

## Michael Eure Show – Episode 23: Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass (part 2)

INTRODUCTION: Hello, this is Michael Eure, and I'd like to invite you to the Michael Eure Show, featuring student hosts and very special guests talking about a variety of interesting topics. You can find us on the Eagle Stream YouTube channel.

MICHAEL EURE: Hello, welcome to the Michael Eure Show. And today we have our very special guests, Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, aka Nathan Richardson and Lynnette Barber. And this is part two of a discussion with, about Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass. And it's really part two. And this month of July has been "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness," and I think that we'll enjoy this dramatic lunchtime dinner theater. So, I'm going on backstage and let them take it from here. So, Sarah?

SOJOURNER TRUTH: Hey there, President.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS: Hello. How are you Mrs. Truth?

TRUTH: Oh, Mr. Douglass, so happy to be here on this nice, hot summer day.

DOUGLASS: Well, you were known for taking a lot of long walks in your time. Is that right?

TRUTH: Oh yeah. But after a while, you might have to see me come out of this because it is hot out here for real. But I just want to share a little bit about me. Is that all right?

DOUGLASS: That's just fine, Mrs. Truth.

TRUTH: All right. Now, I'm gonna try to respect your time because I know we ain't got all day. But a short story ain't one I got to tell, but I'm gonna do my best today because I have had a long life. Now, I was born, they say, in 1797, back in Ulster County, New York, and born and given a name as a slave girl, Isabella. My first master's name was [indecipherable]. As I always say, "Do I look like a [indecipherable]? Do I look like I'm Dutch?" But that was my first name, my first master. And then, from there, I was sold four or five times – too many. Had loves, had the love of my life dropped, married Tom. Had five children.

But I always knew God since the beginning. My mama taught me about that, about right over here. Now, look up over them trees, look up over them skies, look over them clouds, and God is watching you. So, I've always had God in my life. Didn't know enough about no religion, but I always knew God.

When I decided years later I wanted to be free and when I decided I wanted to be free, I talked to my master because emancipation in the North had started. And when he said yes, [Indecipherable]. I said, "Oh, I'll work hard. I'll work harder than the best of them." But then, when my time comes, right before, my hand, and it slowed me down just a bit. And when the time for my freedom came, he felt like I don't work too hard. He can't let that good help go. He said no. So, I said, "OK, you might not want me to be free, but old Isabella going to be free." So, I still worked hard, stored up my goods, did what I had to do. And when the time came, I left. But I want you to know, I didn't run away. [Indecipherable] Took my baby Sophia, one of my five children.

So, I took the judge, took Sophia with me, and I went to the Van Wagoners. And sure enough, master come looking for me. I knew he would. But they pad \$20. I said I wasn't going with him. I did what I was supposed to do. Anyway, then my journey became, I left the Van Wagoners. When I left the Van Wagoners, well, I decided to go to New York City. And I had decided, from them I learned about the Methodist faith, and I decided I wanted to preach the world, and I decided I wanted to change my name because now I'm free. I don't want no assumed name from the master. So, I took on the name of Sojourner. And this lady asked me one day, "What's your name?" I said, "Sojourner." And she says, "Sojourner who?" I was like, "Lord, I hadn't thought that far." But I decided, if I'm going to journey the land and spread God's word, God's word ain't nothing but the truth.

DOUGLASS: Truth.

TRUTH: That's how I became Sojourner Truth. And in later years, I would get up and speak, preach. How did I get to preach? You act like somebody always just inviting me somewhere. I was right in the middle of the town, and get in the middle of the street. [Indecipherable]. Well, they come gathering around, want to hear that good singing. And I keep right on singing. [Indecipherable] Mm-hmm, and soon as they gathered around to hear that good old Negro girl with the good singing, I stop and preach the word. I tell them that ain't right down there in the South. They still got them slaves. That ain't right. Let people be free.

Later, people would have me come and end up joining different organizations. Talk about their little lady. We're gonna talk about it. I'm glad to talk about it with your name,

Frederick. So, we talked about that, and I join these different groups, and I work for, for the let, anti-slavery work, women's rights. And I lived a good life. Even had a book that I helped write, "The Narrative of Sojourner Truth." Told my story. I got to tell my story. And that [indecipherable] bought me a house down in Michigan. Oh, I've had a life, but I thank God for every bit of it. God has let me lead in my way, let me get up and talk and [indecipherable] allowed me to do. And I'm thankful.

