Angel of Mercy in Washington: Josephine Griffing and the Freedmen, 1864–1872

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On February 19, 1872, Washington, D. C., newspapers carried notices of the death of Mrs. Josephine S. Griffing,[1] "well-known in Washington as one of the leaders of the woman suffrage movement in this District, and more especially for her efforts in behalf of the destitute freedmen. . . ." [2] According to the *Star,* "She was a woman of more than ordinary ability, and was greatly esteemed by all who knew her." The *Daily Morning Chronicle* in a rather exaggerated and thoroughly Victorian manner described Mrs. Griffing as "A woman of rare beauty of character, of uncommon executive capacity and judgement, and ever inspired by a beautiful and self-sacrificing charity, she had warm friends among the best men and women, eminent in character, influence, and position, and a host of devoted friends also among poor and aged freed people, to whom for years she has been a daily angel of mercy." [3] An angel of mercy indeed, but her charity had been extended to a despised class, the former slaves, now freedmen. In spite of a generally unsympathetic public she had persisted in her efforts to deal with the critical problems facing free Negroes in Washington during the post-Civil War period, attempting to ease the all-important transition from slavery to freedom. Her

[1] My attention was first called to Mrs. Griffing by Mr. Edward T. James, editor of the forthcoming *Notable American Women, 1607–1950: A Biographical Dictionary,* being sponsored by Radcliffe College. Mr. James induced me to prepare a biographical sketch of Mrs. Griffing, and he encouraged me to undertake additional, more ambitious research on her career. I deeply appreciate his help. I am grateful to the Smithsonian Institution for providing time and facilities for research. The Business and Professional Women's Foundation has, through its award of the Lena Lake Forrest Fellowship, provided me with funds for travel and clerical assistance, as well as time for research and writing. I am thankful for this assistance.

[2] Washington *Star,* February 19, 1872.

[3] Washington *Daily Morning Chronicle,* February 19, 1872.

efforts, and efforts of others, in behalf of the new citizens constitute a significant but nearly forgotten episode in Washington's history.

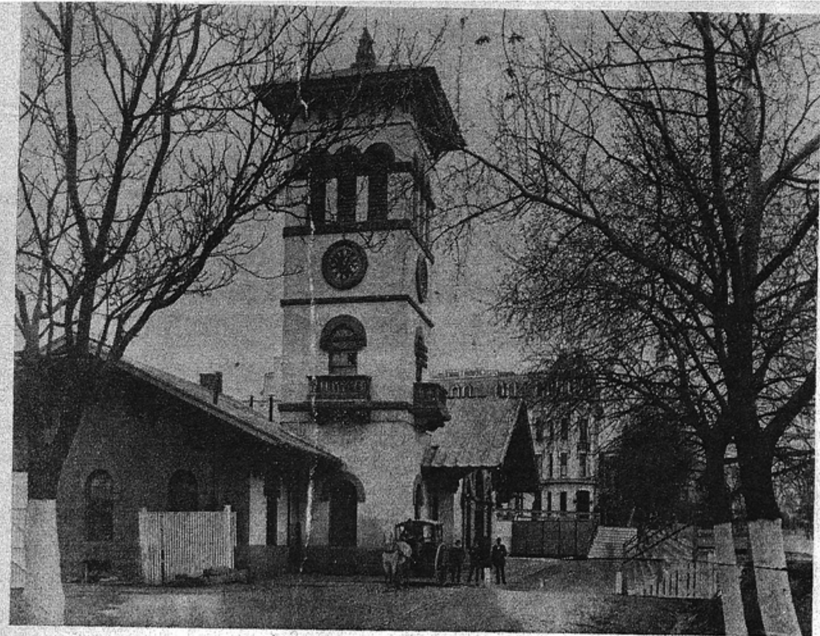
Even before emancipation the District had exerted a magnetic attraction for the Negro slaves. But once freedom was assured the trickle of Negroes became a flood. Washington had been spared the agony of invasion from a rebel army, but between 1863 and 1865 the city witnessed the arrival of another sort of army—straggling, tattered, and hungry—an army of men and women, families with children, worn-out field hands, all refugees from slavery. Had laughter been in order the ragamuffin horde might have seemed a comical sight, but the influx of freedmen promised to create new problems for a city which already suffered keenly from the war. Why did they come? A former slave recalled the joy exhibited when news of freedom arrived:

> "I ain't going to get whipped any more.
> I got my ticket,
> Leaving the thicket,
> And I'm a-heading for the Golden Shore."

