

Compassion, Action and (Sojourner) Truth: A Social Work Month Conversation with Dr. Sandra Edmonds Crewe

(00:05) **Thomas** Greetings. My name is Thomas Benjamin, senior project coordinator at the Rutgers University School of Social Work's Center for Research on Ending Violence. I am also a committee representative on the School of Social Work's Inclusion, Intersectionality, Diversity, Equity and Advancement Committee — also known as the IIDEA Committee.

Today, I'm joined with Dr. Sandra Edmonds Crewe. She is the Sojourner Truth Social and Racial Justice visiting professor here at Rutgers University School of Social Work. Doctor Crewe is also dean emerita and professor at the Howard University School of Social Work. Thank you, Dr. Crewe, for joining me today.

(00:51) **Sandra** Thank you. It is a pleasure to be with you during Social Work Month.

(00:57) **Thomas** Absolutely. And in addition to acknowledging and highlighting your work, we of course are also celebrating this month, March 2025, as Social Work Month. I personally have had the pleasure to attend your February 2025 presentation entitled "Truth and Tubman: Social Justice Warriors During Challenging Times." But for those who have not yet had the privilege to examine social justice champions Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman nor hear about your personal background as a social work scholar, could you tell us about what attracted you to the Sojourner Truth Visiting Professorship in Social and Racial Justice here at Rutgers?

(01:54) **Sandra** Thank you so much, colleague. What attracted me was the focus on the work of Sojourner Truth and the legacy that Sojourner Truth was actually a member — was an enslaved member — of the family of the first president of Rutgers University, and I thought it quite bold to be a part of her continuing legacy that surrounds us as social workers as we began to think about not only the construct of social justice but how will you make it happen for self and others. And, so, I've been a lifelong advocate for social and economic justice, and this gave me an opportunity to drill a little deeper there and find more and learn more about historical legends such as Sojourner Truth. And I had already started focusing on Harriet Tubman some time before because she was such a well-known figure. But Sojourner Truth to a lesser degree. So, I found it an opportunity to examine the lives of these two Black women who were not just individuals who talked the talk. They walked the walk, and I just thought this would be an opportunity to kind of

connect it with my scholarship that, you know, focuses us on justice. You know, how do we get equity and justice and being able to highlight these two women was critically important to me. So, that's sort of what led me to this phase in my life to be able to think about justice through their lens and connect it to contemporary social justice.

(4:00) **Thomas**

The theme for March 2025 Social Work Month is “compassion plus action.” The National Association of Social Workers call social workers to turn their passion into action to help societal challenges. Compassion is, in one way, defined as “a sympathetic consciousness of others distress, together with the desire to alleviate it.” And when I examined the etymology of the word compassion, the Latin term “passio,” p-a-s-s-i-o, passio, it means suffering. Dr. Crewe, could you please explain the role of suffering in Sojourner Truth's journey for justice?

(5:00) **Sandra**

You know, thank you so much for the history that you provided the context. When you think of Sojourner Truth, her journey was full of suffering, that as an enslaved child, that as an enslaved adult, and there is also sexual violence in her history. And you think about what she had to endure to have this freedom that we often celebrate. You think about almost every element of her life was surrounded with suffering, not being able to form the relationship that she wanted. Her significant other was beaten so that they would not ... another formerly enslaved person. Again, sexually abused by her owner and then having her child sold into slavery after the law prevented it, being actually unhoused for periods of her life. And, so, suffering sort of almost was the platform that her life existed upon. Actually, there is a framework that they call Sojournerism, I believe. And that is sort of like John Henryism where she had to always make a way out of no way. And, so, that has been her life narrative — making a way out of no way, standing out there for what she believed in. And, so, suffering truly was inextricably linked to her existence. And if we think about, you know, Sojournerism, you know, like John Henryism, is that she always had to be present. As she suffered, she didn't have the luxury of suffering in silence because her spirit did not allow her to do so. And, so, what I particularly like about thinking about her and suffering — she didn't let suffering have the last word. She did not allow to have the last word. So, as I sort of think about today, we cannot let

