Narrative of Sojourner Truth (Penguin Classics)

Sojourner Truth
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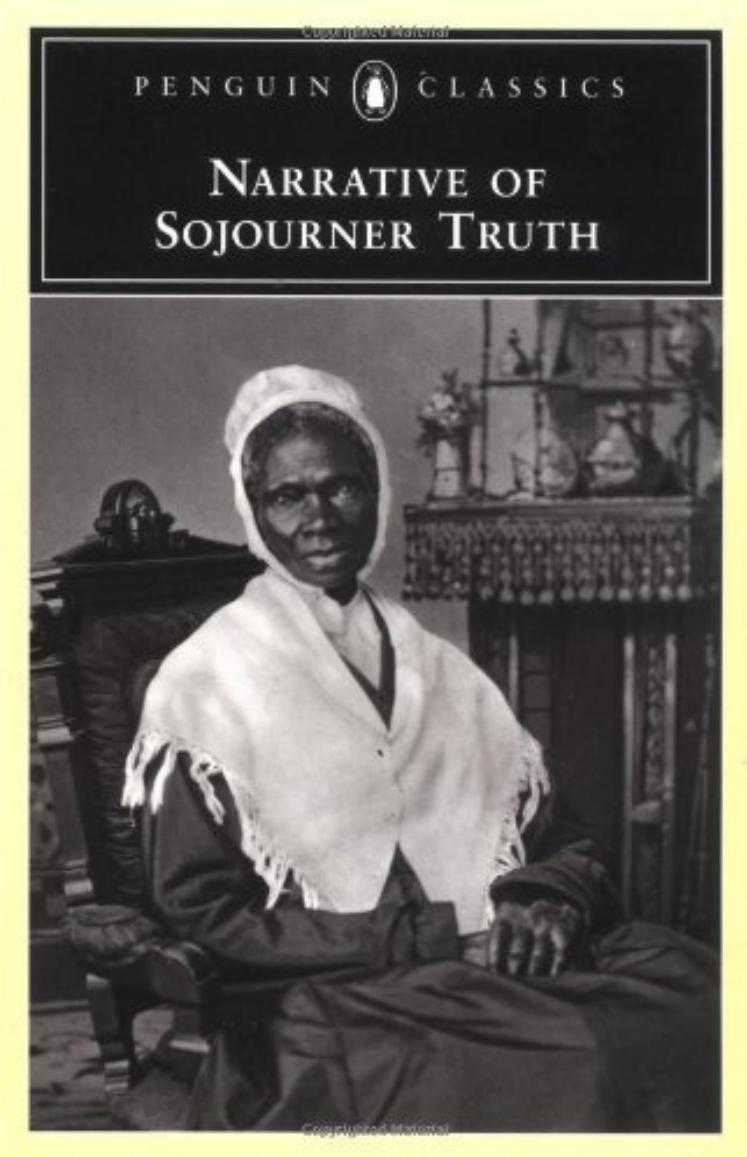

#765469 in Books Sojourner Truth 1998-11-01 1998-11-01Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.78 x .62 x 5.09l, .44 #File Name: 0140436782288 pagesNarrative of Sojourner Truth Penguin Classics | File size: 73.Mb

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Truth's landmark slave narrative chronicles her experiences as a slave in upstate New York and her transformation into an extraordinary abolitionist, feminist, orator, and preacher. Based on the complete 1884 edition, this volume includes the "Book of Life," a collection of letters and sketches about Truth's life written subsequent to the original 1850 publication of the Narrative, and "A Memorial Chapter," a sentimental account of her death.For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

"The time is long overdue for a compelling look at the legendary Sojourner Truth. Margaret Washington deserves our gratitude for reclaiming Truth and shedding light on the most enigmatic black woman of the 19th century."-- Darlene Clark Hine, Professor of History, Michigan State UniversityAbout the AuthorSojourner Truth, born Isabella, a slave in Ulster County, New York, around 1797, became an abolitionist, orator, and preacher, and eventually an icon for strong black women. She was emancipated by state law in 1827, and the following year she moved to New York City, where she found work in wealthy households and became increasingly involved in unorthodox religious groups. In the early 1830s she joined the commune or “Kingdom” of the Prophet Matthias. By 1843 she had transformed herself into the itinerant preacher Sojourner Truth, and spent most of the next thirteen years in Northampton, Massachusetts. Illiterate, she dictated her autobiography to her neighbor Olive Gilbert, and the Narrative of Sojourner Truth was published in 1850. The following year Truth set out to promote her book and to speak out on abolition and women’s rights. In the 1870s Truth’s friend and informal manager Frances Titus compiled a new edition of the Narrative, adding the “Book of Life,” a scrapbook comprising essays, articles, and letters from Truth’s contemporary admirers. Truth died in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1883, and the following year Titus published a new edition that included “A Memorial Chapter.”Nell Irvin Painter is the author of Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol and Standing at Armageddon, the United States, 1877-1919, The Narrative of Hosea Hudson and Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction. She is Edwards Professor of History at Princeton University, where she currently heads the program in African-American Studies.Excerpt. Table of Contents NARRATIVE OF SOJOURNER TRUTHTitle PageCopyright PageIntroductionA PREFACE Narrative of Sojourner Truth “BOOK OF LIFE”PART SECOND - “Book of Life” A MEMORIAL CHAPTERMEMORIAL SONNET EXPLANATORY NOTESNARRATIVE OF SOJOURNER TRUTHSojourner Truth, born Isabella, a slave in Ulster County, New York, around 1797, became an abolitionist, orator, and preacher, and eventually an icon for strong black women. She was emancipated by state law in 1827, and the following year she moved to New York City, where she found work in wealthy households and became increasingly involved in unorthodox religious groups. In the early 1830s she joined the commune or “Kingdom” of the Prophet Matthias. By 1843 she had transformed herself into the itinerant preacher Sojourner Truth, and spent most of the next thirteen years in Northampton, Massachusetts. Illiterate, she dictated her autobiography to her neighbor Olive Gilbert, and the Narrative of Sojourner Truth was published in 1850. The following year Truth set out to promote her book and to speak out on abolition and women’s rights. In the 1870s Truth’s friend and informal manager Frances Titus compiled a new edition of the Narrative, adding the “Book of Life,” a scrapbook comprising essays, articles, and letters from Truth’s contemporary admirers. Truth died in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1883, and the following year Titus published a new edition that included “A Memorial Chapter.” Nell Irvin Painter is the author of Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol and Standing at Armageddon, the United States, 1877- 1919, The Narrative of Hosea Hudson and Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction. She is Edwards Professor of History at Princeton University, where she currently heads the program in African-American Studies.PENGUIN BOOKS Published by the Penguin Group Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A. Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V

