

# One Feminism? Sojourner Truth and the History of Feminist Ideas

Dr. Katrine Smiet



I TELL THE SHADOW TO SUPPORT THE  
SUBSTANCE.  
SOJOURNER TRUTH.

1851

Speech: 'Ain't I a Woman?'

Women's Rights Convention

Akron, Ohio (United States)

# Gloria Wekker reads the speech of Sojourner Truth

<https://vimeo.com/321717787>



I TELL THE SHADOW TO SUPPORT THE  
SUBSTANCE.  
SOJOURNER TRUTH.

- feminism and anti-racism
- feminism and religion
- feminism and the category 'woman'

# Feminism and anti-racism

“this phrase was still a question contemporary black women had felt compelled to raise as we confront a racist and sexist society that would deny our womanness” (bell hooks 1981, 164)

“When feminist theory and feminist politics that claim to reflect *women's* experience and *women's* aspirations do not include or speak to Black women, Black women must ask: Ain't *We* Women? If this is so, how can the claims that 'women are', 'women believe' and 'women need' be made when such claims are inapplicable or unresponsive to the needs, interests and experiences of Black women.” (Crenshaw 1989, 66-67)

# Feminism and religion

“Neither Sojourner herself nor even Jesus is the *locus* of liberation and salvation, but rather wo/men’s movements for change and transformation. In my view, her speech pioneers a theological approach that locates G\*d, Christ, and the possibility of salvation in a wo/men’s movement concerned with justice and well-being for all” (Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza 2001, 161)

# Feminism and the category 'woman'

“[Sojourner Truth] rested her case on her refrain ‘Ain’t I a Woman?’ It’s my hope to persuade readers that a new Sojourner Truth might well – except for the catastrophic loss of grace in the wording – issue another plea: ‘Ain’t I a fluctuating identity?’ **For both a concentration on an a refusal of the identity of ‘woman’ are essential to feminism.** This its history makes plain.” (Denise Riley 1988, 1)



'travelling truths'

open to different interpretations  
and contestations