

In an artist's romanticized rendition, a Union soldier reads the Emancipation Proclamation to a slave family.



“To Canvass the Nation”: The War for Union Becomes a War for Freedom

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On the eve of the Civil War, the North was deeply divided on the issue of slavery. Northern free blacks, who numbered less than 2 percent of the population, stood unambiguously opposed to slavery. But the majority of white Northerners evinced no desire to promote emancipation. Many believed that black people were particularly fit for slavery by experience or nature. Some—linked to Southern slaveholders by family ties, political allegiance, and business connections—had a vested interest in the system of chattel bondage. Those not directly involved in the slave system feared the heavy hand of federal interference in local affairs. Believing the principles of states’ rights and limited government to be the cornerstones of the Republic, they saw federally sponsored emancipation as a violation of sacred liberties. Rather than allow the national government to expand its domain, they willingly assented to the slave masters’ right to control their “domestic institution.” For these white Northerners, slavery and the Republic were inseparable.

Opposing this majority, a small but growing number of men and women came to view slavery as economically inefficient, socially retrograde, and morally repugnant. Yet, this minority could not agree upon the best way to implement its principles and often disagreed on the principles themselves. At one extreme, radical abolitionists declared slavery a sin that tainted American political institutions. They demanded immediate emancipation—even at the price of disunion—and the elevation of black people to full equality. At the other extreme stood gradualists of various sorts who envisioned eventual emancipation, usually accompanied by compensation to slaveholders and the physical removal of black people to Africa or some other distant land. Between these two groups, antislavery politics flourished in almost infinite variety. By the 1850s, most antislavery politicians and their constituents had rallied in support of the practical matter of halting the expansion of slavery—with the understanding that limiting slavery’s growth would eventually destroy it. Their appeal ignored—or flatly rejected—the abolitionists’ concern for racial equality and instead emphasized the detrimental effects of slavery on Amer-

ican democracy. For these white Northerners, slavery and the Republic were incompatible.

This last strand of antislavery thought informed the development of the Republican party. Abraham Lincoln, the party's standard bearer in 1860, declared "[i]f slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." But he and his party promised not to interfere with slavery in the existing slave states. Even after his election to the presidency triggered secession, the establishment of the Confederacy, and the beginning of open warfare, Lincoln held fast to his party's principles. From his perspective, the struggle with the Confederacy would be a war for union. As Northern soldiers took to the field, only blacks and a handful of white abolitionists understood the conflict as a war of liberation.

The history of the Civil War is the story of the transformation of a war for national union into a war for universal liberty. At the cutting edge of that change were black people—slave and free—who recognized their centrality to the dispute and understood that their future depended upon its outcome. Lacking political standing or public voice and forbidden access to the weapons of war, black men and women nonetheless acted resolutely to place their freedom—and that of their posterity—on the wartime agenda. Steadily, as opportunities arose, they demonstrated their readiness to take risks for freedom and put their loyalty, their labor, and their lives in the service of the Union. In so doing, they rendered untenable every federal policy short of universal emancipation.

The change did not come easily or at once. At first, Union political and military leaders freed slaves only hesitantly, under pressure of military necessity. But as the war dragged on, their reluctance gave way to an increased willingness

and eventually to a firm determination to extirpate chattel bondage. The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, and the enlistment of black soldiers into Union ranks in the following months signaled the adoption of emancipation as a fundamental Northern war aim, although that commitment availed little until vindicated by military victory. Even after the surrender of the Confederacy, slavery survived in two Union states—Kentucky and Delaware—until the Thirteenth Amendment became part of the United States Constitution in December 1865.

While the primary work of emancipation took place on the battlefields and plantations of the South, an essential part of the story must be traced to the North. The documents that follow, drawn from petitions and memorials to Congress now housed in the National Archives, demonstrate how events in the South transformed Northern opinion and how Northern opinion, in turn, speeded the transformation of the war for Union into a war for freedom.

Depicting the drama of emancipation is the work of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project. In the fall of 1976, with a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the sponsorship of the University of Maryland (and later, with additional assistance from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Ford and Rockefeller foundations), the editors of the project systematically searched those records at the National Archives that promised to yield material for a documentary history of emancipation. During the next three years, the editors selected more than forty thousand documents, representing perhaps 2 percent of the total number they examined. This preliminary selection constitutes the basis from which documents are being further selected for

MEN OF COLOR, TO ARMS! NOW OR NEVER!

MEN OF COLOR! BROTHERS and FATHERS! WE APPEAL TO YOU! By all your concern for yourselves and your liberties, by all your regard for God and Humanity, by all your desire for Citizenship and Equality before the law, by all your love for the Country, to stop at no subterfuges, listen to nothing that shall deter you from rallying for the Army. Come forward, and at once Enroll your Names for the **Three Years' Service**. **STRIKE NOW**, and you are henceforth and forever **FREEMEN!**

Immediately following the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union Army began to actively recruit blacks for service. The above appeal is taken from a broadside in which freedom was promised in exchange for a three-year enlistment.



Black servicemen served on both the land and sea. One quarter of the Union's sailors were black; four won the Navy's medal of honor. In this scene, sailors and marines pose on the deck of the U.S. gunboat Mendota in 1864.

publication in a multivolume edition entitled *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*.

The documents selected for *Freedom* illustrate the transition from slavery to freedom. The first two series concentrate primarily on the years of the Civil War. Series 2, *The Black Military Experience* (published in 1982), examines the recruitment of black men into the Union army and the experiences of black soldiers under arms. The two volumes that constitute series 1 portray the wartime transformation of Southern life. *The Destruction of Slavery* (published in 1985) explicates how slaves initiated the process of emancipation in the portions of the South occupied by the Union army, in the Union's own border slave states, and in the shrinking Confederacy. Its companion volume, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor* (forthcoming in 1989), will discuss the wartime reconstruction of Southern society. *Slavery, Freedom, and the Civil War* (forthcoming in 1990) will bring together the most significant documents from the first three volumes of *Freedom*.

The petitions printed below are physical remains of a vast and variegated effort to abolish slavery. From the beginning of the assault on slavery, abolitionists found in the petition a useful device for stating their cause, bringing it before the public, and involving fellow-citizens in their movement. Petitions also served as a means of refuting the slaveholders' claim that the abolitionist movement was subversive of the good order of the Republic. What could be more "republican" than rallying one's fellow citizens and advising elected representatives of popular opinion? In fact, antislavery memorials proved so successful that the opposition soon began to circulate petitions of its own. Both opponents and proponents of slavery found petitions to be a basic tool of political advocacy and education.

With the beginning of the war, abolitionists and their opponents mobilized this familiar device. Antislavery societies or antiabolition groups (usually connected with the Democratic party) issued forms that local constituents reprinted or copied by hand. Although initiated by national



A family encompassing four generations on Smith's Plantation near Beaufort, South Carolina.

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organizations and formulaic in tone and content, these petitions frequently took on the imprimatur of local organizers who circulated them, and who sometimes added a few lines of their own, addressing matters of particular concern or soliciting funds to support their activities.

Other petitions sprang directly from the grass roots. They were the product of an individual's or a community's effort to address the immediate consequences of war—new taxes, conscription, the deaths of husbands, brothers, and friends on distant battlefields. Such petitions were generally handwritten, composed on the spot, and signed by both men and women, almost always residents of a single neighborhood, town, or county. They spoke to national policy as it had become a part of their experience.

For most Northern black men, all women, and many newly arrived immigrants, petitions served a particularly important purpose. They offered those denied suffrage and other trappings of citizenship a medium through which they could make their voices heard. Composing a petition or memorial became a regular part of their meetings or conventions. The involvement of black men, women, and immigrants in formulating memorials and collecting signatures further politicized them and fueled their struggles for equality.