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INTRODUCTION

ALL, black Sojourner Truth—ex-slave, abolitionist, women's rights activist—stands today for strong African-American women, for the female strength of all women. She embodied "the slave" as female and "the woman" as black, having achieved that status even in her own times. An indefatigable lecturer, Truth rounded out the two most important reform movements of the early nineteenth century. Today, photographs of Truth grace many a woman's office, and her name appears on lists of great Americans. Yet despite the familiarity of Truth the symbol, what she actually did in her lifetime remains surprisingly obscure. This incognizance stems in part from the unorthodoxy of the Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a multilayered presentation of her life as a slave, worker, and Christian in New York State, joined to a hodgepodge of a scrapbook, and eventually to a chapter on her death. Looking carefully at the whole of Truth's narrative can help us see the woman behind the words.Truth's fame rests on her speech: her preaching, her singing, and her mastery of lightning repartee. But as Truth did not read or write, the words of others communicate her speaking genius. She first published her narrative in 1850, but as an author, her voice has not carried very far, compared to that of her contemporaries. Unlike Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, whose narratives convey the tragedy of Southern slavery, Truth could not set her narrative in the South. For lack of familiar Southern trappings, the story of her enslavement in New York rests uneasily in the corpus of American ex-slave narratives. Truth's nonconformist (auto)biography puzzles students of American slavery with its seeming inauthenticity. Not knowing what to make of it, they often lay it aside. As a consequence, the neglected Narrative of Sojourner Truth seldom serves as an historical source, leaving Truth's slave experience in the North relatively unstudied.That Truth was born in the Hudson River Valley of New York surprises many Americans, who know nothing of slavery in the North. One of tens of thousands of enslaved New Yorkers, Truth was born Isabella in Ulster County in about 1797. At the turn of the nineteenth century, more than 10 percent (3,220) of Ulster County's population of 29,554 was of African descent. Isabella spoke Dutch as her first language, for Dutch was the language of Ulster County's Huguenot settlers. At the time, at least 16 percent of Afro-New Yorkers grew up speaking Dutch. Most slaveholding households in New York held only one or two slaves, a pattern that dispersed black people all across the countryside. A large slaveholder like Isabella's first master might own six or seven people at a time, but very few New Yorkers owned more than twenty slaves.Slavery was an important part of Northern life in 1800. Among American cities, only Charleston, South Carolina, had a larger black population than New York. New York City's 5,865 blacks (including five slaves owned by Founding Father John Jay) accounted for about 10 percent of the total population. Almost 1,000 of the 6,281 black people in Connecticut and 12,422 of the 16,824 black people in New Jersey were still enslaved. Black people lived among whites, Indians, and people of mixed race throughout the North. Former slaves were to be found even in Massachusetts.In her childhood, Isabella lived with her own parents, Elizabeth (Mau Mau Bett) and James (Bomefree). As cottagers, Elizabeth and James farmed land let them by their master and worked in relative autonomy. But autonomy assured neither physical nor psychic comfort, nor could it offset their grief. When Isabella was a child, her parents had already sacrificed ten or twelve children to the slave trade. Then, at the age of about nine, Isabella, too, was sold away from her parents. Elizabeth and James's bereavement lodged permanently in Isabella's memory. Her new owners spoke no Dutch, Isabella knew no English, and miscommunication led to whippings whose motives the young girl could not understand. Her father helped arrange her sale to less vicious owners, who taught her to tend bar and swear like their tavern's clientele.The man who would be Isabella's longtime master, John Dumont, bought her in 1810. She worked for the Dumonts until her emancipation by state law in 1827. While she lived with the Dumonts, Isabella married Thomas, a fellow slave; they had five children: Diana, born about 1815; Peter, born about 1821; Elizabeth, born about 1825; Sophia, born about 1826; and one who cannot be identified. Like many other Northern slaves, Isabella had worked out a deal with her master for emancipation a year early. When he broke his commitment, she completed her work for the crop year, walked away with her baby, Sophia, and spent the remaining eight months of her last year of legal enslavement earning wages from Isaac and Maria Van Wagenen (not Van Wagener, as in Olive Gilbert's text). The Van Wagenens belonged to the same Dutch Reformed Church as the Dumonts, but they held the same Holiness (Pentecostal) ideals of equality and simplicity that had led Isabella to the new Methodist Church in Kingston.During the fateful year between the end of the summer of 1826 and the midsummer of 1827, Isabella experienced another upheaval (in addition to seizing her freedom and choosing her own religion). At the end of 1826,