DOUGLASS: Well, Isabella, and I say the name Isabella tongue in cheek, but as we both know, once we escape from bondage, many of us would change our names. I was actually born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey.

TRUTH: Oh, OK.

DOUGLASS: On the Eastern Shore around 1818. Of course, none of us knew the dates of our births. The closest we could come would be planting time or harvest time.

TRUTH: Mm-hmm.

DOUGLASS: So, we had no celebrations of our birth as the, as the white children did. But nevertheless, we were able to free ourselves from bondage, both of us.

TRUTH: That's right.

DOUGLASS: And so, my narrative is one that is well-known. You wrote one narrative; I wrote three. But as I told Mrs. Tubman when she sent me her manuscript for her narrative, I would say the same thing to you. And your backdrop today shows the life that you live. While I was out of bondage under, the under the leadership of the Garrisonian movement, William Lloyd Garrison and I, I would have the privilege of being on stages and speaking to thousands of people and, and such, in the spotlight. While you and Mrs. Tubman were on the trail helping to liberate our fellow men and women in bondage and to fight for equal rights in the suffrage. Movement.

TRUTH: Uh-huh.

DOUGLASS: And, and so, my narrative, in comparison to yours, is, I would say, quite pampered, to say the least.

TRUTH: Yeah.

DOUGLASS: And so, I'm, I'm speaking, I did want to mention that I'm speaking today in this modern era, I came to, to the modern era to meet you, and I'm here in the home of a Mr. J. Thomas Newsome, who was born in 1865.

TRUTH: Uh-huh.

DOUGLASS: And became one of the first Black attorneys in Virginia.

TRUTH: That's nice.

DOUGLASS: And so, his house has been kept for the history of America, and you might want to come to Oak Street in Newport News, Virginia, and visit sometime. And you can visit my home in Cedar Hill.

TRUTH: Uh-huh.

DOUGLASS: But I digress. And so, of course, out of bondage, we, we ended up meeting on the, on the trail to freedom, in New York, on the abolitionist circuit speaking. I remember once, and this was right around the time of the Dred Scot decision that I was, probably one of the most depressed times in in my life about, about the decision-making of our government, in which they denied Dred Scot his freedom.

TRUTH: Uh-huh.

DOUGLASS: We happened to be speaking at the same convention, and I was questioning the existence of God. If God was actually, how would he allow our people to suffer such. And I remember you with, having the audacity to stand up and, and make a proclamation.

TRUTH: Is God dead? [Indecipherable] I knew you were weary. Oh, I knew you were. So, but I felt like I needed to give you a little push. We get weary on this journey, but then we gotta look up and remember he's watching us. But yes, I remember that. I remember that, Mr. Douglass, I sure do. Is God dead? All right.

DOUGLASS: Well, well, let's, let's have a quick discussion about, about this religion.

TUTH: OK.

DOUGLASS: Our faith is for both of us to, to sustain ourselves.

TRUTH: Uh-huh.

DOUGLASS: I think one of the things about us, we had a different aspect. I, I certainly was a Christian, practiced Christianity. We both were members of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in New York. You remember that church, don't you?

TRUTH: Yes, I do.

DOUGLASS: And so, we practiced our faith, but I certainly often spoke, I remember a speech that I gave called "The Church and Prejudice" about the two distinct Christianities in America. And, and so, we know that the slaveholding master would use the Bible against us. And so, it was up to us, number one, to be able to read, and fortunately I was, had the divine providence to teach myself how to read and write. So, I didn't, not need the master to read the Bible for me and tell me what the Bible said. I could interpret it for myself.

TRUTH: Well, I, on the other hand, could not read or write. So, how I had to learn the Bible, I started off by letting adults read it to me. And they read a part, and I ask them to read it again. And they thought once they had to read it again, that means I needed them to explain it. Now, I ain't want no explaining because God was gonna explain it. So, from there, I stopped letting the adults read it to me, and I got the children to read it because, when I ask the children to read a verse over again, they just read the verse over again.

I might not could read the word, but God would give me whatever I needed and gave me that memory now that I can remember them verses and them passages. I might not could read the Bible, but I can read the people. So, I knew when I go in and I could use my, use God's words and remember the verses. God would bring me whatever I needed at that time.