suffering have the last word and that is a lesson that Sojourner leads us with. Even though injustices are all around you, you have to figure out how I can sort of overcome these. Another interesting story about Sojourner Truth is that she was promised her freedom earlier. And her enslaved owner indicated that he would not fulfill his promise because she was not as productive as she could have been because of an injury to her hands or something of that nature. So, rights were taken away from her. But, yet, she did not let that be the last word. She said, "I am going to walk away in plain view" — that I'm walking away because you promised that I would be freed at a certain time frame, and you lengthen my servitude, because of some subjective reasoning. And, so, you know, Sojourner got to enough is enough and just walked away. But she did not do that without suffering. She figured out a way to make her life have meaning despite all the things, all the barriers, people threw in her pathway, and not only have meaning for herself but have meaning for others as she sort of evolved into her addresses regarding feminism and womanism, whatever you want to kind of characterize it up, she became. A spokesperson for the injustices that women were also experiencing and, colleague, you talked about her in the Freedman's Bureau, which is really interesting. Long before Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth was a part of the Freedman's Bureau, and she assisted with desegregating streetcars in Washington, D.C. She took her seat early in the fight, early in the struggle. So, I think as we sort of look at our history, we will find that there are hidden pieces in our history that we don't always know about. She was standing firm even at that period of our lives that she was saying, I am a person, and I am doing my full rights and not only am I going to talk about it I'm going to insist upon that they be given to me.

(11:54) **Thomas**

I see that you appeared on a February 2025 podcast hosted by Dr. Tamara M. Cook-Henry called "Emunah." And Emunah, which by the way is Hebrew, a Hebrew word for faith. You mentioned that Sojourner Truth walked the way to freedom. And that, while Sojourner Truth was enslaved, she was not disempowered. And, so, given the role of suffering, and not just Sojourner Truth's time as an enslaved person, but more so especially so as a social justice champion, given that context as someone who would encounter challenges in her life's

work, in that context, do you think the modern social worker should to some degree embrace suffering?

(12:10) **Sandra**

I don't know that I think we should embrace it. But I think we should be aware of it. And, many of us who have worked with our clients, we know that the reason we encountered them is because of the suffering that they have experienced. And, so, we are in a profession often that we are working with individuals who experience suffering. So, we have to be aware that suffering sometimes relates to someone moving to a better place and a different place. But I do not advocate that to move to better and greater places should always start with suffering. We should be aware, but you know, I have a colleague at Howard [University] states often that every victory does not have to be based on a failure. So, we should really seek to elevate individuals to alleviate suffering. And, for those who are experiencing suffering, we should work with them to work through the suffering. So, I think it's there. We can't deny it. The history of our profession goes back to really thinking about individuals who were not given the rights that they do, and that inherently means some suffering was going on with them. But, I think we always want to think of a way forward that we can not have to go through suffering. But if it comes our way, how do we make sure that it does not become the end of our story but a part of our story, a part of the journey and not the end of the journey? So, it is my dream and what I work for is that we don't have suffering. But should we have it, we need social workers out there in the community to be able to support individuals through this journey and hopefully the short-term journey till they can get to the other side of through. And the other side of through looks like victory even though they have suffered.

(14:53) **Thomas**

And in regard to that, to stepping on the other side of victory and getting through, I'll reference your again your February 2025 presentation, "Truth and Tubman: Social Justice Warriors During Challenging Times." And in that you mentioned that we all have to step out of our comfort zone, and that when we get to our *growth* zones, we are able to reconnect to our values. In considering that, is stepping out of our comfort zone, is that in any way related to perhaps a personal struggle that a social worker may encounter or witness?