John Dumont sold her son Peter, who was only about five, to one of his in-laws. The child changed hands twice more, then landed in Alabama, where slavery was not expected to end. New York State law prohibited the sale of New York slaves into places where slavery would continue to be legal after 1827, but the law was routinely and massively contravened. Peter was only one of thousands of New Yorkers sold illegally into permanent bondage in the South.Empowered by her new closeness to God, Isabella went to court and secured the return of her son, an unusual but not unique use of the judicial system. (In later years, Truth again invoked the law in her own behalf: in New York, in 1835, when she was accused of poisoning after the disintegration of the "Kingdom of Matthias"; and in Washington, D.C., in 1867, for discrimination in the streetcars.) Having recovered her son, Isabella left Ulster County for booming New York City in 1828.In New York, Isabella lived and worked in wealthy households and honed her ability to move others through her speech. She began to shine as a preacher and singer at the revivals then common around New York City. Leaving the predominantly white John Street Methodist Church for the Zion African Church, she worshipped with other blacks, among whom she discovered some of her own siblings, whose sale had so grieved her parents. She soon left Zion African Church to join self-appointed messengers of God (who would today be called Pentecostals). In 1832 she followed the Prophet Matthias (né Robert Matthews in upstate New York), one of the independent holy men inspired by the Second Great Awakening (see p. xiv). The "Kingdom of Matthias" lasted some three years, in New York City and in West-chester County, before succumbing to the strains of free love and one member's death in suspicious circumstances.Although she remained in New York City, Isabella disappears from the historical record between the breakup of the "Kingdom of Matthias" in 1835 and her transformation into Sojourner Truth on 1 June 1843 at the height of Millerite Second Adventism (see page xv). As the itinerant preacher Sojourner Truth, she made her way across Long Island and up the Connecticut River Valley, arriving in Northampton, Massachusetts, in the late fall. Intending only to stay the night, Truth spent the better part of thirteen years in Northampton, first in the Northampton Association for Education and Industry (a cooperative manufacturing silk), then in her own house on Park Street, in what is now Florence. In the Northampton Association she met Garrisonian abolitionists and feminists for the first time and found an amanuensis, Olive Gilbert, to write her (auto)biography. The Narrative of Sojourner Truth was published in 1850, and the following year Truth set out to lecture and sell her book to audiences of reformers. In 1856 she and her three daughters moved to Battle Creek, Michigan.Between 1851 and the Civil War, Truth persevered on the feminist abolitionist lecture circuit. Her appearance at a women's rights meeting in Akron, Ohio, in 1851 is well known, though misconstrued through a report written by Frances Dana Gage twelve years after the fact. In 1853 Truth had visited Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of the best-selling Uncle Tom's Cabin, to ask for a promotional statement for her book. Stowe complied, and the two never met again. Ten years later, in the midst of the Civil War, Stowe turned this encounter into an article for the Atlantic Monthly entitled "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl." Stowe's errors (that Truth was dead, that she had not been a committed feminist) inspired Frances Dana Gage, the radical feminist writer who had chaired the 1851 meeting in Akron, to publish—two weeks after "The Libyan Sibyl" appeared—her own version of Sojourner Truth's 1851 comments. Gage pointed out that Truth was still active and living in Battle Creek, Michigan. Gage also reorganized Truth's words and heightened the drama by borrowing Stowe's scenario. In place of Stowe's "Frederick, is God dead?" Gage substituted a rhetorical question