DOUGLASS: That he would. I believe one of your most famous encounters on your trail, on, on your sojourn ...

TRUTH: Uh-huh.

DOUGLASS: I remember reading about this in your narrative, about how your gift of song and oratory saved the day or the night, for that matter, at one of the camp meetings. And, you know, we, we were always visiting part of the camp meetings.

TRUTH: Oh, yeah.

DOUGLASS: You were at a camp meeting, and these riotous men tried to uproot what was going on, and you were the one to use your skills as a singer and an orator to, to quiet the crowd.

TRUTH: That's true. Now, I have to tell you the truth, I was scared. Everybody was scared. All the young, white boys come running up in there, we were all scared, and I did hide. But after a while, God spoke to me. I'm like, "I just can't sit here." But I know I, I'm the only Negro, I'm the only Negro in there. So, I'm scared because I know they're gonna try to get me. But that's why God gave me the strength, that same strength from what my mother told me to look up over the clouds, God's watching. So, I always felt like I was special. I always felt like I was strong because God is watching me.

So, I got that nerve, and I got up and I started singing because, I done told you earlier, they love to hear me sing. And I sang, and I sang, and I sang. Yeah. And I see them calm down a little bit, and we sing another one. And after I was about to finish, they were, like, "Sing another one." And I'm, like, "I tell you one thing, let's sing one more. But when I sing one more, I need every last one of y'all to leave." And I talked to them, and I said, "But I ain't gonna sing that song until everybody agrees to leave." And so, when I wouldn't sing, and they tell the other one, "Go ahead. Tell her, tell her." And finally everybody saying they would leave after the song. And while I sing that last song, that's probably one of my biggest songs, I saw midnight singing.

But I thought that song, and once again, the Lord made them all, and they obeyed. They did what I asked them to do. When it was time, they got right up, and they left. Some of them tried to hesitate a little bit, and then the other ones would say, "Unh-uh. We told her we would leave." Maybe that night.

DOUGLASS: Well, we were so fortunate that our reputations preceded us when we started to advocate for the abolition of slavery, especially during the Civil War, that we would even be entertained by our president, Abraham Lincoln. And who would have thought that two Negroes who were born in bondage would ever enter the White House and stand beside the president of the United States?

TRUTH: Yes, Lord, that's true.

DOUGLASS: I remember my first time ...

TRUTH: Uh-huh.

DOUGLASS: Visiting Abraham Lincoln that he put off a governor, the governor of Connecticut, who was one of the most popular governors in the entire nation. Had him wait just to speak to Frederick Douglass. And so, I stood beside the president. Of course, he was, I, I am a tall man myself, but he was taller than I.

TRUTH: Uh-huh.

DOUGLASS: But we looked eye-to-eye, and I found that there was character in the man despite, in spite of his prejudiced nature.

TRUTH: Right.

DOUGLASS: That he was an honest boatman, is the way I would describe him.

TRUTH: Yeah, I feel, I feel special to get the chance to meet the man myself. And then also for the Freedmen's Bureau to help other ex-slaves to now learn training on what of, how to work and how to live. Again, I, I, I, I thought that was special to get to meet the president. Me, a former girl in bondage.

Now, Mr. Douglass, could you tell me a little bit about that, that speech of yours on the Fourth of July?

DOUGLASS: Well, many, I believe this is probably one of my most heralded speeches. Of course, [indecipherable] the speech on Haiti, the Church and Prejudice, Self-made Men, Friendly Words to Maryland, all of these speeches. But I think this speech that I gave on of the 5th of July, I kept waiting because initially, I was not intending to speak. They asked me what did I think about this, this day of liberty, and I said, "Well, what to the slave, is the Fourth of July?" And it wasn't until the 5th that I came up with the answer. And so, you might wanna go to the books. Unfortunately, we don't have time in the modern era to go through that speech, but you can certainly go to your books and read the speech.

TRUTH: That's true. That's true.

DOUGLASS: Hopefully, the monitor has preserved our legacy. But what I was saying at the time was that, certainly, this, the Founding Fathers gave us a jewel called the Constitution, a promise of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But as a great man once said, “Men seldom eulogize the fame and fortune of their forefathers without leaving out some folly or wickedness of their own.” And so, we can proclaim how great our forefathers were in laying out this Constitution for us, but we have done nothing to preserve and to continue and, and improve on this life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That all men are created equal and that every man is in, fully enfranchised in American society, then we have done nothing, and we have no claim to our fathers’ legacy.