(15:37) **Sandra**

I think social workers always have to step out of our comfort zones because often we're working with individuals who have not had our lived experience, or we've not had their lived experience. And, so, before we begin to sort of package everyone into the same package, we have to really think about what is this person going through? Every social worker should learn from their encounter with a client, and that really does require that you step outside of your comfort zone. I'm doing this: One of my first experiences with the crack epidemic required me stepping out of my comfort zone when I was a director of a Housing Authority. And there was a problem in one of the units. I went to visit the families, and I saw a mother, and a grandmother, and a grandchild all using crack. That was not my comfort zone. I wasn't ready for that, so I had to step outside of my comfort zone to understand something's going on here that I have not encountered, but yet there's an opportunity for me to learn from it. So, for me to help them. I needed to understand, because eviction was the outcome. That was going to be the consequence, but did it help them? So, I had to understand it because I had this image of grandparents being these wholesome individuals helping us, you know, to deal with some of the issues we face with parents and all those kinds of things. But to see that required that I rethink what my experiences have been. That's stepping out of your comfort zone when you don't understand what's going on. When I taught a course, Agency-based Practice, one of the assignments I would always give my students is the movie that you're probably familiar with *Antwone Fisher*. And I would ask the students to tell me who they like to be the social worker for. And everyone wanted to be Antwone's social worker. But, I said, I'm assigning you the daughter of the foster care person.

(18:20) **Sandra**

I want you to be that person's social worker, the one who sexually abused the young man. So, that's stepping out of your comfort zone to be able to work with individuals that you don't understand what's going on with them. So, as I think about it, sometimes we all enter this profession with ways that we want to help and ways of knowing. Another area that comes to my mind, thinking about stepping out of my comfort zone, and I'm sure all of you all have stories that are equally powerful in your lives, is that when I was working on my dissertation and I was working with public housing families, and I

visited one of the families trying to understand why they did not participate in mandatory job training programs. You know, what is it that would not make you do something that, in my zone, would be helpful to you and your family, so I visited one of the families and I really brought all of my privilege and my attitude to the interview. I brought all of it, and I asked the question. I asked the question. I forgot to check it at the door. Because I forgot to check that privilege at the door. But I asked the young woman as to why is it that she didn't have a telephone and she had all of the programs you had to pay to view? I don't know what they were at that point, but it's like programs like the Disney Channel and all of that. I don't understand how I can't reach you by telephone, but yet you have this expensive package. You know, sometimes we go there, don't we, colleague? We go with our values. And, so, she said to me, "You know, Miss Crewe, that's a good question." And I'm so grateful for her, for challenging me on the question. And she said to me, "You know, there's a group of us who live in this development, and we can't afford everything we need to be successful."

So, one in this group has a telephone, another one in this group has the transportation, and I'm the one who provides the entertainment. So, we are a collective. And, so, you see where I'm going with this. My values said to me, the most important thing is for you to have a telephone so I can reach you — so I can reach you. She was beyond my thinking, and so I think we all have to challenge ourselves to make sure that we are what we say we do. Start where the client is. And we can't do that if we're in our own heads. So, that's what I mean by stepping out of your comfort zone — to be in the head of someone else — understand. And I think that's critically important as we think about compassion and action. I can't be simply compassionate. I have to link it with some action that makes sense, and I'm a great component of the value of lived experiments. And, so, allowing lived experience to be a teachable moment is, I think, what next generation social work looks like.

(22:07) **Thomas**

Great. Thank you for sharing that. That's a scenario I think all sorts of people need to hear and understand but especially our social workers in the field as well as our emerging social workers. So, thank you that was mighty impactful.

(22:29) **Thomas** Your work uses a liberatory consciousness framework. For those not yet familiar with liberatory consciousness. It is a framework developed by Dr. Barbara Love. And it's a framework for addressing oppression. It has also been adopted by the Rutgers University School of Social Work. The liberatory consciousness framework consists of four components: awareness, analysis, accountability slash allyship, and action. So, I'm going to circle back to the podcast with Dr. Cook-Henry, in which you said that there are challenges beyond your ability to handle as social workers. But Sojourner Truth would say, "Yes, you can handle them. You won't win every one of them, but you have the ability to take them on." What are some tools from Sojourner Truth or Harriet Tubman that social workers can use to prepare themselves to take action?

