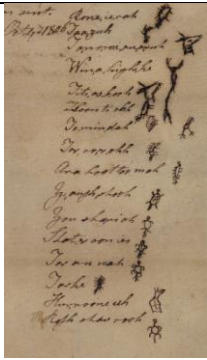
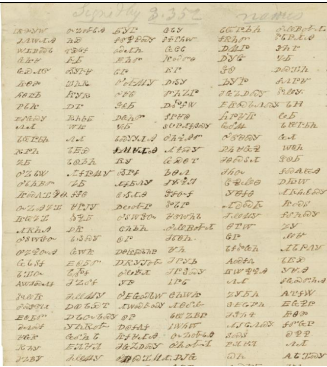
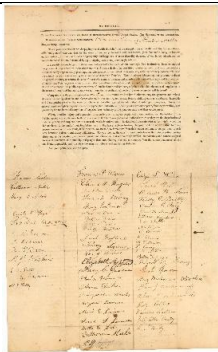


Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

Station 1: Petitions on Relations between the U.S. Government and Native Americans

Tennessee, Kentucky, and the Northwest Territory were the frontier after the American Revolution. A flood of migrants moved into the region and established the states of Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. A society of farmers and agricultural merchants developed, and they established links to markets in the Northeast and abroad. This westward expansion pushed Native American tribes off their ancestral territory. The loss of land was accelerated by government policies, as state and federal governments pushed tribes away from settled regions. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 was the most famous of these laws. These petitions are examples of protests against Indian Removal, and they show how Native Americans, and women who petitioned on their behalf, worked to persuade Congress.

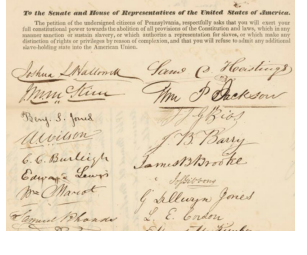
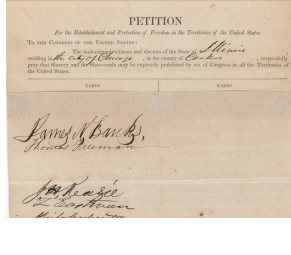
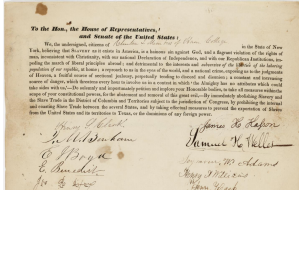
			
Identify the petition and summarize its main point.			
What historical information in the description helps you understand this petition?			
What social or political change was (were) the author(s) seeking?			
How does this petition show people using political tools to achieve a goal?			

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Station 2: Petitions for the Abolition of Slavery or Limits on its Expansion

Although slavery appeared to be dying after the American Revolution, the institution was revived after the War of 1812 with the invention of the cotton gin and the expansion of the South into land well-suited for growing cotton. Rather than withering away, slavery expanded. At the same time, Northern states abolished slavery, and many Northerners called upon Congress to abolish slavery nationwide. Abolitionists also urged Congress to contain slavery by preventing its further expansion into territories not yet admitted into the Union as states. The issue of slavery became a wedge that split the free and slave states. Over time, the abolitionist petitions that flooded into Congress after 1830 made it difficult for the government to avoid a national conflict over slavery. These petitions from Northern states were representative of the ways in which groups of abolitionists worked to persuade Congress.

			
Identify the petition and summarize its main point.			
What historical information in the description helps you understand this petition?			
What social or political change was (were) the author(s) seeking?			
How does this petition show people using political tools to achieve a goal?			

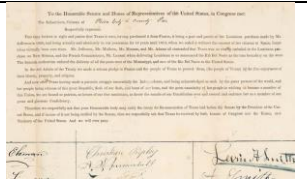
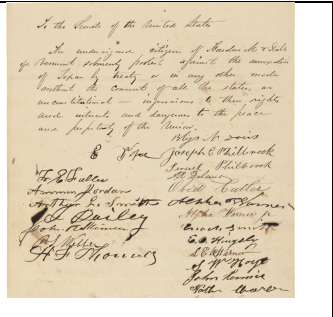
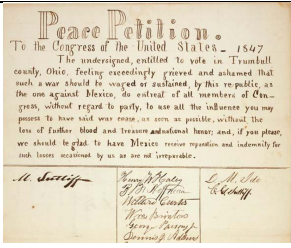


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Station 3: Petitions on the Slave or Free Status of Territories

The westward expansion of the United States deepened the divide between free and slave states, triggering increasingly bitter fights over the status of territories seeking admission as states. Advocates on both sides of the issue lobbied Congress, attempting to define the legality of slavery in territories before their admission. Abolitionists argued that Congress should ban slavery in the District of Columbia and lands not yet admitted as states, but slavery's supporters disagreed. The annexation of Texas and the acquisition of Western lands from Mexico brought the territorial conflict to a head. These petitions reflect a range of opinions about slavery in the territories, showing that opinions were not uniform in slave or free states.

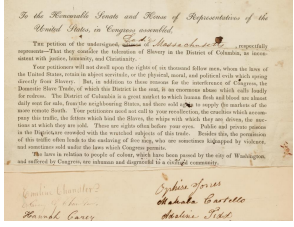
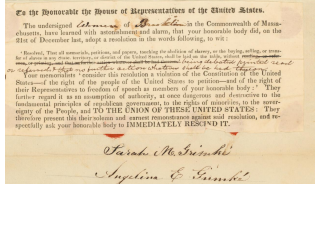
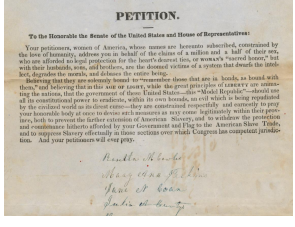
			
<p>Identify the petition and summarize its main point.</p>			
<p>What historical information in the description helps you understand this petition?</p>			
<p>What social or political change was (were) the author (s) seeking?</p>			
<p>How does each petition show women using political means to achieve a goal?</p>			

Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

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Station 4: Women’s Petitions to Congress

Starting around 1830, groups of women began organizing grassroots petitioning campaigns. Working together, they expressed their opinions on a variety of political issues including opposing Indian Removal and calling for the abolition of slavery. Although they were largely excluded from political decisions during this time period, women petitioned on moral grounds and drew attention to issues they viewed as central to national democracy and the well-being of the nation. Women could not vote, but they could, and did, exercise their First Amendment right to petition, and it is through petitions like these that Congress heard their voices.

			
<p>Identify the petition and summarize its main point.</p>			
<p>What historical information in the description helps you understand this petition?</p>			
<p>What social or political change was (were) the author(s) seeking?</p>			
<p>How does this petition show people using political tools to achieve a goal?</p>			



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Reflection Questions:

Instructions: Once you have completed your work at all four stations, answer the Reflection Questions. Be prepared to share your responses with the full class.

1. In what ways do the documents studied in this lesson illustrate how the First Amendment's protection of the right to petition played a vital role in representative government of this era?
2. How do these petitions show that the right to petition is not limited to citizens or voters? What does this suggest about who is represented by Members of the House and Senators?
3. Which of the petitions that you studied in this lesson do you think made the strongest, most persuasive argument? What elements of that petition gave it its power?
4. The right to petition is still intact today. Based on your study of these petitions, what issue do you think would be an appropriate topic for a petition campaign to Congress today, and what type of argument would make your case in the most persuasive way?