Whatever their origins, petitions made the rounds slowly. The interval between their inception and their presentation to Congress sometimes stretched to months. In the meantime, events might have rendered the original cause irrelevant, raised it in stature, or given it new meaning. Although the process was slow and cumbersome, the petition remained an essential means of influencing elected representatives. During the Civil War, Americans collected hundreds of thousands of names by which to demonstrate the nation's resolve on the issue of slavery.

Elected representatives gave petitions close attention. With elections infrequent and newspapers avowedly partisan, congressmen and senators listened carefully to these communications from their constituents, frequently using them to initiate debate or as a rationale for new legislation. Petitions thus linked politics at the grass roots and politics in the corridors of power.

Although Congress was duly respectful of the petitions' contents, it was careless with the documents themselves. Sometimes only one copy of a petition was retained, when multiple copies were submitted. Clerks often disposed of long lists of signatures or (according to federal government lore) used petitions as kindling on cold winter mornings. For whatever reason, only a



Lincoln promised noninterference with slavery during his campaign, but the course of the war changed his views.



Gen. Benjamin Butler forced the U.S. government to acknowledge fugitive slaves by declaring them contraband.

small portion of the petitions presented to Congress has survived. Those that have, however, tell an important part of the story of emancipation and its consequences.

Following the editorial practice of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project, the documents are transcribed exactly as written, with no correction of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or syntax. Extra space indicates the end of unpunctuated sentences.

I

As the Union army took to the field, federal officials reiterated President Lincoln's pledge of noninterference with slavery. Eager to reassure wavering slaveholders in the border states, Union generals declared their willingness to crush servile revolts and return fugitive slaves to their owners. During the summer of 1861, Lincoln reconfirmed these policies in his Independence Day oration, omitting any mention of slavery and assuring the South that he had not changed

his views on the rights of the states within the federal Union. Congress added its support, resolving that the North fought only to preserve the Union and posed no threat to Southern institutions. Antislavery Northerners, however, maintained that the war was a slaveholders' conspiracy and that no enduring reconstruction of the Union was possible with slavery intact. In common with many opponents of slavery, citizens of New Bedford, Massachusetts, believed that the rebellion found its "roots and nourishment in the system of chattel slavery." Although willing to compensate loyal slaveholders, they urged Congress to use its war power to punish rebels by freeing their slaves.

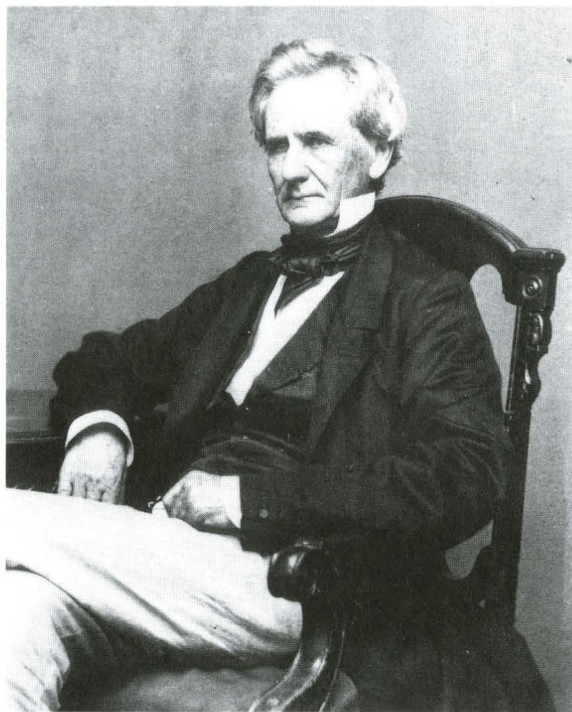
[New Bedford, Mass., late 1861?]

"Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof."

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

The undersigned, citizens of New Bedford, State of Massachusetts respectfully submit—

That as the present formidable rebellion against the General Government manifestly finds its root and nourishment in the system of chattel slavery at the South; as the leading conspirators are slaveholders, who constitute an oligarchy avowedly hostile to all free institutions; and as, in the nature of things, no solid peace can be maintained while the cause of this treasonable revolt is permitted to exist; your honorable body is urgently implored to lose no time in enacting, under the war power, the total abolition of slavery through-



Sec. of War Simon Cameron approved Butler's actions and issued instructions to further employ fugitive slaves.

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out the country—liberating unconditionally the slaves of all who are rebels, and, while not recognizing the right of property in man, allowing for the emancipated slaves of such as are loyal to the Government a fair pecuniary award, in order to facilitate an amicable adjustment of difficulties; and thus to bring the war to a speedy and beneficent termination, and indissolubly to unite all sections and all interests of the country upon the enduring basis of universal freedom.

VOTERS.

NON-VOTERS.

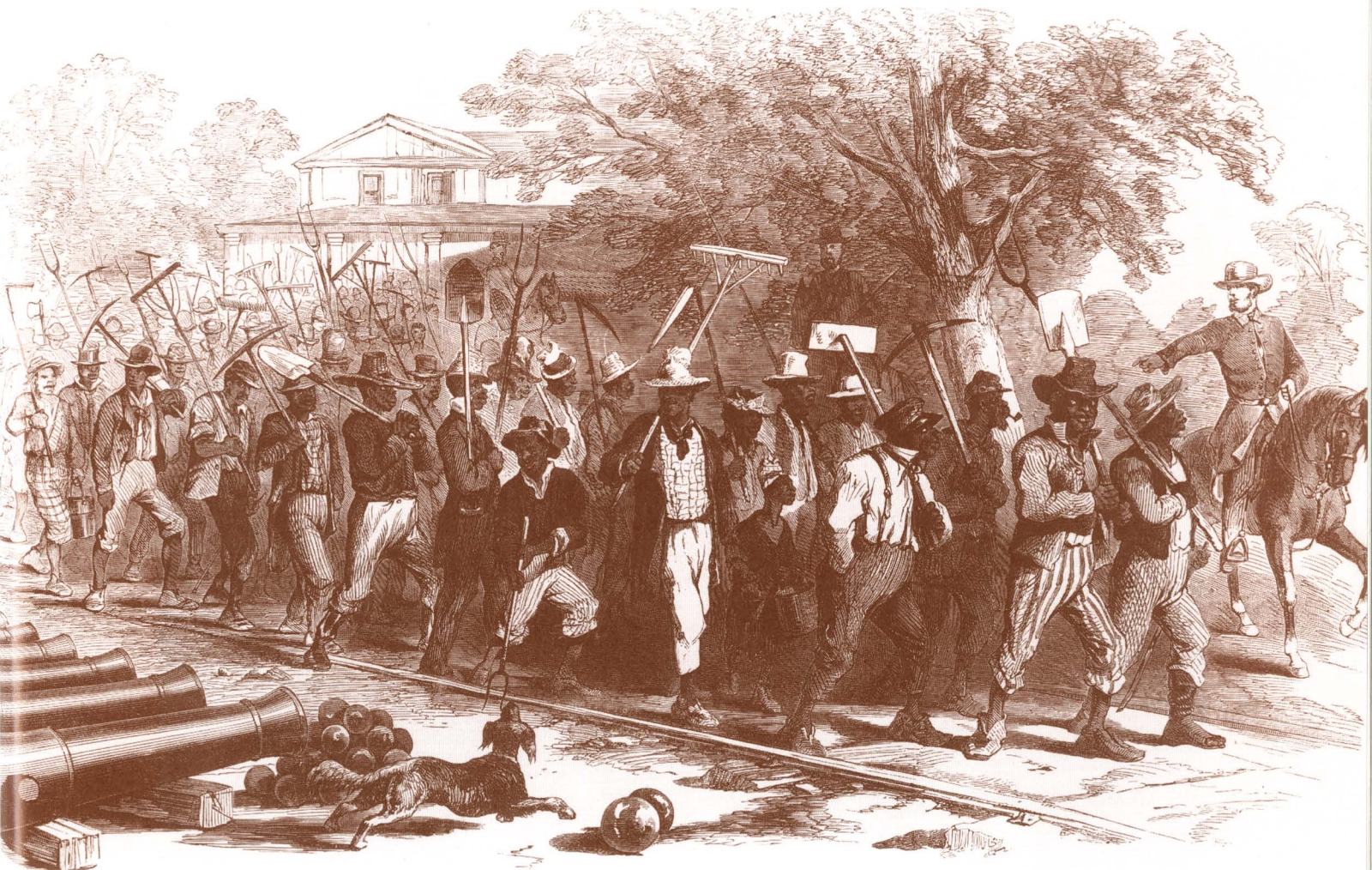
[408 signatures]