What did freedom mean? "Nobody took our homes away, but right off colored folks started on the move. They seemed to want to get closer to freedom so they's know what it was—like it was a place or a city." [4] For many of the freed people, Washington—the capital city—represented the concrete substance of freedom, the gateway to the Golden Shore. Constance Green, in *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800–1878,* has described in considerable detail the influx of "contrabands" into the District of Columbia between 1861 and 1865. Possibly as many as 40,000 ex-slaves came crowding into the city between 1861 and 1865, living wretchedly in overcrowded, ramshackle tenements and huts. In "Murder Bay" (presently the site of the Federal Triangle) shacks made of scrap lumber, tarpaper, and miscellaneous junk were occupied by several thousand freed people living with no attention to comfort or sanitation. Thousands of others lived on the "Island", in alley dwellings and old barracks on Capitol Hill, and near the Navy Yard.[5] Most of the Negroes had little if any awareness of what "freedom" would require of them in the way of resourcefulness or self-discipline. As Mrs. Green has written: "Slaves, accustomed to constant supervision, were rarely

[4] B. A. Botkin, ed., *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (Chicago, 1945), p. 223.

[5] Constance M. Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800–1878* (Princeton, N.J., 1962), p. 277; ch. XI devotes considerable attention to the arrival and circumstances of the freedmen in the District.



Photograph from the Baltimore and Ohio Collection, Smithsonian Institution

Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Passenger Depot

This photograph of the old Baltimore and Ohio Railroad passenger depot at New Jersey Avenue and C Street, N.W. was made during the 1880's. The depot appears much as it did between 1865 and 1870, when Josephine Griffing escorted several thousand freedmen out of Washington to homes in the northeastern United States.

Photograph from the National Archives

A Group of "contrabands" who fled from slavery

Many of these tattered, helpless people, who fled into Union Army lines during the Civil War, migrated to Washington where they expected to be cared for.

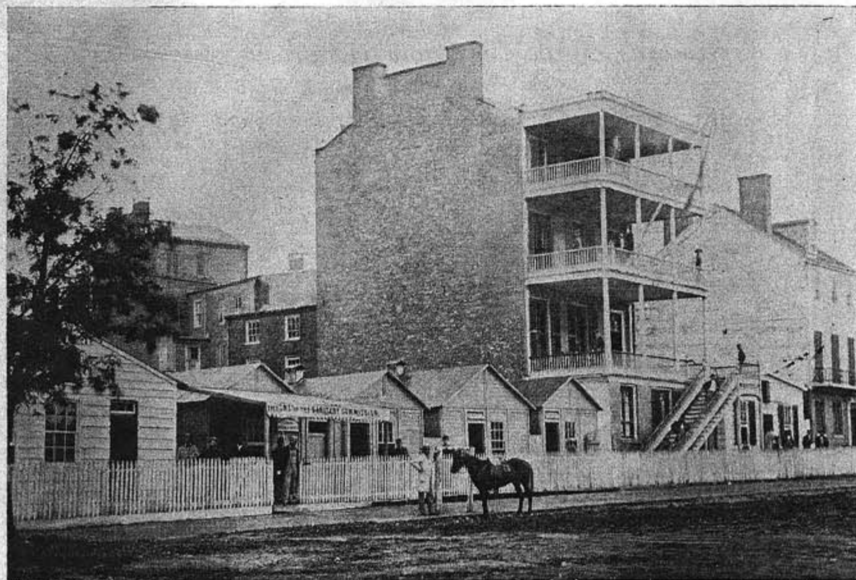
ready to fend for themselves. Someone had to attempt to find them employment, to house, feed, and clothe them until they could support themselves, to watch over their health lest they suffer needlessly or spread epidemics, and to prevent them from turning lawless." [6] It was this critical situation which Josephine Griffing faced upon her arrival in Washington in 1864. Her interests and her experiences had prepared her well to take an active part in the movement to elevate the freedmen.

A Connecticut Yankee, she was born Josephine Sophia White in 1814 in the village of Hebron, and reared in the moralistic atmosphere of the "land of steady habits." In 1835 she married Charles Stockman Spooner Griffing, a mechanic from nearby Stafford. A few years later she became a transplanted Yankee when she and her husband moved west to the recently-settled town of Litchfield in the Western Reserve of Ohio.[7] For reasons not sufficiently understood, the Yankees who moved from New England into New York, Ohio, and the middle west were more sympathetic to enthusiastic religious and reformist causes than their brethren who remained at home.[8] At the time that the Griffings migrated to northern Ohio, that area was being saturated by groups of itinerant radical reformers—abolitionists, temperance advocates, feminists—who found a particularly receptive audience among the transplanted Yankees from Connecticut who were the principal settlers of the area. During the 1840s the Griffings became interested in some of the new causes, and by 1849 they were active members of the Western Anti-Slavery Society, a radical "immediatist" organization affiliated with the Garrisonian wing of abolitionism. In the following year Mrs. Griffing attended the first Ohio Woman's Convention at the town of Salem, inaugurating an interest in the rights of women which continued for the remainder of her life. In 1851 Mr. and Mrs. Griffing became traveling agents of the Western Anti-Slavery Society, preaching Garrison's message of "no union with slaveholders," and declaring the United States Constitution to be a "covenant with death and an agreement with hell." At a time when women were expected to remain close to the hearth, and be contented in their domestic rou-

[6] *Ibid* p. 273.

