



NEWS FROM  
**ULSTER COUNTY**  
County Executive Jen Metzger

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## **Ulster County Celebrates Sojourner Truth Day with Historic Marker Unveiling and Evening Program**

**KINGSTON, NY** - Ulster County celebrated Sojourner Truth Day on Tuesday with two powerful events commemorating the renowned abolitionist and women's rights advocate who freed herself from enslavement in Ulster County in 1826, and then successfully sued to win her son's freedom at the Ulster County Courthouse on Fair Street in Kingston, becoming the first Black woman to win a court case against a white man in the United States.

The day's events welcomed Barbara Allen, Sojourner Truth's sixth-generation granddaughter, who unveiled a new historical marker outside the Ulster County Courthouse that reads: "Sojourner Truth - At This Courthouse In 1828, The Orator And Anti-Slavery Activist Successfully Sued To Free Her Son Peter From Enslavement."

Ulster County Chief Diversity Officer Esi Lewis led the unveiling ceremony, which also included a Libation by Dr. Weldon McWilliams, Chair of the Department of Black Studies at SUNY New Paltz. Aleshanee Emanuel and Briana Gary, two members of the Kingston YMCA Farm Hub Youth Crew, spoke about Sojourner Truth's legacy and its resonance with young people today. The two were among the Kingston YMCA Farm Hub Youth Crew members who successfully advocated with the County Legislature, beginning in 2020, to designate Sojourner Truth Day as an annual County observance, and Emanuel, who is also an artist, created the image of Sojourner Truth that was also used for this year's observance.

In a surprise announcement at the ceremony, Senator Michelle Hinchey and Assemblymember Sarahana Shrestha shared that Governor Hochul was signing their legislation that day, designating Sojourner Truth Day as a statewide commemorative day — legislation inspired by the advocacy of these young YMCA Farm Hub youth.

Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger closed out the ceremony with a Sojourner Truth Day

Proclamation from her office recognizing Truth's powerful story and legacy in the country's history and encouraging **"All residents to take this day to reflect on the remarkable life of Sojourner Truth and to honor her accomplishments by continuing to strive for a more just and equitable society for all."**

The County Executive, along with Kingston Common Council Member Bryant "Drew" Andrews, Hinchey, and Shrestha, also presented certificates of recognition to Barbara Allen, Aleshanee Emanuel, and Briana Gary.

Later that evening, the community gathered at the Ulster County Restorative Justice Center in Kingston for a reenactment by Rev. Deborah Zuill, of Sojourner Truth's iconic speech, "Ain't I a Woman?" at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. The evening was led by Harambee's Ubaka Hill, also a nationally-known percussionist, and included words by Ulster County Human Rights Director Joe McDonald and a performance of "the Valiant Soldiers" by Rev. Evelyn Clarke. Barbara Allen spoke about the honor she felt to carry her descendant's torch forward, and how Truth was a savvy businesswoman and galvanized her community.

Court artifacts were on display, offering a unique glimpse into the life and times of Sojourner Truth. Kim Mapes, of the Ulster County Restorative Justice Center, presented Allen with copies of all of the court documents being displayed, one bearing Truth's signature. The documents will remain on display at the Restorative Justice Center, at 733 Broadway in Kingston, through Black History Month 2025.

"Being here in Kingston to honor Sojourner Truth and represent the family is a tremendous privilege," **said Barbara Allen, Truth's sixth generation descendent.** "Sojourner was a truly extraordinary woman, and her legacy deserves recognition for her contributions not just to Kingston but to the world as a pioneering abolitionist and women's rights leader. Her memory will always endure."

"Like our beloved, Sojourner Truth, I too seek solace in watching the waters that flow nearby. It was a privilege to collaborate with my community and partners in the State to honor the phenomenal life and legacy of the most notable and influential figure in our County's history. I was moved by the power of Sojourner Truth's legacy and the inspiration of our youth who are carrying it forward," **said Esi Lewis, Ulster County Chief Diversity Officer.** "I am proud to have been a small part of unveiling the historic marker that recognizes my personal shero and informs generations to come of her excellence and what they can achieve."

"Sojourner Truth's story and historic role as an abolitionist and fighter for women's rights has profound significance not just as part of history, but for today," **said Ulster County Executive**

**Jen Metzger.** "Her story is one of tenacity, courage, and resilience in the fight for human rights and the dignity of all people, and we honor her by continuing to strive for a more just and equitable society for all."

"On this day we commemorate the life of a remarkable woman who overcame the bonds of slavery here in Ulster County," **said Rev. Evelyn Clarke.** "Though she was illiterate, Sojourner Truth used her voice to speak truth against slavery and injustice throughout this land."

"Sojourner Truth's story is widely regarded as one of the most inspiring in all American history. Her vigilance and tenacity brought about a watershed legal decision that propelled us closer to the 'more perfect union' promised in the Constitution. Being the first Black woman to win a court case in our Nation's history, Sojourner Truth showed us what justice should look like in a post-slavery America, and we're proud in Ulster County to honor her and the Courthouse where this justice was served," **said Taylor Bruck, Acting Ulster County Clerk.**

"Together with local historians, community leaders, and the Kingston YMCA Farm Project Youth Crew — who I was proud to work with to establish November 26th as Sojourner Truth Day in Ulster County — we honor the legacy of Sojourner Truth and her fight for justice and equality. We are especially honored to welcome Barbara Allen, Sojourner Truth's sixth-generation granddaughter, for this occasion," **said Peter Criswell, Chair of the Ulster County Legislature.** "This collaboration not only celebrates her extraordinary life but also inspires us to continue addressing social justice and fostering a more equitable future. I am proud to stand with these remarkable individuals on this meaningful day."

"The Black Studies department of SUNY New Paltz is grateful and honored to be a part of the program that celebrates and honors the life of Sojourner Truth," **said Dr. Weldon McWilliams, Chair, Department of Black Studies, SUNY New Paltz.** "In keeping her memory alive, we continue to shed light on the history of the Black experience in America and recognize that experience as a legitimate one!"

"Sojourner Truth didn't stop when she became the first Black woman to successfully sue white men to get her son released from slavery — she went on to spend the rest of her life fighting for everyone else across the country," **said Assemblymember Sarahana Shrestha.** "Her determination is a reminder that those who commit to dismantling systems of oppression and injustice seldom do it because someone told them it was going to be easy. They do it precisely because it's difficult, and precisely because it's up to everyday people like Truth and her abolitionist peers were at the time, to lay the groundwork for making the impossible possible. I'm thrilled to have worked with Senator Hinchey and Governor Hochul

to establish November 26th as Sojourner Truth Day in the State of New York, and look forward to honoring Truth’s work every year."

“Sojourner Truth was an American hero whose unyielding fight for freedom and equality continues to inspire us nearly 200 years after her passing, igniting a new generation of young leaders carrying her legacy forward — including here in Ulster County, Truth’s birthplace. Our bill to establish Sojourner Truth Day in New York began with students from the Kingston YMCA Youth Crew, who recognized our responsibility in New York State to share her journey as one of the most prolific abolitionists and women’s rights activists of the time,” **said Senator Michelle Hinchey**. “Turning this vision into law is an honor, and for New York, November 26th of each year will not only reflect our commitment to keeping Sojourner Truth’s legacy alive but reaffirm what it means to be a New Yorker: always striving toward a better, more equitable future for all.”

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