S. Griffith Morgan et al. to the Congress of the United States, late 1861?, 37A-G7.2, House Committee on the Judiciary, Petitions and Memorials, ser. 467, 37th Congress, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233, National Archives. (Hereafter, records in the National Archives will be cited as RG—, NA.)

II

As the war moved into the South in the spring of 1861, the Union army found it increasingly

difficult to ignore the slaves who flocked to federal lines. In May, General Benjamin F. Butler took possession of Fortress Monroe in the Virginia tidewater only to discover that rebel commanders were mobilizing slaves on behalf of the Confederacy. In response, Butler accepted fugitive slaves within his lines and put the able-bodied to work, declaring them contraband of war. The label “contraband” captured the Northern imagination and Secretary of War Simon Cameron approved Butler’s bold stroke. Soon after, Congress added its weight to Butler’s policy by passing the First Confiscation Act, thereby making all property—including slaves—used in support of the rebellion “subject of prize and capture.” In November 1861, when the Union army and navy invaded coastal South Carolina, Secretary Cameron instructed General Thomas W. Sherman to employ fugitive slaves as Butler had at Fortress Monroe. Butler’s policy and the



A cartoon of the morning muster of contraband at Fortress Monroe. The original caption optimistically stated that the men “had a comparatively pleasant time under their state of contraband existence.”

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Confiscation Act thus marked the first breach in the federal government's attempt to shield slavery from the corrosive effects of the war. The citizens of Erie County, New York, saw in these new policies an avenue for emancipation—albeit an avenue that had still not been extended to its final destination. They pressed their case for immediate emancipation and countered arguments that such a policy would encourage servile insurrection by pointing to the peaceful transition from slavery to freedom in the West Indies.

[*Erie Co., N.Y., Nov.? 1861*]

To the Congress of the United States:
We, the undersigned, citizens of the County of Erie, State of New York, your Petitioners, respectfully represent to your Honorable Body that it is a notorious fact that the slaveholders of our country as a class, with few exceptions, have rebelled because the People, by voting for Messrs. Douglass and Lincoln, decided against forcing Slavery upon the Territories; that by rebelling they have forfeited all the rights which were conceded to them before they rebelled; that it is plainly duty to "break every yoke and let the oppressed go free" when we have the Constitutional power to do so; that Congress can do this by the exercise of its War Power; that there is always, so long as that duty is undischarged, a possibility of the rebels' submitting, upon terms which will leave to them their enslaved victims, and leave the Cause of the war uneradicated, to continue, in the future as in the past, its disturbances, aggressions, and rebellious outbreaks; that a proclamation of freedom to the slaves, while it would fix their legal status, and increase their attachment to the Union, would not probably, otherwise, have much effect upon them, during the war, beyond that produced by Secretary Cameron's instructions to Gens. Butler & Sherman, unless the rebels greatly aggravate their provocations; and that West India emancipation has proved the enslaved Race to be unrevengeful; Therefore, we respectfully petition

your Honorable Body to proclaim Freedom to all slaves in the United States, to the full extent of your Constitutional Power, adopting for them such laws and regulations as their condition shall require; also to insert in the Proclamation a clause guarantying a suitable pecuniary award to loyalists who shall at once make known to their slaves this Proclamation, liberating them.

[46 signatures]

S. D. Taylor et al. to the Congress of the United States, [Nov.? 1861], 37A-G7.13, House Committee on the Judiciary, Petitions & Memorials, ser. 467, 37th Congress, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, RG 233, NA.

III

When Congress reconvened in December 1861, it was greeted by a flood of petitions demanding stern punishment for secessionists. Northerners, tired of military defeat, traced the Union's failure on the battlefield to the policy of waging war on the narrowest moral and political grounds. They urged Congress to reassert the unity of freedom and Union by emancipating slaves held by rebels and placing them in the service of the Union army.

Underhill, Vt. March 1. 1862.

To the Hon. Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America.

The undersigned, inhabitants of Underhill and vicinity in the State of Vermont,—believing **loyalty to freedom** to be one and the same with loyalty to the ground principles of the **Constitution** interpreted according to the just and praiseworthy **intentions** of our political Fathers;—therefore believing that in the present national struggle for the maintenance of the **Authority of the Constitution**, it is our clearest right—nay our imperative duty, to invoke to our aid the Love of Freedom in all the national subjects;—re-



Under the First Confiscation Act of 1861, slaves behind Union lines became contraband of war and free from their former masters. This photo taken in May 1862 shows a group of so-called contraband at Cumberland Landing, Virginia.

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spectfully petition that you will provide by law for the liberation of those held in bonds by the enemies of the Government,—and for the employment of the same, with their consent, in such manner as may best conduce to the speedy overthrow of the rebellion.

[92 signatures]

Simeon Parmelee et al. to the Hon. Senate and House of Representatives, Mar. 1, 1862, 37A-G7.13, House Committee on the Judiciary, Petitions & Memorials, ser. 467, 37th Congress, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, RG 233, NA.

IV

During the spring of 1862, abolitionists took aim at slavery in the District of Columbia. Because Congress had undisputed sovereignty over the District, and simple legislation—not constitutional amendments or presidential proclamations—would be enough to end slavery, the District had long been a special target of emancipationists. With the outbreak of the war, pressure for emancipation in the District had increased. Aided by the District's substantial free black population, District slaves fled their owners. They were joined by hundreds of fugitives from the adjoining slave states of Maryland and Virginia. The complicity of federal agents in recapturing runaways and dumping them in ill-equipped federal prisons reminded abolitionists all over the North of the contradiction between republican principles and the continued presence of slavery in the nation's capital. Citizens of West Alexander, Pennsylvania, urged Congress to take the first step toward a general emancipation by ending "the disgrace to the civ-

ilization of the age" in the District of Columbia.

West Alexander Pa. Dec. 14th 1861.

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives in Congress Assembled. The undersigned Citizens of West Alexander Pa, beg leave to represent to your Honorable body, that we are painfully grieved to learn that men and women, have been, and are now, incarcerated in the jails of Washington City and Alexandria, being denied the comforts of life, to which every prisoner in a civilized land is entitled, they are ragged & almost naked, hungry, have no fire, & not even a pillow, on which to lay their heads, & are filthy & being devoured by vermin,

All this, being in the "land of the free & the home of the brave," We therefore, pray you, not to give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids, until you provide means for present relief & future Security, that this disgrace to the civilization of the age Shall be unknown outside of Pandemonium.

