

# ART SECTION

## SOJOURNER TRUTH (1797-1883)

### AIN'T I A WOMAN?†

That man over there say  
a woman needs to be helped into carriages  
and lifted over ditches  
and to have the best place everywhere.  
Nobody ever helped me into carriages  
or over mud puddles  
or gives me a best place . . .  
And ain't I a woman?  
Look at me  
Look at my arm!  
I have plowed and planted  
and gathered into barns  
and no man could head me . . .

And ain't I a woman?  
I could work as much  
and eat as much as a man—  
when I could get to it—  
and bear the lash as well  
and ain't I a woman?  
I have born 13 children  
and seen most all sold into slavery  
and when I cried out a mother's grief  
none but Jesus heard me . . .  
and ain't I a woman?  
that little man in black there say  
a can't have as much rights as a man  
cause Christ wasn't a woman  
Where did your Christ come from?  
From God and a woman!  
Man had nothing to do with him!  
If the first woman God ever made  
was strong enough to turn the world  
upside down, all alone  
together women ought to be able to turn it  
rightside up again.

†There is no exact copy of this speech given at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1852. The speech has been adapted to the poetic format by Erlene Stetson from the copy found in *Sojourner, God's Faithful Pilgrim* by Arthur Huff Fauset (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938).

## A LITANY AT ATLANTA

Done at Atlanta,  
in the Day of Death, 1906  
By William Edward Burghardt DuBois

O Silent God, Thou whose voice afar in mist and mystery hath left  
our ears an-hungered in these fearful days—  
*Hear us, good Lord!*

Listen to us, Thy children: our faces dark with doubt are made a  
mockery in Thy sanctuary. With uplifted hands we front Thy  
heaven, O God crying:  
*We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!*

*We are not better than our fellows, Lord, we are but weak and  
human men. When our devils do devilry, curse Thou the doer and  
the deed: curse them as we curse them, do to them all and more  
than ever they have done to innocence and weakness, to woman-  
hood and home.*  
*Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!*

And yet whose is the deeper guilt? Who made these devils? Who  
nursed them in crime and fed them on injustice? Who ravished and  
debauched their mothers and their grandmothers? Who bought  
and sold their crime, and waxed fat and rich on public iniquity?  
*Thou knowest, good God!*

Is this Thy Justice, O Father, that guile be easier than innocence,  
and the innocent crucified for the guilt of the untouched guilty?  
*Justice, O Judge of men!*

Wherefore do we pray? Is not the God of the fathers dead? Have  
not seers seen in Heaven's halls Thine hearsed and lifeless form  
stark amidst the black and rolling smoke of sun, where all along  
bow bitter forms of endless dead?  
*Awake, Thou that sleepest!*

Thou are not dead, but flown afar, up hills of endless light, thru  
blazing corridors of suns, where worlds do swing of good and  
gentle men, of women strong and free — far from the cozenage,  
black hypocrisy and chaste prostitution of this shameful speck of  
dust!

*Turn again, O Lord, leave us not to perish in our sin!*

From lust of body and lust of blood  
*Great God deliver us!*

From lust of power and lust of gold,  
*Great God, deliver us!*

From the leagued lying of despot and of brute,  
*Great God, deliver us!*

A city lay in travail, God our Lord, and from her loins sprang twin  
Murder and Black Hate. Red was the midnight; clang, crack and  
cry of death and fury filled the air and trembled underneath the  
stars when church spires pointed silently to Thee. And all this was  
to sate the greed of greedy men who hide behind the veil of  
vengeance!

*Bend us Thine ear, O Lord!*

In the pale, still morning we look upon the dead. We stopped our  
ears and held our leaping hands, but they — did they not wag their  
heads and leer and cry with bloody jaws: *Cease from Crime!* The  
word was mockery, for thus they train a hundred crimes while we  
do cure one.

*Turn again our captivity, O Lord!*

Behold this maimed and broken thing; dear God, it was an hum-  
ble black man who toiled and sweat to save a bit from the pittance  
paid him. They told him: *Work and Rise*. He worked. Did this man  
sin? Nay, but some one told how some one said another did — one  
whom he had never seen nor known. Yet for that man's crime, this  
man lieth maimed and murdered, his wife naked to shame, his  
children, to poverty and evil.

*Hear us, O Heavenly Father!*

Doth not this justice of hell stink in Thy nostrils, O God? How  
long shall the mounting flood of innocent blood roar in Thine ears  
and pound in our hearts for vengeance? Pile the pale frenzy of  
blood-crazed brutes who do such deeds high on Thine altar, Je-  
hovah Jireh, and burn it in hell forever and forever!

*Forgive us, good Lord; we know not what we say!*

Bewildered we are, and passion-tost, mad with the madness of a  
mobbed and mocked and murdered people; straining at the arm-  
posts of Thy Throne, we raise our shackled hands and charge  
Thee, God, by the bones of our stolen fathers, by the tears of our  
dead mothers, by the very blood of Thy crucified Christ: *What  
meaneth this? Tell us the Plan; give us the Sign!*

*Keep not Thou silence, O God!*