

“SOME OF THE PEOPLE SIGNED IT TWENTY OR THIRTY TIMES”: PETITIONS

The petition that circulates through Mariposa to save Josh Smith’s liquor licence shows the strengths and weaknesses of using petitions to create change. Indeed, it ultimately succeeds in influencing the authorities to reverse the liquor licence revocation. However, the petition is not without its flaws. As the book says:

It was the right kind of document, too. It began – “Whereas in the bounty of providence the earth putteth forth her luscious fruits and her vineyards for the delight and enjoyment of mankind – ” It made you thirsty just to read it. Any man who read that petition over was wild to get to the Rats’ Cooler. (24)

In addition to its influential opening line, even though the petition has 3,000 signatures (from a town of 5,000 people), some people signed it “twenty or thirty times” (23).

1. If you are considering signing a petition, what lessons can you take from the experience of the petition in Mariposa?
2. If you are considering creating a petition, what lessons can you take from the experience of the petition in Mariposa?
3. Find examples of petitions in your community that have been successful in helping push forward change. What led to the success?