[54 signatures]

Sarah Emery et al. to the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives in Congress Assembled, Dec. 14, 1861, 37A-G7.1, House Committee on the Judiciary, Petitions & Memorials, ser. 467, 37th Congress, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, RG 233, NA.

V

While abolitionists pressed for emancipation in the District of Columbia, the District's white residents—many of them slaveholders, most of them Southern in origin—squirmed at the prospect of slavery's demise. In early April 1862, as the emancipation bill neared a vote in Congress, Washington's city council mounted a desperate—and futile—effort to prevent its passage, urging the national government not to make the District into "an asylum for free negroes."



This Brady photograph depicts the makeshift conditions of winter quarters. Throughout 1862 the antislavery cause won more support, and increasing numbers of former slaves were put to work for the Union war effort.

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[Washington April, 1862]
copy

Council No 59.
In Board of Alderman
Joint Resolution of Instruction

Be it Resolved by the Board of Aldermen and Board of Common Council of the City of Washington, That these councils, disclaiming any desire improperly to interfere with the business of the National Legislature, deem it not impertinent respectfully to express the opinion that the sentiment of a large majority of the people of this community is adverse to the *unqualified* abolition of slavery in this district at the present critical Juncture in our national affairs.

And be it further resolved, That the Joint Committee representing the interests of this Corporation before Congress be and are hereby instructed to urge respectfully upon the members of that honorable body as the constitutional guard-

ians of the interests and rights of the people of this District, the expediency and the Justice of so shaping any legislation affecting the african race here as to provide Just and proper safe-guards against converting this city, located as it is between two Slaveholding States, into an asylum for free negroes, a population undesirable in every american community, and which it has been deemed necessary to exclude altogether from some even of the non-Slaveholding States.

K Richards
W T. Dove

Joint Resolution by the Washington, D.C., City Council, Apr. 1862, 37A-J4, Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, Petitions & Memorials, ser. 547, 37th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NA. Richards signed as president of the Board of Common Council; Dove, as president of the Board of Aldermen. Mayor Richard Wallach endorsed the resolution, "Approved."



In 1835 this drawing accompanied John Greenleaf Whittier's poem "My Countrymen in Chains!" The appeal was echoed by abolitionists through the 1860s.

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VI

Although a victory for the advocates of immediate abolition, emancipation in the District was compromised by provisions for the compensation of unionist slave owners and the implicit recognition that emancipated slaves had been property legally owned, rather than persons immorally and illegally deprived of their rights. This concession to slaveholders, like the Union's continuing sanction of slavery in the border states, was unacceptable to those who regarded human bondage as a sin against God and man. Meeting in Pennsylvania in May 1862, the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church and the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church urged Congress to remove "a foul blot upon the national escutcheon," warning that continuation of slavery within the Union would invoke divine disapproval.

City of Allegheny Penn^a May 30th 1862

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, in Congress Assembled;

The General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, now in session in the City of Pittsburgh, Pa, and the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, now in session in the City of Allegheny, Pa, believing that the holding of human beings as slaves is a sin against the God of heaven, a manifest transgression of the law of Him who came to preach deliverance to the captives, a gross violation of the rights of man, utterly irreconcilable with the principles of human liberty, destructive of the best interests of the land, a foul blot upon the national escutcheon, a prime cause of the existing national rebellion, and if continued, a sure provocative of further and greater judgments of God upon the nation, would earnestly appeal to the Congress of the United States to adopt at once all the measures competent to it, to secure the immediate emancipation of all human beings now held in oppressive and degrading bondage in any part of this land, and so far as such an act of justice may avail, to avert the just indignation of God Most High, and secure the United States from the recurrence of any similar iniquitous assault upon our national civilization and liberties

Joseph T. Cooper	Moderator of General Assembly of United Presbyterian Church
James Prestley	P. Clerk of General Assembly of United Presbyterian Church
James Wallace	Moderator of Synod of Reformed Presbyterian Church
Samuel Bowden	Clerk of Synod of Reformed Presbyterian Church

Joseph T. Cooper et al. to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, May 30, 1862, 37A-G7.2, House Committee on the Judiciary, Petitions & Memorials, ser. 467, 37th Congress, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, RG 233, NA.

VII

In presenting the case for emancipation, abolitionists frequently joined moral arguments with utilitarian ones. In May 1862, a group of New York Quakers—denominating themselves the

"Friends of Human Progress"—asserted that the ownership of human beings was not merely a sin against God, but an offense to man. Among its baneful effects, slavery had produced in white Northerners "a wicked prejudice" against blacks, which led the federal government to handicap its own war effort by rejecting the proffered aid of former slaves. If the nation was to be saved, they contended, universal freedom must be made its guiding principle.

Waterloo [N.Y.] May 31st 1862

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
The "Friends of Human Progress," assembled in their Yearly Meeting at Junius, near Waterloo Seneca County New York, in view of the unhappy condition of our country, scourged by a terrible civil war, respectfully and earnestly offer their views and desires, as to the Cause of this war, and the means whereby it must end.

SLAVERY IS ITS CAUSE. This Nation is but illustrating anew the lesson of History that Slavery is always the element of danger in the State;—and this in the nature of things, since permanent Peace, Union and Order are impossible save through wise obedience to those Divine Laws of Justice, Freedom and Fraternity, which Slavery repudiates.

Slaveholders plotted this Rebellion. Slaveholders opened this war, and lead in its conduct with desparate malignity.

By an evil necessity inherent in the System they uphold, *it must either rule or ruin*;—hence this foul Rebellion

Our sons and brothers and loved ones, have gone forth freely in our country's defence, and we are grieved and heart-sick to see them the victims and sufferers in the guilty waste of human life, the needless exposure to hard labor and fatigue; results of a weak tenderness toward Slavery in the conduct of this war on the part of the Government.

It is Shameful that a wicked prejudice, created and fostered by Slavery,—and which rebel slaveholders now rejoice to find their ally—prevents the acceptance of the proffered aid of the negro, and flings all the burthen and peril of war on the northern Soldier.

It is folly without parallel to refuse the help of the *only friends* the Government has in large portions of the South. It is base ingratitude to drive back those friends into cruel hands.

In the presence of national law, and of the necessities of war *rebels have no rights*. The first gun fired against Fort Sumter shattered the fetters from the limbs of every Slave in the rebel States, under the same principle by which that base act made all its perpetrators and abeitors outlaws.

No legal or Constitutional barrier stands in the way.

As to the few loyal Slaveowners in the Border States, if they be *truly* loyal they will share any sacrifice to which the ending of Slavery will subject them as their ready offering for their country's safety:—especially when, in the light of a few years of Freedom the sacrifice will be found more seeming than real, and the Government stands ready to make them such compensation as may be its share of indemnity for a common complicity with the emancipation.

Under the war-power there is ample authority for the total ending of Slavery—so necessary to the safety, even to the very existence of our Nation.

We wish Peace, but it is only possible with Freedom,—broad and impartial *as the right of all, irrespective of race*.

We wish Safety and a high Future for our country, imperilled by the wickedness it has nursed and nurtured in its midst.

We therefore ask that in this Crisis you will use your abundant power TO DECREE THE EMANCIPATION OF EVERY SLAVE,

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with a high faith that Divine Wisdom has so ordered that it is always safe to do right.

In behalf of the Meeting—as its earnest and unanimous expression.

Waterloo Yearly Meeting, May 31, 1862	} G B Stephens } Phebe B Dean } Secretaries }	Phillip G. Moore } Chairman }
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Phillip G. Moore et al. to the Congress of the United States, May 31, 1862, 38A-G25.1, House Select Committee on Emancipation, Petitions & Memorials, ser. 479, 38th Congress, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, RG 233, NA.

