

The Prayer of One Hundred Thousand.

SPEECH OF HON. CHAS. SUMNER ON THE PRESENTATION OF THE FIRST
INSTALLMENT OF THE EMANCIPATION PETITION OF THE
WOMEN'S NATIONAL LEAGUE.

In the Senate of the United States, Tuesday, February 9th, 1863.

Mr. SUMNER.—Mr. President: I offer a petition which is now lying on the desk before me. It is too bulky for me to take up. I need not add that it is too bulky for any of the pages of this body to carry.

This petition marks a stage of public opinion in the history of slavery, and also in the suppression of the rebellion. As it is short I will read it:

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.

There is also a duplicate of this petition signed by "men above the age of eighteen years."

It will be perceived that the petition is in rolls. Each roll represents a State. For instance, here is New York with a list of seventeen thousand seven hundred and six names; Illinois with fifteen thousand three hundred and eighty; and Massachusetts with eleven thousand six hundred and forty-one. But I will read the abstract with which I have been furnished:

State.	Men.	Women.	Total.
New York	6,519	11,187	17,706
Illinois	6,382	8,998	15,380
Massachusetts	4,248	7,392	11,641
Pennsylvania	2,259	6,366	8,625
Ohio	3,676	4,654	8,330
Michigan	1,741	4,441	6,182
Iowa	2,025	4,014	6,039
Maine	1,225	4,362	5,587
Wisconsin	1,639	2,391	4,030
Indiana	1,075	2,591	3,666
New Hampshire	393	2,261	2,654
New Jersey	824	1,709	2,533
Rhode Island	827	1,451	2,278
Vermont	375	1,183	1,558
Connecticut	393	1,162	1,555
Minnesota	396	1,094	1,490
West Virginia	82	100	182
Maryland	115	50	165
Kansas	84	74	158
Delaware	67	70	137
Nebraska	13	20	33
Kentucky	21		21
Louisiana (New Orleans)		14	14
Citizens of the United States living in New Brunswick	19	17	36
	34,399	65,601	100,000

These several petitions are consolidated into one petition, being another illustration of the motto on our coin—*E pluribus unum*.

This petition is signed by one hundred thousand men and women, who unite in this unparalleled number to support its prayer. They are from all parts of the country and from every condition of life. They are from the sea-board, fanned by the free airs of the ocean, and from the Mississippi and the prairies of the West, fanned by the free airs which fertilize that extensive region. They are from the families of the educated and uneducated, rich and poor, of every profession, business, and calling in life, representing every sentiment, thought, hope, passion, activity, intelligence which inspires, strengthens, and adorns our social system. Here they are, a mighty army, one hundred thousand strong, without arms or banners; the advance-guard of a yet larger army.

But though memorable for their numbers, these petitioners are more memorable still for the prayer in which they unite. They ask nothing less than universal emancipation; and this they ask directly at the hands of Congress. No reason is assigned. The prayer speaks for itself. It is simple, positive. So far as it proceeds from the women of the country, it is naturally a petition, and not an argument. But I need not remind the Senate that there is no reason so strong as the reason of the heart. Do not all great thoughts come from the heart?

It is not for me, on presenting this petition, to assign reasons which the army of petitioners has forborne to assign. But I may not improperly add that, naturally and obviously, they all feel in their hearts, what reason and knowledge confirm, not only that slavery *as a unit*, one and indivisible, is the guilty origin of the rebellion, but that its influence everywhere, even outside the rebel States, has been hostile to the Union, always impairing loyalty, and sometimes openly menacing the national government. It requires no difficult logic to conclude that such a monster, wherever it shows its head, is a *national enemy*, to be pursued and destroyed as such, or at least a nuisance to the national cause to be abated as such. The petitioners know well that Congress is the depository of those supreme powers by which rebellion, alike in its root and in its distant offshoots, may be surely crushed, and by which unity and peace may be permanently secured. They know well that the action of Congress may be with the co-operation of the slave-masters, or even without the co-operation, under the overruling law of military necessity, or the commanding precept of the Constitution "to guarantee to every State a Republican form of government." Above all, they know well that to save the country from peril, especially to save the national life, there is no power, in the ample arsenal of self-defense, which Congress may not grasp; for to Congress, under the Constitution, belongs the prerogative of the Roman Dictator to see that the Republic receives no detriment. Therefore to Congress these petitioners now appeal. I ask the reference of the petition to the Select Committee on Slavery and Freedmen.

It was referred, after earnest discussion, as Mr. Sumner proposed.

Office of the Women's Loyal National League,

ROOM No. 20, COOPER INSTITUTE,

NEW YORK, April 7, 1864.

DEAR FRIEND: With this you will receive a Form of a Petition to Congress, the object of which you cannot mistake nor regard with indifference.

To procure on it the largest possible number of adult names, at the earliest practicable moment, it is hoped you will regard as less a duty than a pleasure.

Already we have sent one installment of our Petition forward, signed by one hundred thousand persons; the presentation of which, by Senator Sumner, produced a marked effect on both Congress and the country. We hope to send a MILLION before the adjournment of Congress, which we shall easily do and even more, if you and the *twenty thousand* others to whom we have sent petitions will promptly, generously co-operate with us.

For nearly three years has the scourge of war desolated us; sweeping away at least three hundred thousand of the strength, bloom, and beauty of our nation.

And the war-chariot still rolls onward, its iron-wheels deep in human blood!

The God, at whose justice Jefferson long ago trembled, has awaked to the woes of the bondmen.

"For the sighing of the oppressed, and for the crying of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord."

The redemption of that Pledge we now behold in this dread Apocalypse of war.

Nor should we expect or hope the calamity will cease while the fearful cause of it remains.

Slavery has long been our national sin. War is its natural and just retribution.

But the war has made it the *Constitutional right of the Government*, as it always has been the *moral duty of the people*, to abolish slavery. We are, therefore, without excuse, if the solemn duty be not now performed.

With us, *the people*, is the power to achieve the work by our agents in Congress. On us, therefore, rests the momentous responsibility.

Shall we not all join then in one loud, earnest, *effectual* prayer to Congress, which will swell on its ear like the voice of many waters, that this bloody, desolating war shall be arrested and ended, by the immediate and final removal, by Statute Law and amended Constitution, of that crime and curse which alone has brought it upon us?

Now surely is our accepted time.

On our own heads will be the blood of our thousands slain, if, with the power in our own hands, we do not end that system forever, which is so plainly autographed all over with the Divine displeasure.

In the name of justice and of freedom then let us rise and decree the destruction of our destroyer. Let us with myriad voice *compel* Congress to

“Consign it to remorseless fire!
Watch till the last faint spark expire;
Then strew its ashes on the wind,
Nor leave one atom wreck behind.”

In behalf of the Women's League,

SUSAN B. ANTHONY, Sec.

FORM OF PETITION.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, in Congress assembled:

The undersigned, citizens of _____ believing slavery the great cause of the present rebellion, and an institution fatal to the life of Republican government, earnestly pray your honorable bodies to immediately abolish it throughout the United States; and to adopt measures for so amending the Constitution, as for ever to prohibit its existence in any portion of our common country.

MEN.

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WOMEN.