(23:45) **Sandra** I recently spoke with a civil rights legend, in my mind, Dr. John Jacob, who was the former director of the National Urban League. And Doctor Jacob said, and I've used this often in the last couple days, that you just can't fight the battles that you can win, but you have to fight the battles that need to be fought. And, so, they're not always short-term victories, there, but they're long-term gains as we begin to sort of think about it. So, as I reflect upon the question, we really that the lessons that I think both Tubman and Truth taught us is that it's more than about yourself. Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery. but she wasn't satisfied by simply being freed herself. So, when you think about liberatory consciousness framework, and you think about allyship, you have to think about Harriet Tubman in that the Underground Railroad was about other individuals who were aligned with the values of justice. And, so, I think the lesson she taught is that it's not enough for you to do better. We have to look at the collective better, the collective betterment of our society. The other thing that I think both Tubman and Truth reminded me of is you have to stand up for your truth. Stand up for your truth meaning that if you believe when Harriet Tubman arrived at her destination in Philadelphia, people didn't believe that she did this without the support of individuals etc. But she had to stand up for yes, I did. And I will go, and I will bring more people to freedom. An important lesson — it's not enough for you to be tapped on the shoulder because you need the standards of x, y, and z. If you're the first to do something and you are the last to do

it, you are an abysmal failure. Because that means you made a way for self, but you didn't make a way for anyone else. They taught us that this justice work is larger than the individual. It requires allyship. And sometimes it requires distancing yourself from people who don't have the same commitment that you do. They both have lessons like this. If you are really not willing to head for freedom, then I can't let you hinder me. Because I have to be very careful and selected about those individuals that I partnered with because it's a matter of life and death when you think about their lives. If you think about their lives, partnering with the wrong individuals could result in some horrific situations that you couldn't undo. So, I think that's a lesson for social work. We have to be careful with who we partner with on this journey for justice and equity that we're fighting for, because everyone's goal.

If I were teaching more practice evaluation, I'd be talking about program evaluation outputs and outcomes. So, everyone doesn't have the same agenda that you do. And, so, I think it becomes important for us to build allyship but also use what I think about is discernment. Why does this person want to become an ally? Are they true to the mission or are they really looking for self-interest — a bullet on their credentials to say that they are a member of organization A, B or C? So, I think both Truth and Tubman kind of taught those lessons that this is this is not a short-term focus. We're in it for the long-term, and, so, we have to preserve our energy as we go through it, but we have to fight. We have to fight, but there is no one way to fight. Both of them fought differently. They didn't fight the same way, so we have to sort of make sure that we're not overly critical of people who don't fight the same way we fight. But they're all aligned with the cause for making equity, making sure that everyone not only has a seat at the table. Having a seat at the table is not enough. You have to be able to have some food once you sit at the table. And so both of them really kind of talked about, really, Harriet Tubman. I know her as — I call her the mother of self-sufficiency. Because after the enslaved period, she taught the formerly enslaved individuals to use the skills that they gave during their enslaved period, whether they were seamstress, whether they were cooks, whatever their skills, use those and sell those skills. So, that's about self-sufficiency. So, she was able to kind of talk about that. And, so, when I think of Sojourner Truth, sometimes

you have to face challenges when they challenged that whether she was a woman. I mean in public forum. She used the opportunity to show them. It's not just telling you I am a woman; I'm going to show you that I am a woman. And, so, I think those are important lessons? We have to be able to show people sometimes what's behind our thinking. I was saying to a group of students at the child welfare conference held last week that it's important to know what's in the box before you get outside of the box.