VIII

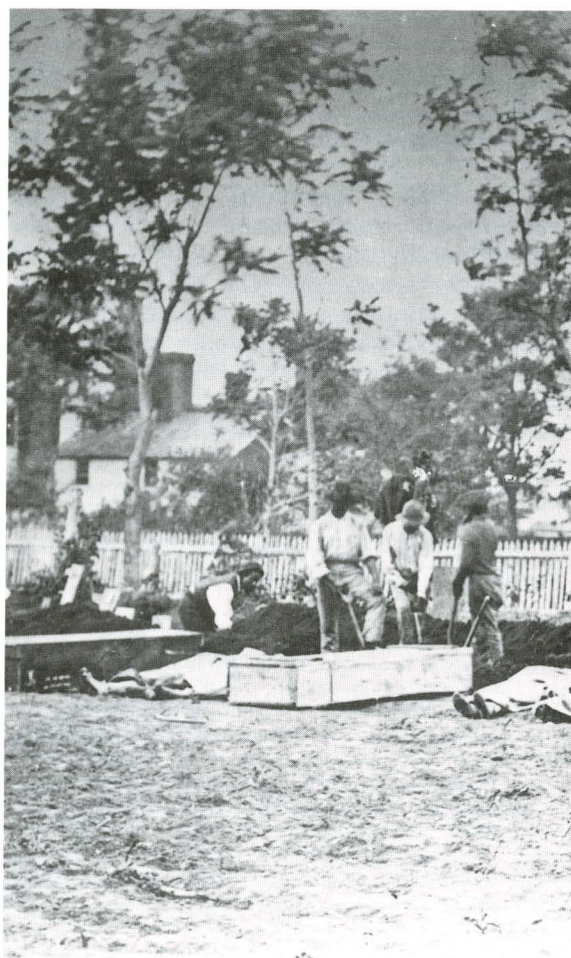
While abolitionists cheered the advance of their cause during the spring of 1862, slavery's friends were horrified by the course of events. Congress, which had abolished slavery in the District of Columbia, seemed poised to do the same in the western territories. Legislation to detach West Virginia from Virginia and admit it as a free state was wending its way through Congress. Radical senators and representatives were calling for the confiscation of all rebel property—including slaves. In the South, the policy of excluding blacks from Union lines had collapsed as the federal army became increasingly dependent on black laborers. Even the president had bent with the winds of change and publicly advocated emancipation in the border states, urging both houses of Congress to approve a joint resolution pledging financial aid to any state that adopted an acceptable plan of compensated emancipation. In the face of this onslaught, Northern opponents of abolition, convinced "that our Federal Government was made for the white race," insisted that Congress stem the revolution.

[Preble County, Ohio June 1862]

To the Honorable House of Representatives in Congress of the United States assembled We the undersigned Petitioners Citizens of the County of Preble and State of Ohio, respectfully represent that our Federal Government was made for the white race— Therefore we ask that this war shall not be waged in the spirit of conquest or subjugation; nor for the purposes of overthrowing or interfering with the rights and institutions of any of the states—but to defend and maintain the constitution, and to preserve the union with all the rights of the states unimpaired—and we earnestly insist that as soon as these objects can be accomplished by a just compromise, the war ought to cease—and we do further insist that you will drop the negro, preserve our constitution, and legislate for the freedom and welfare of the white people of all the States, who are your constituents

[378 signatures]

J. P. Brookins et al. to Honorable House of Representatives, [June 1862], 37A-G7.3, House Committee on the Judiciary, Petitions & Memorials, ser. 467, 37th Congress, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, RG 233, NA.



Union forces grew more dependent on black laborers. Here men bury the dead at a Fredericksburg, VA, hospital.

IX

During the summer of 1862, black people and their allies cheered the advance of freedom's cause. In mid-July 1862, Congress enacted the Second Confiscation Act and Militia Act, which together freed all slaves owned by rebels and authorized the president to employ "persons of African descent" in any capacity to suppress the rebellion. Soon thereafter, Lincoln informed his cabinet of his intention to issue a proclamation of emancipation in the seceded states. On September 22, after waiting several weeks for a suitable military victory, the president issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that as of January 1, 1863, slaves in all the states still in rebellion would be free. The prospect of general emancipation in the Confederacy raised important questions about the future of black people in freedom. The Emancipation Society of Boston, composed of some of the city's most prominent abolitionists, urged

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At a deserted camp after a battle, a wounded Union soldier in Zouave costume received water and attention from a black soldier. This Brady photograph is undated.

Congress to consider the ramifications of that revolutionary change. The place to begin, they thought, was with the establishment of a federal Bureau of Emancipation to oversee "the birth of a race."

Boston. December 12th 1862.

To the Congress of the United States. Your memorialists, the Emancipation League of Boston, Massachusetts, respectfully represent.

This nation is suddenly called to preside at the birth of a race.— Such a crisis—"a nation born in a day,"—devolves upon rulers and people grave responsibilities.

Heretofore, the occurrence of new exigencies; creating large increase of labors, has suggested the necessity of an increase in the number of administrative departments, or an enlargement of their functions. Some years ago, the Department of the Interior was created; the past year has witnessed the creation of a new office—The Commission of Internal Revenue,—for many years there has existed a Bureau of Indian Affairs.

There are now within our limits about four millions of the African Race—a far greater number than that of the Indians has ever been. The care and disposal of these persons are encumbered with grave difficulties.

Thousands of them are now in the service of the Government or supported by its bounty. Those so employed have no sufficient guarantee against the misconduct or neglect of the persons having charge of them; and, on the other hand there is no sufficient caution observed that the bounty of the Government be not needlessly or hurtfully applied,

By the operation of the President's Proclamation of September 22^d 1862, thousands, and we trust millions more will be released from slavery; these freed men must have the opportunity to take care of themselves, or their protection and support will lay upon the Country a burden too grievous to be borne: There is no high official whose special duty it is to see that this branch of the public service is faithfully administered, and there is danger that the great experiment of the reconstruction of Southern Society on the basis of free labor may fail solely through neglect or mal-administration.—

In the present state of things there is now the greatest irregularity and injustice in the government of these persons; one rule prevailing at Port Royal, another at New Orleans, a third in Kentucky, and a fourth in Washington; their wages are often inadequate and frequently withheld; and, owing mainly to the want of a well defined policy on the part of the government, they are, as a matter of course, liable to neglect and often to wrong and outrage at the hands of prejudiced subordinates.

By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the
"year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred
"and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within
"any State or designated part of a State, the people
"whereof shall then be in rebellion against the
"United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and
"forever free; and the Executive Government of the
"United States, including the military and naval
"authority thereof, will recognize and maintain
"the freedom of such persons, and will do no act
"or acts to repress such persons, or any of them,
"in any efforts they may make for their actual
"freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day

Soon after the Second Confiscation Act in July 1862, Lincoln expressed his intention to issue a proclamation of emancipation. It was issued on September 22 and declared slaves in states still in rebellion to be free.

PROLOGUE

In view of the Emancipation of so many of these people, it becomes of the highest importance to inquire what are the best regulations for their new condition, and what has been the experience of other times and nations in similar emergencies. There is at present great ignorance on these points among our people and among even our Civil and Military officers.— To remedy a like ignorance in England, France and Russia, in Denmark and in Holland, the governments of those Countries have instituted committees of Parliament, Grand Commissions, and similar bodies which have accumulated facts of the greatest value to guide the action of those Governments. For want of such facts we are now in danger of hasty and unwise legislation, which may still further complicate the difficulties of the Country.

The Negro's claim at the hands of this Nation is, simply, justice. The Freedmen have a right to fair play:—to a fair trial of the experiment of their capacity for self support and progress. Such an experiment has never yet failed: if it fails in our hands, we shall be held responsible to God and to posterity for the failure.

