE TO TASTE FREEDOM IN DISTANT CANADA; OTHERS ARE NOT SO LUCKY.

AND WHEN THE UNLUCKY ONES HAVE RUN UNTIL THEY CAN RUN NO MORE, WHEN THEY HAVE FOUGHT TO THE DYING EMBERS OF THEIR BEING, THEY CAN BUT WHISPER THOSE WORDS 'FREEDOM OR DEATH!' - AS A TERRIBLE REMINDER OF OUR STILL-BORN DREAM."



I MYSELF HAVE BEEN A SLAVE.
I HAVE BORNE ON MY BACK THE
DEEP SEARS OF INIQUITY;



I HAVE SNATCHED FOOD FROM
THE MOUTHS OF MY FAMISHED
CHILDREN TO INDULGE
ANOTHER'S GLUTTONY;

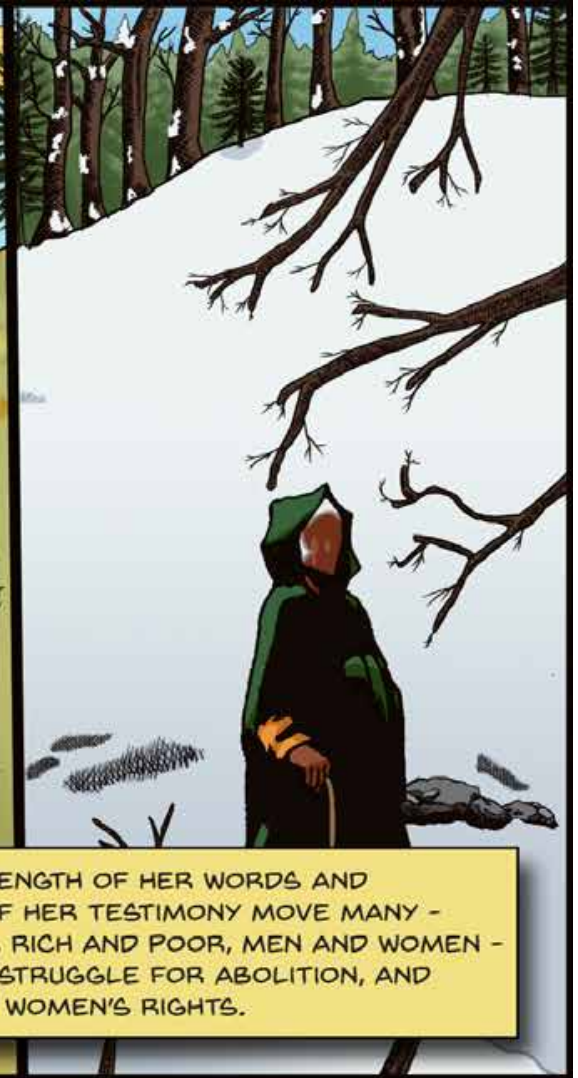
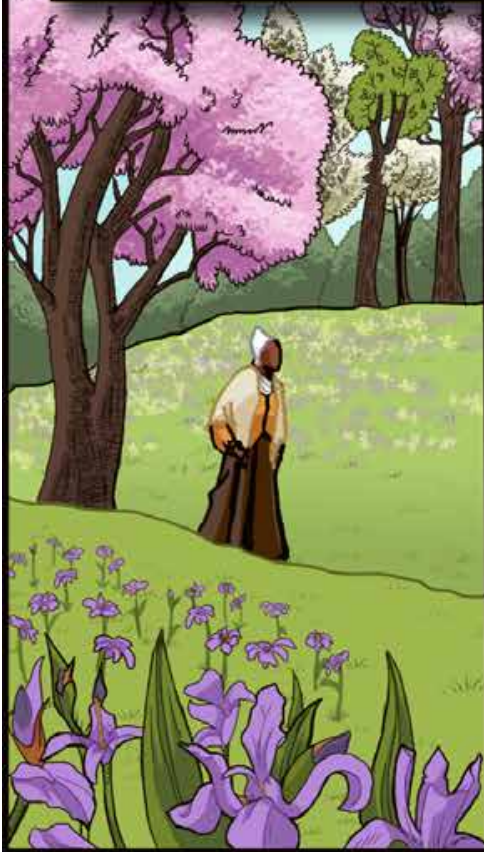


I HAVE SWUNG THE SCYTHE
IN THE HEAT OF THE SUN,
AS ANOTHER GREW RICH FROM
THE FRUITS OF MY LABOUR..."