(30:53) **Sandra** If you don't know what's inside of the box, your fight won't be as effective. And, so, both Tubman and truth understood what slavery looked like and felt like and heard like. So, when they were fighting for freedom. They were fighting knowing what the cost of freedom would be — that they were just not going to be able to walk to freedom. They had to do something once they crossed that road to do that. So, I think that's why social workers, we always try to help people understand what's in the box. And once you know what's in the box, you can speak truth to power and get outside of the box.

(31:44) **Thomas** Excellent. And thank you for referencing your experience with your students and your students' experience with you.

(31:53) **Thomas** And so I will, again, circle back to the Emunah podcast, I'll spell that out for those listening so they could look it up. That's E-M-U-N-A-H. And, so, I read that's a Hebrew word for faith or belief. So, in that Emunah podcast you also mentioned that some of your social work students are most interested in Sojourner Truth's, intersectionality. And intersectionality, of course, is a component of the Rutgers School of Social Work's IIDEA Committee in that intersectionality is in the name. And, in that podcast episode, I remember you taking an interesting spin, or I shouldn't say spin, but I remember you making an interesting comment about intersectionality and how it related to Sojourner Truth and her beliefs and her actions. So, you describe Sojourner Truth as a womanist because in the fight for women's suffrage, she parted with some of the women suffragists saying that she, Sojourner Truth, wanted to include black men and not really liking some of the rather pejorative language that some of the women suffragists used regarding Black men. And, so, considering that, how does intersectionality fit in having compassion for all groups?

(33:44) **Sandra**

OK. Well, I think we each come to whatever the cause we have based upon our lived experiences. And, with Sojourner Truth, she found that race had always been — she wasn't enslaved because she was a woman. She was enslaved because she was a Black woman. So, it didn't mean that she didn't believe in the fight for justice for women. But she went back to the etiology of why she was enslaved. And, therefore, you'll have people on different sides of the issue. Ida B. Wells said the same thing. And as we all know, if you have studied social work, Jane Adams is accredited with a primary position in the founding. But Ida B. Wells also parted with her on this issue of how the decisions regarding African American men and some of the pejorative language that was used in this whole fight for liberation in terms of voting. So, intersectionality means that I may carry two identities. Or three. Or four. Most of us carry more than two. But, it is sometimes one that has caused me more suffering using the context, and I may align myself more than that. Now, that doesn't mean I'm against anything, but if I have to prioritize where my energies are going to be, then that's where I'm going to place my priority. So, when I think of intersectionality, when I show up, I said not too long ago I'm not showing up as a diversity hire. I'm showing up as a competent Black woman with excellence. Now you can label it anything you want to label it, but I am showing up as a competent African American woman who understands what it feels like when you are judged based upon being a Black woman rather than a competent Black woman — those stereotypes that have kind of hung out there. So, intersectionality allows us to have more than one issue that we're fighting for. But, with many, there is a primacy of something. And, so, I can align myself. I think of the Million Man March that was some years ago. I didn't have issues with women not being able to go to the Million Man March. I was comfortable supporting those who were going to the March, and so intersectionality allows me to have an interest in many things and understanding that it's not unusual for individuals to really zero in on the thing that they feel has been most problematic for them in their lives. Some I have to agree to disagree with. But it is their right to feel the way that they feel in terms of doing that. But when you think about particularly Sojourner Truth being a woman, being an African American, being a formerly enslaved person, being a mother, being a daughter, caregiver, all of those robes were there. But, at that moment

in time that we were speaking about the misquoted “Ain’t I A Woman?” she was really saying that as a woman I deserve rights. But as I think about it, I deserve rights as a human being. And being an African American, formerly enslaved woman, gave me a different perspective on it than others might have. So, my allyship, really, I bring the me first, my experiences first but open to others’ experiences as well.