Your memorialists cannot find words to express the magnitude of the subject which they thus bring before you; they regard it as of more moment than any question of currency or of revenue, since it relates to the great source of wealth in a large part of our Country—the laboring population; and concerns these not alone in that aspect, but as human beings, possessed of rights to whom we owe duties, and as members of a race whom we have long and cruelly oppressed.

We are profoundly impressed with the conviction that without some such system for the speedy organization of the Emancipated labor the proclamation of September 22^d 1862, will prove either fruitless or only a proclamation of anarchy.— With such a system administered in an intelligent spirit of justice and humanity, Emancipation is prosperity to the South, progress to the African race, and Peace to the Republic.

We believe the freedmen who have come within our lines already have earned, as a general thing, more than their care has cost, and that if justice, fair play and fair pay, could be secured to them, they would call for no charity and be no burden either to private citizens or to the government.

Your memorialists therefore, respectfully and earnestly urge upon Congress, the importance of the immediate establishment of a Bureau of Emancipation.

And as in duty bound we ever pray.

S. E. Sewall President

James M. Stone— Secretary.

George L. Stearns	Edwin Wright	} Ex. Comm.
S. G. Howe.	T. P. Chandler	
F. W. Bird	Edw ^d Atkinson	
Albert G. Browne,	Chas. W. Slack	
S. R. Urbino		

S. E. Sewall et al. to the Congress of the United States, Dec. 12, 1862, 37A-H9.4, Senate Committee on Military Affairs, Petitions & Memorials, 37th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NA.

X

Although the emancipation of Southern slaves had become increasingly certain by late 1862, the form it would take was far from clear. President Lincoln's longtime advocacy of "colonization" caused black people and their allies considerable concern. Lincoln had included provisions for the removal of black people from the United States

in his proposals for gradual, compensated emancipation in the border states. At his insistence, the District of Columbia emancipation bill had appropriated \$100,000 to colonize blacks in the District who wished to emigrate. In mid-August 1862, meeting with Northern black leaders at the White House, Lincoln had asserted that "on this broad continent, not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours. . . . It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated." His audience differed respectfully with the president but evidently did not change his views, for he reiterated his support for colonization in the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Some months later, H. P. Smith, a free black from New Jersey, took Lincoln more sternly to task. He argued that colonization was politically unwise, economically impracticable, and "inhuman in Conception & practice," for it promised to deprive blacks of their most basic right: a home in their native land.

Saddle River, N.J., Feb. 1, 1863

To the Senate & House of Representatives:

Whereas the President of the United States in the month of August last made a public offer to Colonize the Colored Citizens of this Country in Central America or elsewhere, said offer being based on an act of Congress placing a sum of money at his disposal for that purpose, the undersigned, after a careful consideration of the subject, would respectfully represent;

(1st.) That the act of appropriation referred to is in excess of the authority of Congress, entirely unwarranted by the Constitution which does not Contemplate, nor give authority for the Colonization of any Class of persons, either White or Colored.

(2nd) The Colonization as proposed of the persons mentioned is in the highest degree impolitic. Consider sirs, if you please, that in all the Southern States, they are the only producers the only skilled laborers, whose places Could not be filled by others equally desirable in a score of years, if ever; & Consider, moreover, that they are the only loyal people in that entire region; faithful among the faithless found; just such a class as is especially needed to put down the present atrocious insurrection Against the National authority, & just such a class is needed, with the rights & privileges of freemen, to prevent the possibility of similar insurrections in future, Beware, lest by persisting in this Colonization scheme you put a weapon in the hands of the wily enemy; lest you alienate the affections of a people whose loyalty has risen superior, & will rise superior, to everything but expatriation;

(3d.) Colonization is an impracticability, we may almost say an impossibility. At the rate of a thousand a day, how long, think you, would it take to remove the Colored population from the Country? & how much would it Cost, making due allowance for the pickings & stealings to feather the nests of the disinterested agents of the scheme? Calculate for yourselves if you please.

(4th.) It is inhuman in Conception & practice. As far as it goes every step it takes is in violation of humanity. To succeed even in a single state would need all the appliances of the infernal slave system, the blood-hound, the shackles, the lash & the slave-ship.

Further, if as some would have us believe the scheme originates in a very tender regard for our rights we would

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Even after announcing the Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862, Lincoln, in his December 1 annual message to Congress, proposed a plan of "compensated emancipation" that would not be complete until January 1, 1900.

most respectfully suggest that the right we value above all others is the right on which Colonization infringes: viz: the right to a home in our native land, or the right to choose our home for ourselves free from the offensive intermeddling of pretended friends: or if it is intended as a charity, we would like very much somehow or other to hint, in the very gentlest manner possible, the propriety of withholding such gushing liberality till at least a slight portion of us ask for it.

In view of the above facts, therefore, in response to the offer of the President, reiterated by Senator Pomeroy, the undersigned in behalf of themselves & brethren, would most earnestly & respectfully ask the repeal of the act making the appropriation on which said offer was based.

God & our native land.

H. P. Smith

H. P. Smith to the Senate & House of Representatives, Feb. 1, 1863, 37A-H4, Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, Petitions & Memorials, 37th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NA.

XI

By January 1863, with the promulgation of the final Emancipation Proclamation, Northern armies no longer fought to save the Union as it was (thereby preserving slavery). Instead, the war effort was directed at slaveholders and the institution that underpinned their power. The shift heartened unionists who had previously

rankled at the limited aims of the war. Among the most ardent of these were German immigrants in New York, some of them no doubt refugees from the failed Revolution of 1848. They saw in Southern slaveholders an overweening aristocracy that tyrannized slaves much as German landowners had abused them. The Union's war against slavery fired the immigrants' imagination and brought them fully into the Union cause.

[Brooklyn, N.Y., Feb. 11, 1863]

Resolutions

unanimously adopted at the mass-meeting held Febr. 11th 1863 at the Turner's-Hall Brooklyn F.D. N.Y.

Resolved, That we consider this war, not only to be a war for dissolution or preservation of the Union, but to be war of the Aristocracy against the Democracy; of tyranny against freedom.

Resolved, That we are in favor of the preservation of the Union and against the dissolution of any part of the same, and see in a united republic the only surety of the preservation of our freedom.

Resolved, That we are of the opinion that the southern Aristocracy would never have existed, had it not been for the power, which it had in slavery, and we are therefore in favor of emancipation.

Resolved, That we are of the opinion that a vigorous prosecution of the war can be had only by discharging all disloyal and incompetent officers and placing in command leaders like

TO COLORED MEN!

FREEDOM, Protection, Pay, and a Call to Military Duty!

The "protection" in this broadside referred to Lincoln's General Order No. 233 of July 21, 1863, which declared that the government would protect its black troops by punishing a rebel soldier for every Union soldier executed or enslaved.

John C. Fremont, whose past action¹ gives the government the best guarantee for the strictest enforcement of these measures, which will put down the rebellion.

S Spitzer, Secretary E E Petersen, Chairman

Resolutions adopted at a Mass Meeting Held at the Turner's Hall in Brooklyn, N.Y., Feb. 11, 1863, 37A-H9.4, Senate Committee on Military Affairs & the Militia, Petitions & Memorials, 37th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NA.

¹While commanding in Missouri in August 1861, General Frémont had declared free the slaves of all rebel masters in the state. President Lincoln had forced him to modify his policy in conformity with the more limited provisions of the First Confiscation Act, which freed only those slaves who had labored directly in the Confederate war effort.