of her own invention: "Ar'n't I a Woman?" So, while Truth was associated during the nineteenth century with Stowe's "Frederick, is God dead?" by the mid-twentieth century, Gage's secular, feminist "Ar'n't I a Woman?" had replaced Stowe's more evangelical phrase as Truth's identifying words.Meanwhile, Truth was celebrating the turn of national politics for the first time in her life. With the outbreak of the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, she jettisoned her Garrisonian disdain of politics to campaign for Lincoln's reelection. She visited Lincoln in 1864 and stayed on to assist the impoverished freedpeople clustering in the District of Columbia, a mission that occupied women abolitionists now that emancipation had practically been assured. The end of the war dried up the supply of jobs in Washington, presenting a further challenge to abolitionists. In 1867 Truth and another abolitionist, Josephine Griffing, attempted to find employment for Washington's refugees in the North and West, but the logistics of so ambitious an operation exceeded the two women's resources. A frustrated Truth envisioned another solution: the refugees' permanent resettlement in the West. The quest for Western land engaged the balance of her public career without diminishing her feminist advocacy.Like many old abolitionists, Truth had long supported a range of women's rights, including—but not limited to—the right to vote. And like many old abolitionists after the war, Truth espoused "universal suffrage" (voting for women and former slaves). But once the Fourteenth Amendment inserted the word "male" into the Constitution for the first time, explicitly limiting citizenship rights to men, abolitionists divided. On one side, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony opposed ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments unless women were included, while on the other side, male, female, black, and white abolitionists refused to hold black men's votes hostage to the politically inexpedient cause of woman suffrage. (Potential Democratic, erstwhile Confederate white women voters badly outnumbered potential Republican, pro-Union black male voters in the South.) Between 1867 and 1869, the suffrage movement came apart, with Truth, Douglass, Lucy Stone, and others advocating ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, and Stanton and Anthony opposing anything less than the vote for women.In the late 1860s and early 1870s Truth, in fragile health, collected

signatures on a petition for the allocation of federal land for freedpeople. The petition came to naught, but in 1879 the Exodus to Kansas of tens of thousands of black people from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee delighted her. She visited Exoduster migrants in Kansas in the company of her Battle Creek neighbor and informal manager, Frances Titus. Housebound by the 1880s, Truth became one of Battle Creek's chief tourist attractions—along with the Seventh Day Adventists' Battle Creek Sanitarium. Truth died in November 1883 in the house she had shared with her daughters Diana Corbin and Sophia Schuyler for more than twenty years. (Daughter Elizabeth Boyd lived in Battle Creek, but not in the same house.)Obituaries in the black and feminist press praised Truth as a brave, intelligent opponent of slavery and supporter of women's rights. Another form of memorialization proved more lasting: In a feat of prescient historicizing, Stanton and Anthony appropriated Truth's memory for their branch of woman suffrage, which she had in fact come to oppose by 1869. The History of Woman Suffrage, their multi-volume compendium of feminist documents, crystallized Truth in the prose of Frances Dana Gage, who has Truth four times posing the question, "Ar'n't I a Woman?" In the twentieth century, pioneers in the new field of women's history invariably consulted The History of Woman Suffrage. Through this route, Gage's Truth, rather than the Truth of the Narrative of Sojourner Truth, entered feminist historiography. Gage's version of Truth now fills the crucial role of the strong black woman in American culture, while Truth—the Truth of the Narrative , the enslaved New Yorker, the follower of the Prophet Matthias, the itinerant preacher, the historical woman behind the emblem—hoed a tougher row. The Narrative of Sojourner Truth departs from classic ex-slave narratives in five different ways—three related to content, two to text. Concerning content, Truth was not a Southern plantation slave, her story lacks the stock characters of cruel master and brave fugitive, and the narrative traces Truth's religious itinerary more clearly than the evils of slavery. Concerning the text, the Narrative is not only heavily mediated, it is twice mediated at three different