FROM NEW YORK TO RHODE ISLAND,
FROM MASSACHUSETTS TO CONNECTICUT,
FROM OHIO TO MICHIGAN, THE SOJOURNER BEGINS
TO TRAVERSE THE LAND, SPEAKING TRUTH TO ALL
THOSE WHO HAD EARS TO LISTEN.



THE STRENGTH OF HER WORDS AND
THE POWER OF HER TESTIMONY MOVE MANY -
BLACK AND WHITE, RICH AND POOR, MEN AND WOMEN -
TO JOIN THE STRUGGLE FOR ABOLITION, AND
WOMEN'S RIGHTS.



WITH THE INVENTION OF THE DAGUERRETYPE IN 1839 AND THE SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY, AFRICAN AMERICANS HAD BEGUN TO USE IMAGES TO DOCUMENT THEMSELVES AND THEIR EXPERIENCES.

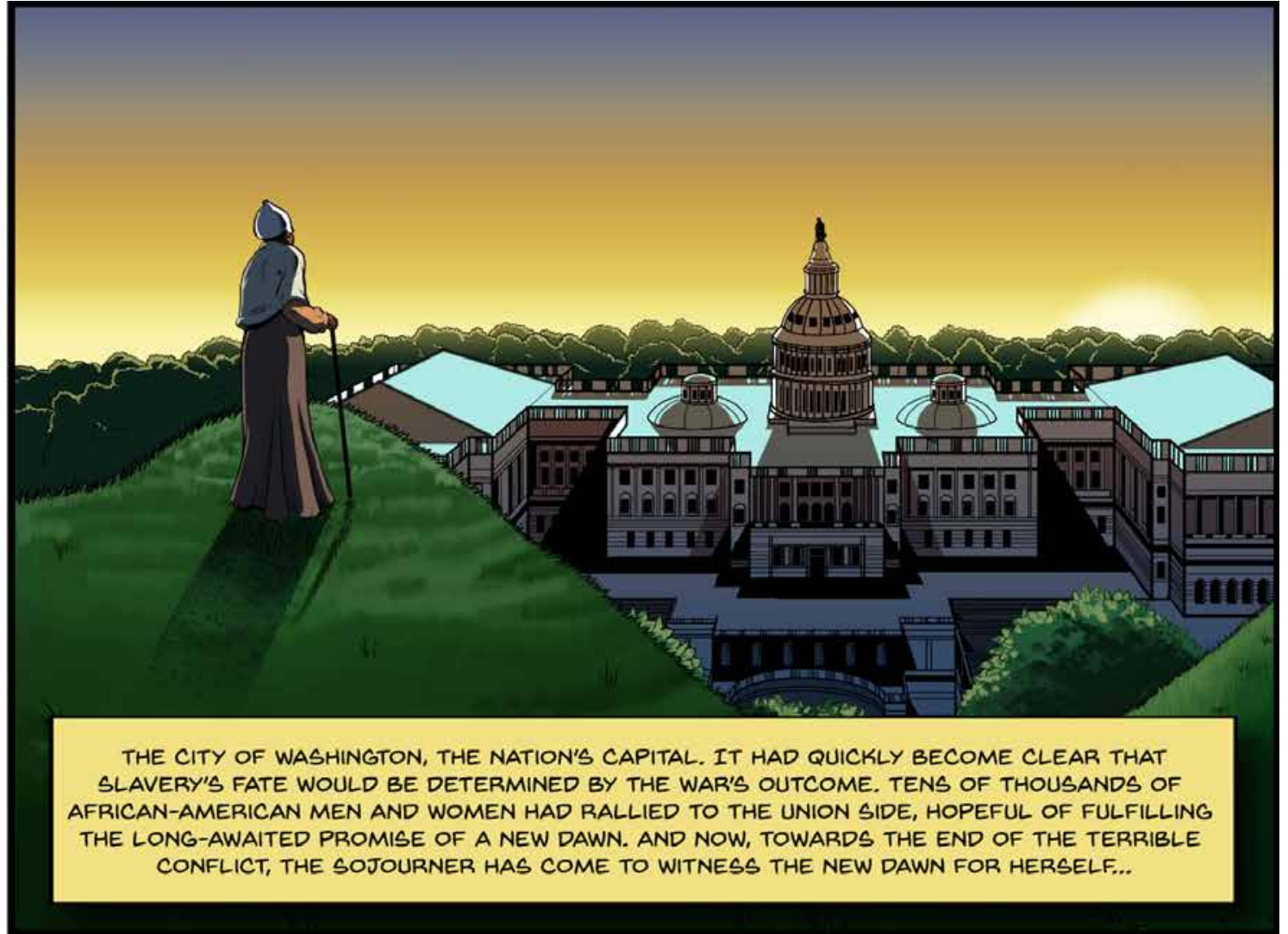
HOW HARD IT IS FOR AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN TO HAVE HIS VOICE HEARD AND RESPECTED; SO JUST IMAGINE WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR US AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN!