XII

As the war turned in the Union's favor and emancipation became increasingly secure, the nation turned to the consequences of those momentous changes. In his annual message to Congress of December 1863, President Lincoln outlined his program of amnesty and reconstruction. Lincoln proposed to reinstate former Confederates (with a few exceptions, including high-ranking civil and military officials and those who had abused captured black Union soldiers) to "all rights of property, except as to slaves," upon their swearing that they would support the United States government and abide by all congressional laws and presidential proclamations respecting slavery. The president also outlined a plan by which the loyal citizens of a rebel state (once they numbered 10 percent of the voting population) could form a state government and seek readmission to the Union. The new state governments, Lincoln insisted, must acknowledge the freedom of former slaves but might be permitted to institute laws concerning them

"consistent, as a temporary arrangement, with their present condition as a laboring, landless, and homeless class." Lincoln's plan sparked sharp debate in the North over the nature of the still-unfinished war, the meaning of freedom in the former slave states, and the terms of national reconciliation. Citizens of Boston saw the president's proposal as a dangerous concession to traitorous former slaveholders at the expense of former slaves and other loyal citizens, North and South.

BOSTON, Mass., January 16, 1864.
PETITION

To the Congress of the United States regarding the proclamation of amnesty and the plan of reconstruction, contained in the last presidential message.

The President of the United States in his last message to Congress proposed in the proclamation of amnesty annexed to it, a plan of reconstruction for the seceded states, based upon that proclamation, which we regard as incompatible with right and as dangerous for the welfare of the republic, and this for the following reasons:

1. The proclamation of amnesty specifies no time, so that rebels who may yet for years continue the traitorous and fratricidal war against their fellow-citizens, can at any time, as they choose, avail themselves of it, whenever hereafter they regard the further continuation of their criminal undertaking as hopeless. Hence this amnesty promises unlimited guiltlessness, not only for past, but also for future crimes, and thereby becomes an indirect inducement for the continuation of the war instead of shortening it.

2. It violates all justice, by making no exception with regard to any crime but such as were committed against negro troops and their officers, so that every robbing murderer, even bloody Quantrell,¹ can by a mere oath clear himself of the guilt of the most horrid deeds, for the perpetration of which a war for slavery served him as a pretence.

All guerillas, and in general all, who fought outside of the regular army of the rebels, and likewise all persons convicted of piracy ought to be excluded from all amnesty, since, like the leaders and originators of the rebellion, they acted entirely from their own impulse, and neither any authority nor conscription can serve them as an excuse.

3. The hand of a barbarous and traitorous murderer, dripping with the blood of innocent fellow citizens, if raised to an oath of loyalty, or extended for the pollution of the ballot-

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box, is a mockery on oath and a desecration of the position of loyal citizens. Missouri has sufficiently proved that a mere oath as a satisfactory means for the civil rehabilitation of enemies who have laid aside all conscience, leads only to this that traitors are secure in loyal camps where they may give new assistance to the cause of rebellion.

4. The proclamation of amnesty almost entirely repeals the law of confiscation, and reinstates all rebels, with the exception of a few hundred persons, in the possession, not only of their movable property, but also of their forfeited lands. Thereby it lays also for the future the foundation for a great landed aristocracy, the most dangerous class that a republic can foster, and robs the nation which has already the prospect of a debt of 2000 millions, of the principal resource from which it could expect indemnification for a part of the cost of the war. At the same time it destroys the means of granting to the soldiers who defend the republic against the most shameful of all rebellions, a reward consisting of land in the territories which they have conquered, as well as that of creating through the settlement of negroes and of new immigrants a security for a regeneration of the disturbed country for the interest of liberty.

5. It enables the enemies of the republic, directly to revive slavery, the cause of the war.

6. It does not charge any of the states to be reconstructed, to make suitable provisions for the freed negroes, but delivers their fate entirely into the hands of their former masters. The consequence of this must be, that the former slaves, "homeless and landless" as they are, will be compelled to serve at any price the landowners who have obtained amnesty, and that the longed for freedom will become for them a curse instead of a blessing. And what prevents without an alteration of the constitution or an appropriate law of Congress, their former masters, again appropriating them as slaves, buying them of themselves?

7. The decree, that one tenth of the population could reconstruct a state, is entirely arbitrary, without any support in the constitution or from reason, especially as it attempts to restore the destroyed legality ante bellum by entirely revolutionary means, in the name of the president, not in the name of the chief commander of the army. With the same right as one tenth, one hundredth or one thousandth of the population might be made the legal masters of the state. The condition which one tenth will create, will most probably not be acknowledged by the remaining nine tenths. New and endless difficulties and confusions will arise therefrom, and the army will finally have to take hold of the work of reconstruction just as much and even under more difficult circumstances, than if the reconquered states had from the first been treated as territories.

8. By the proposed reconstruction the President has—as we think—transgressed his authority and encroached upon the rights of Congress.

For these reasons and because the President has declared himself ready to accept a better plan of reconstruction, and neither does nor can extend the amnesty to that rebel property in which the rights of third persons are concerned, and since—according to our view of the matter—among these third persons are above all the government and the people of the Union who must for the immense damage they have suffered through the rebellion demand indemnification as far as it can be obtained,

Therefore we, the undersigned, would request Congress, themselves to take hold of reconstruction, and this in such a way, that all the evils and dangers above referred to may be avoided, and in their stead the following objects be obtained:

1. Abolition of slavery forever and the conferring of the full rights of citizens upon the freed negroes, so that they may, not only as voters but also as militia men be supports of a better order of things.

2. Avoidance of a landed aristocracy by including the confiscated lands under the homestead bill and giving small parcels to new settlers, as far as they are not to be given to Union soldiers, negroes and the poor whites of the South for cultivation.

3. Free education for the negroes and the uneducated white people;

4. Arrangements which will make the rebels politically harmless until a well regulated condition of the seceded states has been secured.

[66 signatures]







K. Heingen et al. to the Congress of the United States, Jan. 16, 1864, 38A-H8.2, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Petitions & Memorials, 38th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NA.

¹William C. Quantrill, a guerrilla leader in Missouri and Kansas.

XIII

Women played a critical role in the struggle against the last vestiges of slavery within the Union. By pointing to the vulnerability of slave women's "sacred honor" to the masters' power

WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION PETITION.

-  Put no signatures on the back of the Petition.
-  When this sheet is full, paste another at the bottom.
-  If possible, send us contributions to help pay the heavy expenses incurred at this office.
-  Do not copy the names—return the original signatures; no matter if the paper is worn or soiled.
-  When your district is thoroughly canvassed, return the petitions and donations to this office.
-  Address SUSAN B. ANTHONY, Secretary, ~~W.C.~~ National League, Room 20, Cooper Institute, New York.

400,000 persons signed this petition to urge the entire abolition of slavery in the United States. An identical petition with the heading "Men's Emancipation Petition" was circulated to gather men's signatures.

PROLOGUE



Susan B. Anthony (left) with her sister Mary and abolitionist Wendell Phillips. A vigorous opponent of slavery and proponent of women's rights, Anthony dedicated her life's work to the emancipation of blacks and women.

PROLOGUE

and by connecting chattel bondage with the "slavery of sex," abolitionist women had—even before the war—fused their own emancipation to that of the slave. With the beginning of the fighting, the links between women's rights and abolition grew closer. In May 1863, feminists who had been active in both the antislavery and women's rights movements formed the Women's Loyal National League. In early 1864, the league launched a campaign "for the ENTIRE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY," asking women to transform their special role on the battlefield and the home front into support for emancipation. Declaring that "the angels of mercy and justice are twin sisters," the league urged women who were "absorbed in ministering to the outward alone" to come to terms with "the philosophy of the revolution through which they passed." Eleven women from Osage and Shawnee counties, Kansas, were among the 400,000 persons—men as well as women—who had signed the league's petition by July 1864.