moments in time. In the first section, published in 1850, Olive Gilbert tells Truth's story in the third person and inserts her own views. Frances Titus compiled both the 1875 and the 1884 editions, adding to Gilbert's narrative first a scrapbook, then a memorial chapter.But the main difficulty of situating Truth's (auto)biography is geographical: Truth was a New Yorker, but New York is seldom considered a slave state. As the identification between slavery and the South tightened during the antebellum era, abolitionists habitually contrasted the open-minded, progressive, free North with the closed-minded, backward, slave-holding South. How was this possible, with slaves still living in the North well into the nineteenth century? The explanation lies in the chronology of Northern emancipation and the antislavery movement. Truth was emancipated legally in 1827, and by 1835, when abolitionists began flexing their muscles, Northern slave states —New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Connecticut—had emancipated virtually all their slaves, shed the stigma of slavery, and emerged as the rhetorical home of freedom. With the South, not the North, standing for American slavery ever after, Truth's life as an enslaved and ex-slave New Yorker seems inauthentic.The Narrative of Sojourner Truth presents the young Isabella growing up with her parents. When she is sold, her story approaches the standard account of cruel masters and bloody beatings. But plantation slave quarters do not appear. In Isabella's Ulster County, slaves, like white servants, lived cheek to jowl with their employers and shared the same peasant culture on an everyday level. White supremacy was not codified legally in New York as in the Southern states, but enslaved people still suffered unpaid overwork and racial denigration. In Ulster County, as in the rest of the United States, black people were at the bottom, to be exploited for both their race and their poverty.Isabella frequently worked alone, denied the refuge of plantation slave quarters. Without a cohesive African-American neighborhood to return to, young Isabella had no access to a community beyond her master's tight control. When she was beaten, abused, violated, or degraded, no black neighbors could salve her wounds. When her mistress called her a dirty, worthless Negro, no one reassured the child of her human worth. Her enslavement not only sentenced her to unremitting labor for the benefit of others, it also severed her from the psychological reinforcement of family and friends. This isolation emerges early in the Narrative, as Truth, in "utter astonishment," regards her young self, a slave calling slavery "right and honorable." (p. 23).Because the Southern plantation so thoroughly occupies the ground of American slavery, Isabella's isolation may seem unusual. It was not. Virtually every enslaved person in the North—and they numbered in the hundreds of thousands—was alone or nearly alone among whites. In the South, half of all enslaved persons lived in similar circumstances. Enslavement in the United States meant hard work and no pay, plus, often, the psychological vulnerability of disconnection. Isabella's isolation from her family and psychological entanglement with her owners may well represent the experience of a majority of enslaved Americans. (Such entanglement would have affected owners as well.)As a sort of overworked, degraded stepchild of her masters the Dumonts, Isabella was related to them far more ambiguously than a Southern plantation slave who went home to the slave quarters every night. She formed intense, if contradictory, ties with the Dumont family, who owned her for sixteen years. Having lived so intimately with her owners gave Truth's life's story the traces of familial, not just slave-master, contact. Fondness for her master and hatred for her mistress emanate from the pages of Truth's narrative, showing she did not distinguish vice from virtue along the color line: Her white master is good; her white mistress is bad. The abolitionist writing this down, Olive Gilbert, prods Truth for stories of cruel owners. Truth obliges (pp. 55-57), though refuses to divulge her own worst mistreatment. A close analysis of the placement of her comments about her mistress, and her unwillingness to disclose abuse she thought "so unaccountable, so unreasonable, and what is usually called so unnatural" (p. 55), are