[7] Waldo Lincoln, *Genealogy of the Waldo Family: A Record of the Descendants of Cornelius Waldo of Ipswich, Mass., from 1647 to 1900* (Worcester, Mass., 1902), I, pp. 397–399. See also N. B. Northrop, *Pioneer History of Medina County* (Medina, Ohio, 1861), pp. 161–166.

[8] The problem of the reformist inclinations of "transplanted Yankees" has been brilliantly although tentatively explored in Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, 1950).



Photograph from the Library of Congress

The "home lodge" of the United States Sanitary Commission

Some of these barracks, built at North Capitol and C Streets, N.W. to house wounded and homeless soldiers passing through Washington during the Civil War, were later renovated to house freed people after agitation by Josephine Griffing.

Photograph from the Library of Congress

Freedman's Barracks, Alexandria, Virginia

Many former army barracks in and around Washington, like this group in Alexandria, Virginia, were occupied by former slaves between 1865 and 1870. Josephine Griffing worked to expand housing of this sort. She also intervened on behalf of freedmen who complained about living conditions and hard treatment in these barrack villages.

tine, Josephine Griffing became acquainted with and joined a small outspoken group of fiery women lecturers—Abby Kelley Foster, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and others—who embraced and preached the radical doctrines. She joined forces and faced mobs with several of the most remarkable agitators in a generation of agitators. Parker Pillsbury, a leading extremist, was deeply impressed "with the talents and capacity of Mrs. Griffing, for a public missionary in the work of Reform. . . ." [9] In an address on the social and moral condition of the slave, given in 1852, "She dissected the slave system, particularly in its effect on the marriage and family relations among its victims, in the most thrilling, as well as searching manner." [10] From the radicals she learned the gospel of "come-outerism," the principle that all institutions which supported the sin of slavery should be forsaken. Throughout the 1850s she preached against the church and the government as she toured the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. Remarks which she made in 1858 illustrate how far Mrs. Griffing had progressed in her commitment to freedom:

> Impatient are we? There is a power which crushes our brothers into dust, and mocks at God's authority. And we are impatient because we wish to have the rights of the slaves restored, because we wish them to be developed by intellectual culture, because we would have them enjoy the social relations, would restore the husband and wife to each other, give back the babes to the mother. . . .[11]

The slaves, she argued, should be treated as complete human beings, able to enjoy family life and the advantages of education. Mrs. Griffing's experience as an abolitionist during the 1850s was an essential preparation for her humanitarian efforts during the 1860s. She came to hate slavery and the slave power. She was a moralist in the Yankee tradition, a *furious,* uncompromising woman.[12]

The coming of the Civil War affected all abolitionists, including Josephine Griffing. From the beginning of the war radical agitators campaigned to make it a struggle for abolition. One of the most notable efforts to publicize the campaign for freedom was that of the National Woman's Loyal League. Formed in 1863 by leading

[9] *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (Salem, Ohio), November 6, 1852.

[10] *Ibid.*, October 30, 1852. The *Bugle* during 1852, 1853, 1854 contains many accounts of Mrs. Griffing's lecture tours.

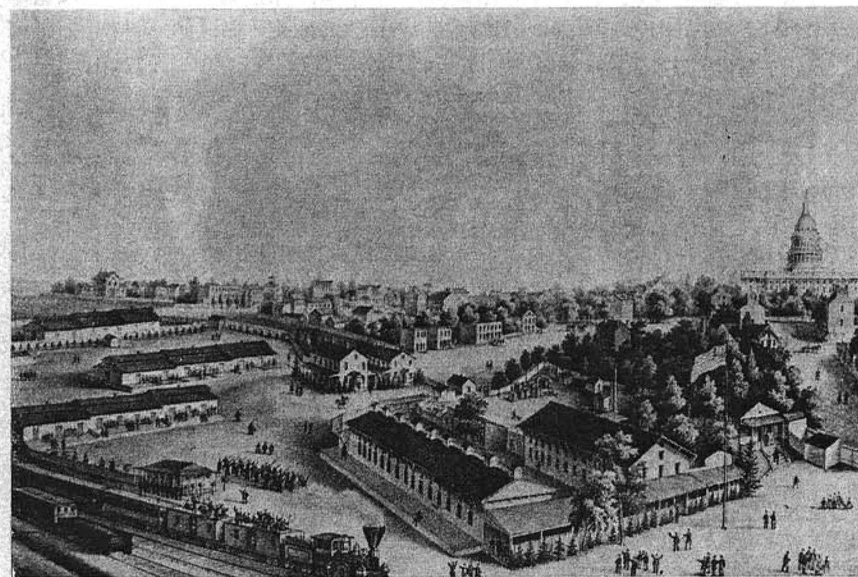
[11] *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (Salem, Ohio), October 23, 1858.