TRUTH: Amen. Life, liberty ...

DOUGLASS: And so, that, in a nutshell, is what I was saying in that speech. We have to do our own work, as you know, Mrs. Truth. We have to set a legacy for our own children. You had five children; I had five children. One of them passed away, unfortunately. Annie passed away when she was 10 years old, but my other four children, they lived to be adults, and they were able to be successful Black people in America.

TRUTH: Mm-hmm.

DOUGLASS: But they had to do their own work. They could not just live off the work of Frederick Douglass.

TRUTH: This is true.

DOUGLASS: I, I would remind them of that. So, if we will be saying anything to, to those people in this modern era who are watching us now, who are listening to us talk, is to make sure that you are following through on your civic responsibility, that the vote is just part of that responsibility.

TRUTH: Folks, you know, we both did some work on that, too. Women’s rights and voting, voters’ rights. When I worked with Susan B. Anthony.

DOUGLASS: Susan B. Anthony, yes.

TRUTH: You know, sometimes you get up there in age, and then sometimes, you know, I can’t remember all them names. And, and Elizabeth Canton Daily.



DOUGLASS: Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

TRUTH: But these, thank you, thank you. Well, you know, I worked with them, and I, and I was, at first, when they asked me to work about the help, about helping women's rights, my thing was about anti-slavery. And so, but they said, "Now, what difference is it going to make if the, if the facts is free and ain't got no rights to vote? Then the women, are they free?" So, sure, I worked with them. Now, I ain't believed everything. I didn't go for everything they said because some of the remarks they made I didn't like. That, if I didn't get this, they wasn't gonna help me. But I still did my call. That don't mean I gotta be [indecipherable], but I still worked for the cause of women's rights and for anti-slavery.

So, yes, you and I have done some work. We need to be tired, all the work we done do. But God gave us energy to keep going, didn't he?

DOUGLASS: Well, that he did. That he did. And you are absolutely correct, Mrs. Truth, that there was a vast difference between the privileges that you had versus the privileges of a Susan. B. Anthony or, or Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Lucretia Mott.

TRUTH: Right.

DOUGLASS: You were in those classes of women. See, they were, they were massless, masterless women. You all had masters, and all the other Black women on the, on the trail had masters, even Frances E.W. Harper. We can continue to name all these great names.

TRUTH: Absolutely.

DOUGLASS: Our sisters are not, not given credit, and even our Native American sisters were not really given ...

TRUTH: That's true. Well, there's another young man.

EURE: Hello there. How you doing?

TRUTH: Oh.

EURE: And Mr. Douglass, I didn't want interrupt your conversation, and we can put it back if we need to. But we have a question, well, several.

DOUGLASS: All right.

EURE: One, Chris wants to know, “Can you please refresh the memory, was, was Truth and Douglass around at the same time? And if not, who was, who was first?”

TRUTH: I was first.

EURE: That was, that was the beginning question. But I think that it seems that you were both around at the same time. Is that correct?

TRUTH: We were around at the same time. We’ve been at some of the same conventions together, but I was older than Mr. Douglass, you know. They say my first day was like seven, 1797, but we ain’t for sure. But I was, I was probably about 20, 30 years older. But we were in some of the same places together.

EURE: We have a few comments. Josie says she loves the way this is enacted, the discussion between the two. So, she, she enjoyed that, and I did, and most people probably feel the same way.

And Rose. Rose is my cousin in Connecticut, and y’all talked about Connecticut a little bit. She just read that Sojourner Truth was the first Black woman to take a white into court to get her son Peter back, and she won. She thinks ...

TRUTH: Well, you know what? In my, in my life, I done, I done took a couple people to court. But the first one was because they took my son Peter from another. They took him out of state, and that was not yet, that was illegal to do. He was 5 years old. And I got that money with the help of some other folks, got that money together and took that man to court. Now, that was not an easy task, but I trusted and depended on God, and I’m gonna tell you, he made a way. I got my son back. They brought him back to, they brought him back, and they brought him down all in the South. And it took me a while to get my son back, and then I got back with me. Because he was still on the old plantation at the time.