SO THE SOJOURNER BEGINS TO
POSE FOR PHOTOGRAPHS....







THE CITY OF WASHINGTON, THE NATION'S CAPITAL. IT HAD QUICKLY BECOME CLEAR THAT SLAVERY'S FATE WOULD BE DETERMINED BY THE WAR'S OUTCOME. TENS OF THOUSANDS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN HAD RALLIED TO THE UNION SIDE, HOPEFUL OF FULFILLING THE LONG-AWAITED PROMISE OF A NEW DAWN. AND NOW, TOWARDS THE END OF THE TERRIBLE CONFLICT, THE SOJOURNER HAS COME TO WITNESS THE NEW DAWN FOR HERSELF...





ON THE BATTLEFRONT, WE WERE NOT GIVEN THE SAME SUPPLIES, HOUSING OR MEDICAL TREATMENT, JUST BECAUSE OF THE COLOR OF OUR SKIN. TYPHOID, MALARIA, DYSENTERY AND PNEUMONIA BECAME OUR MOST PITILESS ASSASSINS.

I AM AFRAID THAT THINGS MIGHT ACTUALLY GET WORSE, EVEN WITH THE UNION VICTORY. WHAT GOOD ARE NEW LAWS IF COURTS ACROSS THESE LANDS ARE DETERMINED TO DEFEND THE OLD ORDER?

A YE. AND WITH THE WAR ENDING, WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THOSE OF OUR SURVIVING SONS AND DAUGHTERS WHO RISKED THEIR LIVES?









