

SOJOURNER TRUTH

**HON. TOM SAWYER**

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 24, 2001*

Mr. SAWYER. Mr. Speaker, on May 29, we will celebrate the legacy of the famed abolitionist and feminist, Sojourner Truth. She was born Isabella Baumfree, as a slave. She escaped slavery and adopted the name Sojourner Truth when she began preaching across the nation.

It was in Akron, Ohio, at the Second Annual Women of Ohio Convention on May 29, 1851, that she delivered her powerful "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. It is appropriate to honor her work and her legacy on the 150th anniversary of that remarkable speech. It is especially appropriate to do so in the city where she delivered it.

A friend of mine, the late Faye H. Dambrot, a leading advocate of rights for women, equality, and justice, wrote a testimonial to Sojourner Truth and her famous speech, which I am honored to submit for the RECORD.

Born the slave Isabella Baumfree in 1797 in Ulster County, New York, this articulate woman with her commanding voice and imposing stature began her career by preaching and lecturing against slavery after the New York emancipation laws of 1827 were passed. Deeply religious and mystical, she chose the name Sojourner Truth to reflect her commitment to travel widely and spread the truth to her audiences. During her extensive journeys through the North and Midwest, she spoke of having been beaten, raped, and forcibly separated from her children and other loved ones under slavery.

In addition to her ministry and ardent abolitionism, Sojourner soon embraced the cause of women's rights, knowing well the double yoke of racism and sexism which bound black women. She worked to raise money for the North during the Civil War, helped emancipated blacks find jobs and housing in Washington, D.C., and even struggled against segregation by her insistence on riding public street cars.

She supported herself through the sale of her autobiography, *My Narrative*, and counted Abraham Lincoln, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass among her friends. Sojourner Truth continued her life of struggle and agitation until ill health forced her retirement. She died near Battle Creek, Michigan on November 26, 1883.

Sojourner was not a welcome speaker at Akron's Women of Ohio Convention, many women present feared the cause of abolitionism would be detrimentally linked to the suffrage struggle and urged the chairwoman, Frances Gage, to prevent her addressing the crowd. The assembled local clergymen were swaying those present with their declarations about the natural superiority of man, Eve's "original sin," the manhood of Christ, and the deference and privilege owed to women which was being jeopardized by demands for equal rights. But Sojourner was not dissuaded as she solemnly strode forward, laid her old bonnet at her feet, and within moments had, with her eloquence, turned the adverse tide of the meeting to a victory for women's rights.

She intoned, "Well children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter . . . But what's all this here talking about?"

"That man over there say that women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place!"

She drew herself up to her full height, and with a voice like rolling thunder continued. "And ain't I a women? Look at me! Look at my arm! . . . I have ploughed, 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 it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne 13 children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus hear me! And ain't I a woman . . . ?"

"That little man in black there, he say women can't have as much rights as men, because 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, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! . . ."

Frances Gage tells her recollection of the crowd's reaction. She says, "Amid roars of applause, she returned to her corner, leaving more than one of us with streaming eyes, and hearts beating with gratitude. She had taken us up in her strong arms and carried us safely over the slough of difficulty, turning the whole tide in our favor. I have never in my life seen anything like the magical influence that subdued the mobbish spirit of the day, and turned the sneers and jeers of an excited crowd into notes of respect and admiration. Hundreds rushed up to shake hands with her, and bid her Godspeed on her mission of testifying again concerning the wickedness of this here people."

Mr. Speaker, in standing up for her beliefs, Sojourner Truth became a role model for all Americans, not just women or people of color. Sojourner Truth was the living embodiment of the basic American tenet that each and every individual has intrinsic worth.

As historian David McCullough reminds us, history didn't have to happen the way it did. History is created by the actions of far-sighted men and women like Sojourner Truth.

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN  
HERITAGE MONTH

**HON. HILDA L. SOLIS**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 24, 2001*

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, May is the month our nation honors Asian Pacific American Heritage. As the Representative of a very ethnically diverse community, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize those in my Congressional district who come from Asian descent.

About 11 million Americans come from Asian or Pacific Island descent. Many Asian immigrants came to this country as laborers in the agriculture and transportation industries. First enduring harsh working conditions in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, many Asian Pacific Americans have now become successful entrepreneurs, teachers, entertainers, and technological professionals. In fact, our U.S. Congress has been home to 32 elected Members of Asian ancestry since 1903.

I would like to acknowledge the achievements of a specific young woman in my district who has made a great contribution to the United States Air Force, the City of Baldwin Park, and the Filipino community. Lieutenant Venus C. Rivera is the first person from Baldwin Park with Filipino American parents to graduate from the United States Air Force Academy. This Dean's List honor student will be trained as a jet pilot upon her graduation this month. I know she will continue to serve as an inspiration to all young Asian Americans in the United States.

Asian Pacific Americans bring a richness to our culture, adding diversity in language, cuisine, religion, and art. I am proud that our country takes this month to honor the heritage of this particular group. However, the diversity of all races and cultures must be something that we remember and respect every day. This will help promote racial tolerance so future generations can build a world that benefits from the ethnic contributions of all cultures.

TRIBUTE TO WORLD WAR II  
VETERAN MIKE LUCERO

**HON. SCOTT McINNIS**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 24, 2001*

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud to rise today to honor a very special man—World War II Veteran Mike Lucero, a resident of Montrose, Colorado. During his time with the Armed Forces, Mike was stationed in the South Pacific. And what he didn't know is that he and his fellow soldiers were about to change the course of history. Because of what Mike did during World War II, I would like to thank him for his bravery and courage on behalf of Congress.

On December 1, 1942, at the age of 19, Mike left the small town of Cuba, New Mexico for the open water of the South Pacific. "My country needed me. I had to go," said Mike. At dawn on June 15, 1944, Coxswain Third Class Lucero maneuvered his landing craft along side the USS Livingston, where members of the 2nd Marine Division boarded his LCVP.

They were headed toward Saipan, which is the northernmost of the southern four Islands in the Marianas 3,200 miles northwest of Pearl Harbor and 1,500 miles from Manila. Over 29,000 Japanese troops waited and guarded the narrow beaches of Saipan. Mike's job was to land Marines on the shore. "The bullets zipping into the water looked like raindrops hitting a puddle. They were striking on both sides of my boat," said the 79-year-old as he recalled