And then I took people to court for slandering my name. Folks, I’ve done some things with the help of the Lord.

EURE: April says she’s really enjoying this conversation with you two powerful people, and today she’s learned more depth about their lives, and so powerful. Thank you for sharing. That’s a comment from April.

And I wanna say that I thought was an excellent presentation, and we always like to let you go out with the closing remarks. My, my thing is thank you so much, and hopefully, we'll have you back again. And we can go ladies first. Sojourner [indecipherable].

TRUTH: I wanna tell y'all to read your books. I might not be able to read my books, but we've prayed for the day that you could have these opportunities to read, that you could, we prayed that you had these opportunities to do things that we weren't able to do. Now, Mr. Douglass and I weren't up there fighting for nothing. It was never for ourselves; it was for others. So that, now that some things are free, you got your life, you got your freedom. Make yourself useful. Free your mind and learn all you can. It's what I say to you. Learn what you can. Know about from whence you came. Know about [indecipherable].

And my last thing is I just wanna say something for the women. Now, women, we can do some things because, if it took one woman to turn the world upside-down, that'd be Eve, now you know right now we could turn it all the way back up again and then some more. So, women, we got work to do. Black folks, we got work. And if we done made it the hardest way for you, you come on in and bring us all home.

EURE: OK.

TRUTH: Thank you.

EURE: You're welcome. And in the end, I might ask you to come back and give your contact information. All right, Ms. Douglass, Mr. Douglass.

DOUGLASS: If anyone has a question about what motivated myself, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman or any of us who were in bondage was, what motivated us was the things that we were denied. We were denied our freedom, and we wanted freedom. We were denied the right to read and write, and we, we wanted that right and pursued that right. We were denied citizenship. We were denied the right to vote. And so, all of these things were the things that motivated us to get out, her to sojourn across country, from me to, to speech and become an orator and write books and run a newspaper, the North Star newspaper. And so, find something in your time that insults you. I believe the great poet said find something, strip away everything that insults you, and you would have left a poem. Let your life be a poem that speaks to the injustices of this society, and make sure that you and others and your children can live up to the preamble of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We will, all men and women, be fully enfranchised in this country.

EURE: Right. And in case y'all didn't realize, I have on my Langston Phillips Virtual Reunion T-shirt, and we had a virtual family reunion on Sunday. And we really do feel it's important that we integrate this great Black history into the Black family reunions. So, and the Freedmen's Bureau, we, we were gonna talk about it a little bit, but I know that several HBCUs were founded through the Freedmen's Bureau, with the help of that. So, that is a very important thing for us to learn about it.

So, I'm gonna let Lynette and then Nathan give us your contact information because we don't know what schools might want you or what families might want you. And you could do a virtual presentation for some of these upcoming family reunions and education. So, I'll start with you, Lynette, your contact information.

LYNNETTE BARBER: All right. My contact information is Lynette Barber, and it's lybarber6113@gmail.com. My number's 919-673-6392. I also do interpretation of Harriet Tubman, Mahalia Jackaon, and, coming soon, Fannie Lou Hamer. I'm looking forward to do that one so that we can start doing things, we're talking about voting.

So, I'm asking all of you that are listening today, pass this on in a conversation. If you're at work or at home, pass it on in conversation. Whatever you didn't know, pass that on to someone else to help someone else know. If you have children, grandchildren, pass this on. Let them know, let them know their history. Thank you.

EURE: And for anybody who, your friends that didn't get to see this, please just share the link with them, and it'll be on YouTube, from now until eternity, I guess. So, Nathan, how do we get in touch with you?

NATHAN RICHARDSON: Well, you can contact my understudy, Nathan Richardson. His name is right there. He seems to think he's more popular than I. But nevertheless, you can give him a call, and, and hopefully, he can introduce me to your audience, wherever it might be. We've been very fortunate to travel the country. So yes, just give us a call, and we'll be happy to come and have you experience Frederick Douglass Live.

EURE: And they can go to your website, [www.scpublishing.com](http://www.scpublishing.com). Correct, Frederick?

RICHARDSON: Yes, I'm still on the job. I don't exactly understand what that mean, but yeah.

EURE: OK. And thank you again both for participating, and we look forward to talking to you some more. And we'll see y'all on an upcoming episode of the Michael Eure Show. And thank you, Sojourner, and thank you, Frederick.