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**Document 2: Josephine Griffing Petition to Congress, May 1864, HR38A-G10.5, Records of the House of Representatives, RG 233, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.[A]**

**Introduction**

Petitioning was one of the only political outlets for women, as they were denied the right to vote. Anti-slavery women undertook massive petition campaigns before and during the Civil War calling for the abolition of slavery. Josephine Griffing continued the tradition with this petition to the House of Representatives, which asked that Northern and Western women be given special responsibility during the war for the care and education of freedwomen and children. Griffing believed that women would better understand the needs of freedwomen and she envisioned women acting as ministers, teachers, doctors, and providing for the general welfare of these former slaves. She hoped that Congress would give women's work in the freedmen's aid movement governmental approval.

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**THIS MEMORIAL,**

Representing a large number of the Women of the Republic, who see before your honorable body proposed legislation, looking to the recognition of the manhood of the millions of American people, heretofore slaves in this nation, but now, by the Government made free; aware that the Government is at present burdened, and the men of our country over-taxed with labor and care, necessarily imposed upon those not called into the army.

Your memorialists, women of the North and North-West, pray that you will allow us to share more fully in the responsibility and labor, so remarkably laid upon the Government and the men of the North, in the care and education of these freedmen.

Government having called the able-bodied men from this emancipated race into the service of the country, their women and children are necessarily exposed and unprotected, and demand and must receive, from the hands of Government, through

its appointed agents, such *aid* as their transmission from slavery to freedom under the above named circumstances demands.

These Freedmen's Associations being composed mainly of women and children, whose wants and necessities are fully understood by your memorialists, we ask you to commission us through competent agents to visit these associations to ascertain their condition; to raise funds in the North to supply their needs; to select teachers who are qualified to instruct in all branches of practical education, both of mind and of womanhood--aiming at the direct development of self-reliance and self support, and appoint them to certain associations and specific work; to provide physicians for their hospitals, of either women or men, who are qualified to treat disease on the most safe and natural system, according to the judgement of your memorialists; and to send to them ministers, either men or women, who can simplify religious instruction to the comprehension of those so lately escaping from centuries of gross ignorance, not only of the principles of religion, but of the art of reading--in short, to look after, and secure the general welfare of these women and children of the freedmen, associated in the various States of the South and West, where they are now, or may be hereafter appointed by the Government to remain.

Your memorialists pray further, that you will grant us such commission at the earliest practicable moment, that we may offer the necessary inducement to organization for this specific work, and be able from your commission to give transport to teachers, ministers and physicians, as well as necessary supplies of clothing for these associations, already suffering for want of attention and the common comforts of life.

In behalf of the country whose imperious calls for labor and self-sacrifice appeal to all her citizens; and in behalf of our sisters so long held in bondage by chattel slavery in this country.

Yours Respectfully,

JOSEPHINE S.  
GRIFFING  
[with 33 signatures]