(38:30) **Thomas** Thank you. And I've also heard you detail the speculation and even controversy behind the famed “Ain’t I A Woman?” and how Sojourner Truth, her origin being in the State of New York and existing there in a time amongst people who spoke Dutch and whatever dialect or accents that emerged from being around such people. And, so, if I'm not mistaken, there's some speculation, some skepticism rather, on if this was someone else's interpretation of Sojourner Truth, suggesting that she would not have necessarily had the dialect or the language or have spoken like how whoever is depicted in “Ain’t I A Woman?” and that in all probability, in *her* voice, it would've maybe been delivered differently. And, in that, I believe you said that you most related to artist Elizabeth Catlett's depiction of Sojourner Truth, which is a portrait of Sojourner Truth with one hand pointed up and another hand on the Bible. That said, why is it important for social workers and social justice advocates to have their own image properly depicted?

(40:38) **Sandra** You know, when you think about images — well, first of all, let me digress a moment. Sojourner Truth was illiterate. So, she had to rely upon allies to write her story. And, so whenever our voice is coming through the voice of someone else who has not had our lived experience, it is not unusual to expect some distortions of that voice. And, so, I think that's sort of critical to understand that she was illiterate in terms of doing that. But having your own image provides a context for you. And so, on Howard's [University] campus, there is Elizabeth Catlett art around, and I'm familiar with her art. And last year, I believe, I think it was last year, the theme was social work and the arts. So, I became very involved in understanding how social justice was displayed in the arts that we do. So, I became even more aware of Catlett's work and as she depicted Sojourner Truth. She didn't show her in the shawl. And I don't recall whether it was a shawl, but she did was she had the finger pointed up and focused on the

Bible, not on her knitting. So, it told me that image says that she's a woman of faith, and she's using her faith to navigate her challenges. And she is heavily relying upon that faith. And, so, as you recall, her Sojourner Truth's enslaved name was Isabella Bomfree — that sort of Dutch origin. But she changed her name to Sojourner Truth. Now that I can be confident about. She changed *her* name to Sojourner Truth. And that means that image that I saw by Catlett really depicted her as a sojourner telling the truth. And, so, her pointing upward and having that biblical reference said that she believed, despite of everything that was happening to her, had happened to her, she still had hope inspired by faith. And, so, that's why I think it's important for us to have our own images. Which image resonates with us? It doesn't mean that the other images are incorrect. It doesn't mean that to me, but what it means that I can relate more to her pointing upward and understanding that because I'm enslaved doesn't mean that you enslave my brain. I am really going to hold on to that piece of me, and I'm going to be strong enough to change my name and to be who I am. And, so, I think sometimes we have to decide that we may have to alter the perceptions — alter the image. That's why it's important.

(44:11) **Sandra**

What do you see when you look at a person who is unhoused on the street. What is the image that you see? I see the image of someone who's been denied opportunities, someone whose had experienced hard times, someone that if I can have a street navigator ... I may be able to get them off that bench and to move forward. But, without having my own image, what I can begin to see is what other people characterize that person as not having value and not having worth. So, we have to have our own image of success and image of how a person ended up in the state that they're in, not just the state. See, when you look at just the state, you forgot that narrative that went before the state that you just saw them in. So, that's why it's important not to be driven by stereotypes. They don't know anything about the journey — Sojourner Truth — the journey that that person experienced. So, having your own reference point. Often, I would have a photograph in my office on my computer, a woman during Hurricane Katrina who was draped in the American flag but yet unhoused and placed in an unhealthy situation. That image kept my compassion. Because if we

don't have images that really help us to understand our humanity, our shared humanity, then we can fall prey to individuals who are telling us a story that probably represents their lived experience and not our lived experiences.

(46:30) **Thomas** Wow. And thank you for elaborating on that, on the role of art, but also the artist we mentioned Elizabeth Catlett in their contribution to social justice and how important that is to own your imagery and your likeness. And, so, here we have this portrait of Sojourner Truth — one hand pointed up, another hand on the Bible. I've also heard you refer to faith. Faith as just one of the many conjoining elements between Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. How do you imagine today's social worker using their faith in their awareness, allyship and action?