convincing evidence that her mistress abused her.To answer Gilbert's request for cruelty and to shape the Narrative to the abolitionist pattern, Truth relates three anecdotes, to which Gilbert adds a story from her own stay in Daviess County, Kentucky, in the mid-1840s (pp. 57-58). Even though the ambiguity of Truth's account of her enslavement departs from standard Southern narratives of white against black, her testament presents important psychological evidence. Attentiveness to the psychological dynamics of Truth's account inspires a fresh understanding of the human dimensions of a savage institution. The pervasiveness of religion in the Narrative of Sojourner Truth often puzzles readers. Expecting an account of the evils of slavery, they encounter page after page of Truth's religious adventures. Even more baffling, her story includes the notorious, pathological "Kingdom" of the Prophet Matthias, in which Isabella was the only black member. Contrary to truisms about "the black church," Truth's various religious attachments emerge from the cauldron of Northern popular religion during the Second Great Awakening. During this great revival, itinerant preachers and aroused laypersons, male and female, proclaimed Jesus's love for people of all stations. They acted on each individual's ability to interpret the gospel without the guidance of college-trained ministers. In the North, they believed God spoke directly to a profusion of impassioned laymen and laywomen, who took to the roads to preach. Sometimes Charles Grandison Finney's fiery sermons set them off, but sometimes they harkened to the voice of God all by themselves. Charismatic self-styled prophets such as Matthias and Joseph Smith founded their own cults, elaborating a thousand varieties of popular Christianity. As a follower of James Latourette and Matthias, Isabella was one of hundreds of Northerners in racially integrated but predominately white sects.The account of Truth in the "Kingdom of Matthias" in the Narrative of Sojourner Truth comes almost verbatim from Gilbert Vale's Fanaticism: Its Source and Influence, Illustrated by the Simple Narrative of Isabella in the case of Matthias, Mr. and Mrs. B. Folger, Mr. Pierson, Mr. Mills, Catherine, Isabella, c. c. A Reply to W. L. Stone, with Descriptive Portraits of All the Parties, While at Sing-Sing and at Third Street.—Containing the Whole Truth—and Nothing But the Truth (1835). Readers expecting the potent feminist abolitionist Sojourner Truth of the 1850s and 1860s are tempted to transform her into a skeptic or a spectator—anything to exempt her from what Gilbert calls the "Matthias delusion." Historical evidence forecloses such strategies, for in Fanaticism, Truth portrays herself as Matthias's devotee, attempting to follow him even after he had abandoned her. It is important to remember that in 1832, when Isabella joined Matthias, she was only five years out of slavery.On the day of Pentecost in 1843—the first of June—the Holy Spirit bestowed on Isabella the power she sought. That morning she heard God direct her to leave New York and go toward the East (i.e., to Long Island) to preach her message. Isabella recreated herself as Sojourner Truth, an itinerant (a sojourner) spreading her gospel (the truth). Thus Truth joined the scores of Northern itinerant preachers exhorting sinners to come to Jesus before it was too late.The Narrative of Sojourner Truth downplays Truth's belief in the prophesy of "Father" William Miller that the world was going to end between mid-1843 and mid-1844. Miller attracted tens of thousands of followers in the North and in 1843 was preaching regularly in New York City. Only after eight pages of Truth's itinerant adventures does the name "Miller" appear—almost incidentally. There is no conclusive proof that in 1843 Truth was a Millerite Second Adventist expecting the imminent second coming of Christ. But all the evidence points in that direction, particularly with her rebirth at the apex of Millerism and the account of her beliefs on pages 74-77. By the time Truth and Gilbert produced the Narrative, Millerism had long fallen into disrepute, as a result of the hysteria Truth describes on pages 75-76 and Millerites' "Great Disappointment" after the world had not ended by 1844. Readers looking for an account of Truth's initiation into feminism and abolitionism in the Northampton Association find, instead, Truth the itinerant preacher among the Millerites, subduing an unruly crowd.Truth's religious independence characterized the Second Great Awakening in the North, where practically anyone could found a church on divine inspiration. But the tropes of the ex-slave narrative come from the South, where the Second Awakening produced practices intended to reinforce slavery's relations of power. In the plantation South, the gospel came in the guise of "slaves, obey your masters" (from Colossians 3:22 and Ephesians 6:5- 6). Southern Christianity, as transmitted through owners, aimed to subdue notions of autonomy in the enslaved. As a consequence, Southern ex-slave narratives mock Southern religion's hypocrisy. For Truth and thousands of Northern poor people, however, religion played