

Congress and Harriet Tubman's Claim for a Pension

Worksheet 1: Decoding the Documents

1. Questions for the general affidavit of Harriet Tubman relating to her claim for a pension:
 - a. Whose actions are described in this affidavit?
 - b. Was the affidavit form filled out by the same person whose actions are described? How do you know?
 - c. What specific services to the nation are asserted as the basis for this claim?
 - d. What compensation is being requested by the petitioner?
2. Questions for the Letter from Sereno E. Payne:
 - a. What is the author of this letter trying to accomplish?
 - b. Why is Tubman already receiving a pension? On what ground is she requesting additional compensation?
 - c. What opinions are cited of those familiar with her case?
3. Questions for H.R. 4982, a bill granting a pension to Harriet Tubman Davis:
 - a. What does this document propose?
 - b. For what aspect of Tubman's service was the pension proposed?
4. Questions for S. Rpt. 1619 to accompany a bill granting a pension to Harriet Tubman Davis:
 - a. Who is the author of this report? Who is the audience?
 - b. What evidence is presented of Tubman's Civil War service?
 - c. Does the Senate committee support or oppose granting a pension to Tubman?
 - d. On what grounds does the report recommend decreasing the pension amount?

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5. Questions for full class discussion of the Act Granting a Pension:
 - a. In the act that Congress ultimately passed which determined Tubman's pension, how much did she receive?
 - b. On what grounds was she granted the pension?

6. Questions for full class discussion of all five documents:
 - a. Based on examination of this evidence, what services to the nation did Tubman render during the Civil War?
 - b. What parts of Tubman's service were not acknowledged in the final act?
 - c. How does the pension amount recommended for Tubman in H.R. 4982 compare to the amount recommended in Senate Report 1619? In the final act?

Revisit the Guiding Question:

To what extent, and for what services, did Congress officially acknowledge Harriet Tubman's Civil War service to her country? Hypothesize reasons that could explain the disconnect between the evidence about Tubman's service and the decision not to grant her a pension on that basis. Take into consideration the date of the final act and the context of other events in that time period.