(47:33) **Sandra** You know, I believe that faith is an individual thing. And we believe in different things. So, I can speak to my faith but very mindful that people experience faith differently as well. But I think it's important. I think faith, as I believe, things can be different. I believe it. And my faith allows me to work toward that difference that I believe can take place. Also, I just recently reviewed a book done by one of our former students that says don't give me that old time religion. And as she interviews individuals and their walk with faith, it shows up differently for every individual. Some who were experiencing violence really felt that faith had let them down. Now, yet, it was a person of faith who was able to show them there was a way out. So, faith has that people can lose faith. But I think it works with us by showing people that they can be reunited with their faith to really get to the goal that they are seeking to have. Now, I'm clear that it is not a particular faith — spirituality — it's the one that can lead you to hope and steal you from hopelessness because often individuals are facing hopelessness. And that really dampens their faith. So, I see faith as a platform for hope. And it's critically important as I think about how it really encourages the downtrodden, and it really can provide a trajectory for individuals to kind of think about how they can really make life better for themselves, but it's also a coping mechanism, isn't it? Wouldn't you agree? It's a coping mechanism that faith allows me to believe that the road may not be easy. And I think in that old one of the spirituals "But I didn't come this far for you leave me alone." So, I am here and,

you know, stand way out yonder by myself. And I couldn't hear nobody pray. Well, faith allows me to say, "I'm going to listen harder to hear that prayer," and it allows me to connect with ancestors. Because it was often the faith of ancestors that got us to this moment in time. So, I'm firmly rooted in the importance of faith but also the respect of the differences in faith. It is so important that we understand that faith without action is not the kind of faith that I believe in. Compassion without action really is simply another slogan on another poster. And, so, faith just can't be a slogan on a poster. It has to be a way that we approach individual, and it's our grounding. There's a lot of talk about self-care in social work. I do think when we think about self-care, if we have faith, we know that tough times don't always last. So, it allows us to go to our private and our personal spaces to really reconnect with our spiritual focus to get through tough times. But it also allows us a moment to rejoice. And I'm really big on rejoicing. It allows us to rejoice over the victories that we have won. I think it's faith that allows us to celebrate in doing that. So, I think faith becomes an integral part of our lived experience. But it is something that we have to be careful with. We have to be very mindful about that if we show up and leading with that sometimes, it can be a problem with connecting with the clients that we want to serve. But it has to be in you. I have to see it in you and not on you. So, faith becomes critically important. And I think, you know, the lesson of faith is to be a good listener — to be a good listener — to listen to what the persons are experiencing, the communities are experiencing and to allow them to share their faith with you rather than you overlaying your faith on them. But, I know within many of the communities that we serve, particularly African American communities, there has been the reliance upon faith through the civil rights era. It has been a reliance upon faith to get us through tough times. It has been spiritual leaders that we often cite as a part of the victories that we experience in doing that. If we think of faith, we think of our ancestors and what they endured and how they used the spirituals and the gospels, the singing to connect themselves to the way forward. So, faith provides a way forward for us, and it also gives us a little, you know, personal time on the couch.

(54:14) **Thomas**

And I like that you drew that distinction in that you would suggest that, we have the faith in us, not necessarily on us, especially when we're

working with different populations. And I also love how you mentioned the singing and, again, this is a reference to the arts and its connection to social justice. And it reminds me of there's actually a recently released documentary called Soundtrack to a Coup D'etat. This was released in 2024, and it actually is about singer Abby Lincoln and jazz drummer Max Roach and their protest of the Republic of Congo's Patrice Lumumba and his assassination. And, so yet again, even though we're years removed from the time of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth being that this event was during the 1960s, early 1960s. Again, we see artists, music artists rather, and their role in justice work and as well as their promotion of, you know, some issues that may not be on the forefront of people's minds, especially if they're not, you know, issues in America. And so again, yet again, we have that relying on, if not the music itself, the relying on artists to help propagate the right image. And, again, the name of the film is Soundtrack to a Coup D'etat. So, there is usually some sort of social justice soundtrack with some sort of musicians in all sorts of time periods.