Osage County, Kansas [early 1864?]

WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION PETITION.

Put no signatures on the back of the Petition.

When this sheet is full, paste another at the bottom.

If possible, send us contributions to help pay the heavy expenses incurred at this office.

Do not copy the names—return the original signatures; no matter if the paper is worn or soiled.

When your district is thoroughly canvassed, return the petitions and donations to this office.

Address SUSAN B. ANTHONY, Secretary W. L. National League, Room 20, Cooper Institute, New York.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States:

The Undersigned, Women of the United States above the age of eighteen years, earnestly pray that your Honorable Body will pass, at the earliest practicable day, an Act emancipating all persons of African descent held to involuntary service or labor in the United States.

NAME.	RESIDENCE.
<div style="text-align: right; margin-right: 20px;">[11 signatures]</div>	

OFFICE OF THE WOMEN'S LOYAL NATIONAL LEAGUE, }
Room No. 20, Cooper Institute.

THE WOMEN'S LOYAL NATIONAL LEAGUE, New York, January 25, 1864.

TO THE WOMEN OF THE REPUBLIC:

We ask you to sign and circulate this petition for the ENTIRE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY. We have now ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND signatures, but we want a MILLION before Congress adjourns. Remember the President's Proclamation reaches only the Slaves of Rebels. The jails of LOYAL Kentucky are to-day "crammed" with Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama slaves,

advertised to be sold for their jail fees "ACCORDING TO LAW," precisely as before the war!!! While slavery exists ANYWHERE there can be freedom NOWHERE. THERE MUST BE A LAW ABOLISHING SLAVERY. We have undertaken to canvass the Nation for freedom. Women, you cannot vote or fight for your country. Your only way to be a power in the Government is through the exercise of this, one, sacred, *Constitutional* "RIGHT OF PETITION;" and we ask you to use it NOW to the utmost. Go to the rich, the poor, the high, the low, the soldier, the civilian, the white, the black—gather up the names of all who *hate* slavery—all who love LIBERTY, and would have it the LAW of the land—and lay them at the feet of Congress, your silent but potent vote for human freedom guarded by law.

You have shown true courage and self-sacrifice from the beginning of the war. You have been angels of mercy to our sick and dying soldiers in camp and hospital, and on the battle-field. But let it not be said that the women of the Republic, absorbed in ministering to the outward alone, saw not the philosophy of the revolution through which they passed; understood not the moral struggle that convulsed the nation—the irrespressible conflict between liberty and slavery. Remember the angels of mercy and justice are twin sisters, and ever walk hand in hand. While you give yourselves so generously to the Sanitary and Freedmen's Commissions, forget not to hold up the eternal principles on which our Republic rests. Slavery once abolished, our brothers, husbands and sons will never again, for ITS SAKE, be called to die on the battle-field, starve in rebel prisons, or return to us crippled for life; but our country free from the one blot that has always marred its fair escutcheon, will be an example to all the world that "RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTHETH A NATION."

THE GOD OF JUSTICE IS WITH US, AND OUR WORD, OUR WORK—OUR PRAYER FOR FREEDOM—WILL NOT, CANNOT BE IN VAIN.

E. CADY STANTON,
President.

SUSAN B. ANTHONY,
Secretary W.L.N. League
Room 20, Cooper Institute,
New York.

Hannah Seiler et al. to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, [early 1864?], 38A-H20, Senate Committee on Slavery, Petitions & Memorials, 38th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NA. A notation indicates that the signers had donated one dollar to the league.

XIV

By mid-1864, efforts to secure emancipation had come to focus on a constitutional amendment, introduced in early 1864, that would abolish slavery in the United States forever. Support for the amendment came from many quarters, including state legislatures. In January 1865, Rhode Island lawmakers put the case for the amendment most forcefully when they argued that slavery violated "the spirit of all free institutions of Government," basic "principles of Justice," and "common sense." The amendment passed the House of Representatives the same month and was submitted to the states for ratification.

PROLOGUE

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.
January SESSION, A.D. 1865

Resolution—relative to a proposed amendment of the Constitution of the United States to abolish slavery.

Whereas—the existence of African slavery based upon the title to oppress a race because of its complexion, is at variance with the spirit of all free institutions of Government; against the manifest principles of Justice, and dire violence to the common sense of mankind: And whereas, the existence of this institution has impelled a large majority of our Federal population who uphold and support it, to attempt to overthrow our Federal Constitution, and to involve the country in a terrible war, which has not only absolved us from all obligations to uphold the relations existing under this institution of master and slave, but has imposed upon us the duty of exerting ourselves to extinguish that relation forever.

It is therefore

Resolved—That this General Assembly heartily commends to the favorable action of the Congress of the United States the Constitutional amendment pending before that body to abolish and forever prohibit the existence of slavery or involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, in any of the United States or of the Territories thereof.

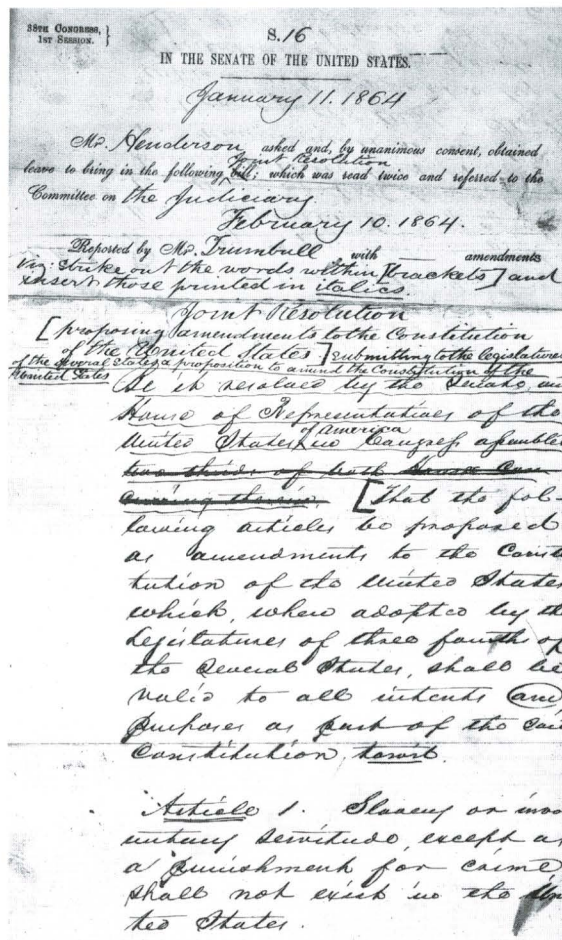
Resolved, That the Governor be and he hereby is requested to forward a copy of the foregoing Preamble and Resolution to each of the Senators and Representatives in Congress with the request that they be laid before the respective Houses of that body—

John R Bartlett
Secretary of State

James Y Smith
Governor of Rhode Island

Resolution of the General Assembly of Rhode Island, Jan. 18, 1865, 38A-14, Senate Committee on Slavery, Petitions & Memorials, 38th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NA.

Ratified in December 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment freed all persons held in slavery in the United States. The amendment represented the final resolution of a conflict older than the Republic and the beginning of new controversies about the meaning of freedom itself. The petitions and memorials signed by thousands of Americans on both sides of the slavery question had not themselves resolved the issue—the



The Senate draft of the Thirteenth Amendment, which finally abolished slavery in all of the United States.

question of slavery had been settled by blood and iron. However, these memorials offer insight into the course of the struggle and suggest why it could not be resolved by words alone. □

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