

Senate Speech Arguing to Extend Funding for the Freedmen's Bureau

Excerpt from speech by Hon. L. Trumbull of Illinois in the Senate of the United States, January 19, 1866:

Now, sir, we have thrown upon us four millions of people who have toiled all their lives for others; who, unlike the Indians, had no property at the beginning of the rebellion; who were never permitted to own anything, never permitted to eat the bread their own hands had earned; many of whom are without any means of support, in the midst of a prejudiced and hostile population who have been struggling to overthrow the Government. These four million people, made free by the acts of war and constitutional amendment, have been, wherever they could, loyal and true to the Union; and the Senator seriously asks, what authority have we to appropriate money to take care of them? What would he do with them? Would he allow them to starve and die? Would he turn them over to the mercy of the men who, through their whole lives, have had their earnings, to be enslaved again?

Who is Trumbull talking to/about?

Directions: Four major players in Trumbull’s speech have been identified in the underlined text below: (1) the Senate opposition (those who oppose using government funds to support freedpeople), (2) the country / US government, (3) Black Americans / freedpeople, and (4) white Southerners / former slaveholders. To help clarify how Trumbull characterizes each group, do the following:

- Assign a different color or symbol to represent each of these four groups.
- Mark each of the bolded nouns or pronouns in the remainder of the speech according to your colors/symbols to identify where Trumbull is referring to each group.
- Fill out the chart on the back with details from the speech to show how Trumbull represents each group.

Now, **sir** (**Senate opposition**), **we** (**the country / US government**) have thrown upon **us** four millions of **people** (**Black Americans / freedpeople**) **who** have toiled all their lives for **others** (**white Southerners / former slaveholders**); **who**, unlike the Indians, had no property at the beginning of the rebellion; **who** were never permitted to own anything, never permitted to eat the bread **their** own hands had earned; many of **whom** are without any means of support, in the midst of a prejudiced and hostile **population who** have been struggling to overthrow **the Government**. **These** four million **people**, made free by the acts of war and constitutional amendment, have been, wherever **they** could, loyal and true to **the Union**; and **the Senator** seriously asks, what authority have **we** to appropriate money to take care of **them**? What would **he** do with **them**? Would **he** allow **them** to starve and die? Would **he** turn **them** over to the mercy of **the men who**, through **their** whole lives, have had **their** earnings, to be enslaved again?

<p>Four parties most referred to in speech:</p>	<p>Senate Opposition (to extending funding for Freedmen's Bureau)</p>	<p>Country / US Government</p>	<p>Black Americans / Freedpeople</p>	<p>White Southerners / Former Slaveholders</p>
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Details (according to Trumbull) given or implied about each group:	<i>-suggested the government doesn't have the power to assign money to be used to help freedpeople</i> <i>-may not care about lives of freedpeople</i>	<i>-has inherited a problem ("we have thrown upon us")</i> <i>-has been recently challenged (by Confederacy)</i> <i>-remains a respected authority</i> <i>-is honored by freedpeople</i>	<i>-worked hard for others</i> <i>-were not allowed to own or keep anything</i> <i>-have few resources on which to build new life</i> <i>-face prejudice despite being loyal to the Union</i>	<i>-are "prejudiced and hostile"</i> <i>-have tried to challenge the US government</i> <i>-have denied enslaved people wages and earnings for their labor</i>
Adjectives summarizing how Trumbull characterizes each group:	<i>-inhumane</i> <i>-unreasonable</i> <i>-pragmatic</i>	<i>-responsible</i> <i>-obligated</i> <i>-moral</i> <i>-powerful</i>	<i>-wronged</i> <i>-disadvantaged</i> <i>-loyal</i> <i>-hardworking</i>	<i>-inhumane</i> <i>-self-centered</i> <i>-belligerent</i>

How is Trumbull painting a moral duty for the government through his techniques in this speech?

Responses might include one or more of the following points:

- Trumbull lists out injustices endured by many Black Americans while also describing them as loyal and hardworking; this makes a moral case for action.*
- Trumbull characterizes former slaveholders, whom he implies are responsible for this problem, as not only inhumane but also hostile to the US government; this makes action against these immoral ideas necessary.*
- Trumbull uses rhetorical questioning about his opponent at the end to suggest that anyone who doesn't support funding for this is also inhumane and immoral.*

What does this speech tell you about Trumbull's view of what it means to be American?

Students could make various arguments here, but this is one possible response: Trumbull's speech suggests he sees a good government to be one that takes responsibility for the well-being of its people, especially when they've been wronged. His ideals about what it means to be an American probably also include the concept of morality and care for the less advantaged in society.