(56:18) **Thomas** I noticed that some of your work, your scholarship, is on social welfare history and ethno-gerontology. What is ethno-gerontology?

(56:31) **Sandra** The shortcut to it is sort of study of aging of ethnic groups. And I have particularly focused on African American, older persons and caregiving as a responsibility. But ethno-gerontology is sort of looking through the lens of the sociological study of aging with a focus on ethnic identities and what that means. So, that that's when we say ethno-gerontology, we're just sort of zeroing in on the unique experiences of different ethnic groups.

(57:11) **Thomas** And I also heard you mention Sojourner Truth's fight for aging justice. What was that like?

(57:20) **Sandra** They lived to — I believe Sojourner Truth lived to be around 85 years of age. That's at least the story that we are saying since there is no official record of her birth. But if you really think about they worked — they worked a whole life. And Harriet Tubman lived longer. She lived into her early 90s. So, these were women, we would think about their legacies during the times, the early parts of their lives. But Sojourner Truth was in her 50s when she started doing some of this work we're

talking about. So, it speaks to that, the value we have related to the contributions of older women. And that's how I see it. We often, well not often, hopefully under social workers, if they don't believe in ageism. But ageism really does pervade, is pervasive in our society, where people make decisions about one's competence based upon one's age. And, so, when I think about these two women, they were really fighting for justice during their older ages as well. So, justice work is not just for young people. It is a life course way of thinking about a work. So, they really kind of shared with us that they were able to work until the job was done, at least until they could do no longer do the jobs. And I think that's really important that we not be focused on how old a person is, but our focus is what they can contribute. And too often we get carried away with one moment in time, and we don't look at the life course perspective of the individuals. If you think about both of these women, I mean, Harriet Tubman started a bit earlier in her life, but she continued the battle. And one of the beauties of Harriet Tubman, I love this, is that she created housing for older and quote "indigent negroes." That is the very housing that she had her end-of-life journey in. So, sometimes colleagues, we're creating the programs that we will need to use ourselves. So, we should take care of making sure that we're creating a program that we would like to enjoy and appreciate ourselves at different stages of life. And, so, I think it just, to me, old age justice. And there's a wonderful article, you can Google it and find it, about old age justice and both Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. But it says that we have to keep on keeping on, that it's okay if the person decides, "I'm done. I've had enough." But there are some people who are going to fight as long as the fight needs to be fought. They're going to be in the battle, and that's what I saw with Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. They stayed in the fight for as long as they could. And now they're looking to you to continue the fight. They didn't give up on the fight, they just passed the torch.

(01:01:05) **Thomas** With subjects like ethno-gerontology and aging justice that is, they are, mighty appropriate for a place like Rutgers School of Social Work in that we house the Rutgers Hub for Aging Collaboration, which is directed by Dr. Emily Greenfield. The Rutgers School of Social Work also offers an aging and health certificate program. And hopefully

from this conversation there can be some sparked interest in, say, Sojournerism or John Henryism, if not already, in that we can maybe integrate the Sojourner Truth ethos and practice in our work on aging and aging justice as well as gerontology and ethno-gerontology. So, it's great to hear that that's where some of your life's work has been in. And, again, it just seems like you're just at the right place at the right time.

(01:02:18) **Thomas** So, thank you. And, again, I'm with Dr. Sandra Edmonds Crewe. She is the current Sojourner Truth Social and Racial Justice Visiting Professor. And Dr. Crewe is also a dean emerita and professor at the Howard University School of Social Work. And thank you. This has been a phenomenal conversation. What a way to honor Women's History Month as well as Social Work Month. And, again, the theme this year is compassion plus action.

(01:02:56) **Sandra** Thank you. It's indeed an honor, an honor and a privilege to really serve in the honor and legacy of Sojourner Truth. And it's really been a tremendous experience, and I look forward to continuing the journey.