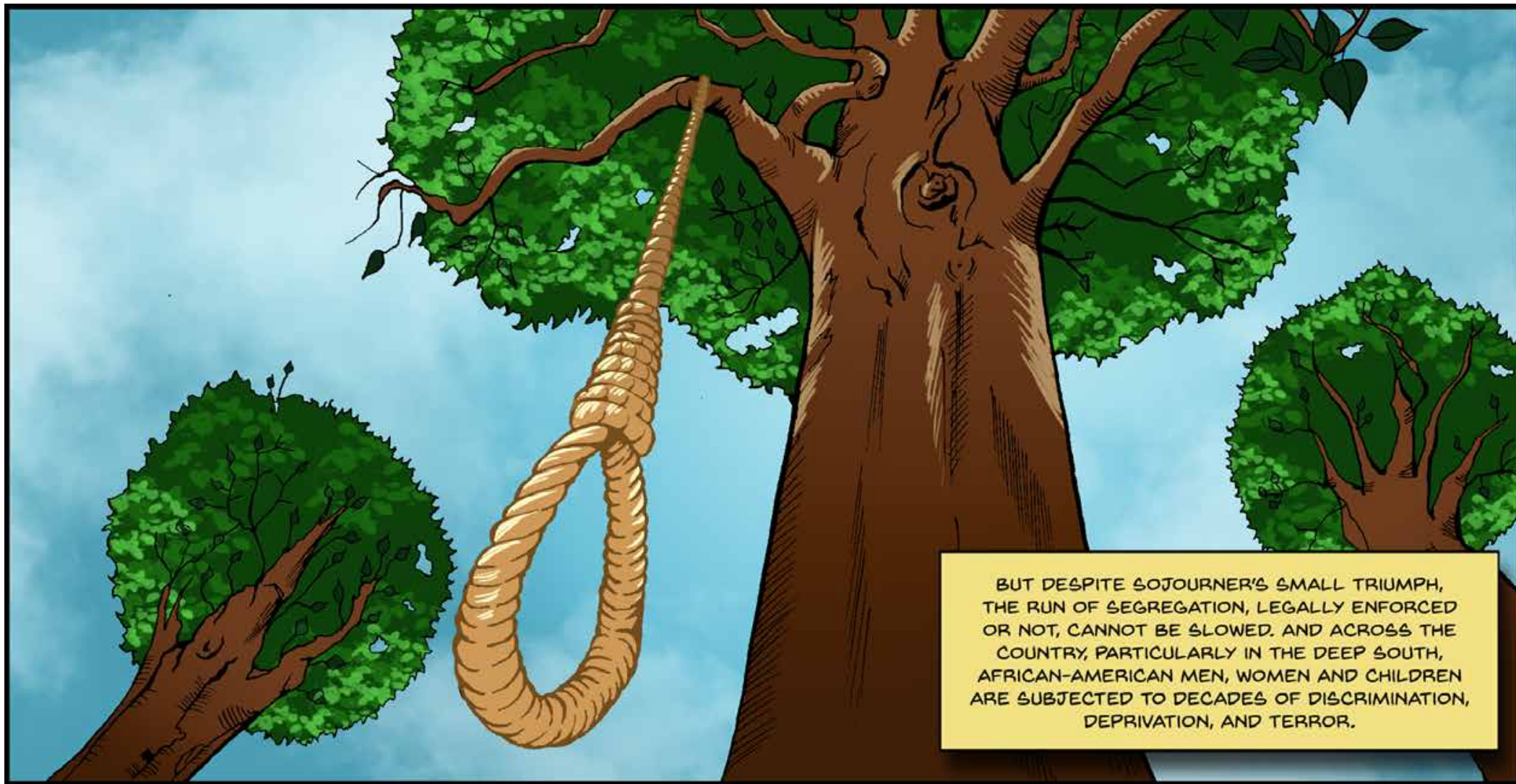




I DEMAND REDRESS. BENEATH THAT SLOGAN 'SEPARATE BUT EQUAL' FESTERS THE SINISTER TRUTH OF OUR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY, THE PUTRID SHAME OF OUR AMERICAN IDEALS, THE TENACIOUS HYPOCRISY OF OUR AMERICAN JUSTICE SYSTEM.

AM I NOT A CITIZEN OF THIS LAND? DO I NOT SUFFER AS YOU SUFFER, OR LAUGH AS YOU LAUGH? WHY, THEN, THESE DIVISIONS AMONG US? I DEMAND REDRESS.

FIRED



BUT DESPITE SOJOURNER'S SMALL TRIUMPH, THE RUN OF SEGREGATION, LEGALLY ENFORCED OR NOT, CANNOT BE SLOWED. AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY, PARTICULARLY IN THE DEEP SOUTH, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE SUBJECT TO DECADES OF DISCRIMINATION, DEPRIVATION, AND TERROR.



ALMOST ONE HUNDRED YEARS AFTER THE NATION-WIDE FIGHT OF SOJOURNER TRUTH AND OTHER HEROIC INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS AGAINST SEGREGATION ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT, ROSA PARKS'S REFUSAL TO VACATE HER BUS-SEAT FOR A WHITE PASSENGER IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, TRIGGERED A HUGE STRUGGLE BY AFRICAN AMERICANS AGAINST RACIAL SEGREGATION. IN 1964, AFTER CENTURIES OF STRUGGLE, THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT WAS PASSED, WHICH SOUGHT TO END LEGAL SEGREGATION ONCE AND FOR ALL. EVEN STILL, THE STRUGGLE FOR GREATER JUSTICE CONTINUES TODAY...



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Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth (c.1797-1883) was a leading activist, speaker and teacher at the forefront of the African-American struggle for civil rights. Resolutely non-sectarian, she acted as a bridge between issues such as women's rights, abolition, and religious freedom. Her astute exploitation of her reputation, through photography and print, helped her to become one of the most well-known orators of the nineteenth century.

Women in African History

Through various pedagogical resources and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), UNESCO seeks to highlight the legacy of a selection of key women figures of African history and its diaspora. This project demonstrates that African women have always distinguished themselves in the history of their continent in areas as diverse as politics (Gisèle Rabesahala), diplomacy and resistance against colonization (Njinga Mbandi), the defense of women's rights (Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti) and environmental protection (Wangari Maathai).

This list of 20 women represents only a small part of the contribution of African women, known and unknown, to the history of their countries, Africa and all mankind.

For additional resources, please visit the website www.unesco.org/womeninafrica