another role. The antinomian ism of Northern popular religion heartened the poor. In New York, the voice of the Holy Spirit empowered Isabella, and her religion ultimately healed the wounds she carried from her enslavement. The process of healing required a good twenty years and took Truth through Matthias's Kingdom in the early 1830s and Second Adventism in the early 1840s.When Olive Gilbert and Sojourner Truth began collaborating on the Narrative of Sojourner Truth in 1846, both lived in the Northampton Association for Education and Industry. One of the utopian commune's originators, George W. Benson, was William Lloyd Garrison's brother-in-law. In the early 1840s the extended Benson family and friends had moved from Connecticut to Massachusetts to form the Northampton Association with other idealists. Olive Gilbert (born in 1801), was a close friend of George's unmarried sister Sarah and accompanied the Bensons to Northampton. Gilbert seems to have stayed in the Northampton environs until her death a year after Truth's, in 1884.On a first reading, separating Truth's voice from Gilbert's seems impossible, especially as Gilbert quotes Truth in the third person and inserts her own views. Is this the real history of Truth's life or an abolitionist's elaboration? The problem of mediation has long bedev iled ex-slave narratives, even those labeled as their authors' own writing. After publishing the best-selling Narrative of the

Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave in 1845, Frederick Douglass had to write My Bondage and My Freedom as proof he had actually been enslaved. Not until the 1980s did Jean Fagan Yellin show conclusively that Harriet Jacobs and not her editor, Lydia Maria Child, actually wrote Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861). In the 1980s historians finally condescended to grapple with mediated ex-slave narratives in order to gain access to slavery from the point of view of the enslaved. Up to that point, the documents of slaveowners had monopolized the historical record. A similar struggle over the true nature of slavery had occurred before the Civil War: While slaveholders and their allies depicted a benevolent—or at least necessary—institution, abolitionists like Gilbert and Truth sought to correct the record with testimony from those who had been slaves.Before Truth had dictated a score of pages, Gilbert began inserting her own commentary. On page 9, Gilbert sharpens Truth's depiction of her parents' situation by appending her own indictment of Southern slavery. Gilbert is addressing Northern abolitionist readers, who, by the 1850s, dissociated slavery from New York. On page 10, Truth describes the misery of slaves lodged in Charles Hardenbergh's cold, wet, filthy cellar and its enduring legacy of fevers, arthritis, sores, and tremors. Truth exonerates, but Gilbert contradicts Truth in a lengthy sermon on slaveowners' cruelties and the humanity of slaves.Twice Gilbert reprimands Truth, addressing the reader directly to question the morals of Truth's daughters—whom Gilbert had met when they visited their mother in Northampton—and to insinuate that Truth has failed to raise them properly. Gilbert recognizes that Truth, as a slave, lacked control of her children, but even so, Gilbert says, she could have done better: These neglected daughters, deficient in virtue and easy prey to the devil, are bound to neglect their mother in her old age. This censure marks the daughters' main appearance in the Narrative of Sojourner Truth. Gilbert also exhorts philanthropic abolitionists to buy the Narrative, Truth's only source of material subsistence now that she has squandered her retirement money on scoundrels like the Prophet Matthias, and her ingrate daughters have abandoned her (pages 82-84).Truth has the last word in her Narrative, however, in a page and a half added in 1849 that begins with Truth visiting her oldest daughter. Diana had stayed on with John Dumont after the expiration of her indentured servitude in 1840. (Although enslaved adult New Yorkers received their freedom in 1827, children owed their masters additional years of unpaid labor. Truth's children were still serving out indentures when she crusaded against slavery. Elizabeth was not free until 1850; Sophia not until 1851. Peter would have been indentured until 1849 had he not been sold out of New York. His sale to Alabama freed him from indenture and allowed his mother to take him with her to New York in 1828). Skipping quickly over Diana, Truth turns to her former master, whom she blesses and calls "a brother" for having finally come to disapprove of slavery—more than two decades after emancipation (p. 85). The Narrative Truth dictated to Gilbert ends in 1849, before the events that define the heroic Sojourner Truth.