

Dear Ms. Sojourner Truth,

I hope this letter finds you well. I know you often traveled around the Midwest to give speeches and rally for abolition and women's rights. I revere you more than I can express for your strength and bravery in standing up to the men and bureaucracy that have attempted to knock you off your feet and keep you down.

I am reaching out to you because I have recently read one of your speeches – “Ain't I a Woman.” It has touched me very close to my heart, and I find it imperative for you to know how greatly your words have penetrated into my mind and actions. Like you, I am a woman. More specifically, I am a woman of color. I am also a first generation immigrant, and although I have been fortunate enough to be spared from the shackles of slavery, I often feel that I face instances of injustice and inequality like you did. Still today, there is a powerful energy and passion in the American ether, as people are riling and rallying against injustice from coast to coast. Streets are shaking under the mass of protesters walking along the roads and alleys of Baltimore, D.C., and even my small town of Salisbury. It's about time, too: you, Mr. Douglass, Ms. Tubman, and you have protested to generations of Americans to change their ways for a mighty long time! I am bolstered with pride to hear the words I believe are strung across skies and hurled toward the Capitol's steps on my behalf. “This is what democracy looks like” and “immigrants are welcome here,” they chant. I bolster with pride.

But then, Ms. Truth, I go home and I go to school, and I wonder where those words have gone. I feel pushed away, ostracized in corners, and locked away, like I'm told I don't belong here. Sometimes they do tell me I don't belong here. They don't say it with words, no, as that'd get them into jail nowadays. But they say it with their eyes. They say it with their actions. They say it with their silence, when they – teachers, city workers, shopkeepers, and cashiers – say hi to the men and women on each side of me, but not to me. By some odd, prejudice of the mind, I may not look like I speak their language or understand their dog-whistles. But I do. And I use the same language every morning to pledge allegiance to our flag. In these times, I think back to the chants I heard on Washington's streets. I wonder, as you once did, “what's all this here talking about?”

I've come to the realization that these words are not for us. They are not for women *of color*. Don't get me wrong, I see positive change for women's equality: Roe v. Wade and Title IX are there to protect women's rights. But on the daily basis, in classrooms and store lines, it's primarily the women of color who do not receive the same care and treatment chivalrous men offer. For you, you did not get “helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and have the best place everywhere.” For me, I don't get the same jobs, opportunities, or trust in society. Earlier this week, Aryton and Alex Little's mother was on the Ellen Show to celebrate her sons' acceptances to Harvard and Stanford. She has guided them a long way from their homeless, poverty-stricken life in Louisiana. People say her sons' reactions to their acceptances were priceless; like their reactions, the men's achievements are priceless, as well. Yet the Ellen Show gave Ms. Little \$20,000. Ms. Truth, in today's time, that check will not cover the cost of a home, and may barely meet the cost of food and travel for the next year. I understand that the Ellen Show cannot provide Ms. Little with enough income for all her needs. But I strongly believe that, rather than give her a finite amount of money that will leave Ms. Little in the same predicament when it runs out, shows and organizations like these should give equal amounts of money and resources to predominately colored inner cities as are directed to white suburbs. If women of color and all people of color were given the same opportunities for schools,

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businesses, and government services like healthcare, then there would be more Ayrtons and Alexes rising up, eliminating the need for futile, impotent checks.

I used to deny that my family, friends of color, and I are not treated equally to our white counterparts. My mother, a schoolteacher, is mocked for “broken English” by colleagues, and my father was never promoted at the university he works out after years of lecturing. I think I did not speak up primarily because I was afraid. I worried that people would further ostracize me or I would create animosity by sharing that I was hurt by this treatment. You have mitigated my fears, Ms. Truth, and inspired me to take a stand. I know that I, like you, will likely be ostracized and mistreated when I speak up. However, if I persevere, I will overcome these worries for a greater good. Today, I am no longer apprehensive in telling individuals that their words or actions are unjust. When peers make innocent but ignorant stereotypes, I choose to inform them of their misperceptions. I also encourage discussions about injustice with my friends of color, particularly young Sudanese girls who may be apprehensive or fearful like I once was. On a larger scale, you have encouraged me to participate in marches like the Women’s March on Washington and inspired me to promote events for justice in my own town. Today, I lead the chants “this is what democracy looks like” and “immigrants are welcome here.” Today, I bolster myself with courage and pride. Thank you for teaching me that it’s not only okay, but right to stand for equality. Again, I hope this letter finds you well. As you stated, women ought to turn the world right side up. Through your inspiration, *all* women can.

Kind Regards,

Rawan Osman  
Civil and Women’s Rights Activist

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