[12] Mrs. Griffing's ferocity may have undermined her domestic life, for sometime between 1858 and 1863, her husband, Charles Griffing, disappeared. He does not appear at all in the Washington period of her career, but he reappeared years later in Ohio. The couple had five daughters, of whom two died before reaching maturity.

Photograph from the Brady Collection, National Archives

Shacks in Washington occupied by former slaves

Thousands of freed slaves came to Washington during the war and post-war period, and occupied structures of this sort on the Island, in the "Murder Bay" area south of Pennsylvania Avenue, and elsewhere in the city.



Photograph of an engraving from the National Archives

A view of "Soldier's Rest", about 1863

This view of "Soldier's Rest" operated by the United States Army, shows the northeastern side of Capitol Hill. The house occupied by Josephine Griffing was on the east side of North Capitol Street. It may appear in this picture as one of the structures closest to the capitol building.

feminists, the Loyal League agitated for full emancipation and inspired women's devotion to the Union and the Radical Republicans.[13] Mrs. Griffing joined the League as a paid lecturing agent at the time of its formation. Her territory was the northwest—which then included Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin—and her work consisted principally of securing signatures to thousands of petitions favoring emancipation in 1863 and 1864. Although the women were not successful in securing 1,000,000 signers as they had hoped, they submitted nearly 400,000 signatures to Congress appealing for immediate and complete freedom for the slaves. Traveling constantly during this period, Mrs. Griffing became acquainted with and evidently earned the respect of many leading political figures on the state and national levels. She also came to know of the efforts being made by abolitionists through private philanthropy, to provide assistance and education for the newly freed slaves.

The abolitionists have been criticized, somewhat unjustly, for oversimplifying the issue of slavery, for demanding unrealistic social and economic sacrifices from one section of the country. While their program of "immediate emancipation," did not represent a realistic plan for eliminating slavery, when faced suddenly with the wartime realities of freedom, the abolitionists did not flee from the responsibilities of assisting and planning for the slaves.[14] Between 1862 and 1865, antislavery men and women organized a great movement to meet the problems of the freedmen, including important regional freedmen's aid societies and scores of other local organizations. Centered in religious denominations and in local churches, these societies developed an ambitious program of relief and education for the slaves. They appealed particularly to women's benevolent impulses, enlisting their sympathies and their busy fingers to provide garments and foodstuffs for the victims of oppression. One writer has estimated that in three years of work, the freedmen's aid societies contributed 3 to 4 million dollars for Negro relief of various kinds.[15] In Washington the National Freedmen's Relief Association of the District of Columbia was organized on April 9, 1862, "To relieve the

[13] *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Loyal Women of the Republic, held in New York, May 14, 1863* (New York, 1863); pp. 65–67 include a copy of a vigorous letter from Josephine Griffing. For accounts of the League, see Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony* (Indianapolis, 1899) I, pp. 226–240, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, et al., *The History of Woman Suffrage* II, pp. 50–89.

[14] James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, N.J., 1964), p. 133. This study provides a comprehensive and well documented picture of the abolitionists' relief efforts.

[15] George K. Eggleston, "The Work of the Relief Societies During the Civil War," *Journal of Negro History* XIV (July, 1928), pp. 272–299.

immediate wants of the contrabands, by furnishing clothing, temporary homes, and employment, and, as far as possible, to teach them to read and write, and bring them under moral and religious influences. . . ." [16] Sponsored chiefly by Northern men—many of them government employees, and one of whom, Sayles J. Bowen, later served as Mayor of Washington—the Association typified the religious, moralistic, and reforming philanthropy which underlay the freedmen's aid movement in general.

As she traveled for the National Woman's Loyal League, Josephine Griffing became increasingly concerned over the fate of the freedmen. She envisioned a radical program of temporary relief, resettlement, education, employment, and ultimate social equality for the Negroes to be carried out jointly by private organizations and a massive Federal welfare agency. As she later wrote:

> It may be seen . . . that by no stroke of legislation, or resolutions of philanthropic societies, can four millions of people emerge from slavery by the power of the sword and without lands, money, or homes, become at once self-sustaining. To assume that a million of women, with two millions of children depending upon their care, under such disadvantages, can, within a short given time, master the elements, feed, clothe, and educate themselves, and then organize civilization out of the chaos and curse of slavery, is, we think, proving too much, and is at once a dangerous and unchristian doctrine.[17]

Mrs. Griffing was more fully aware of the consequences of emancipation than most Americans of her time. She endeavored, to the detriment of her own health and personal well-being, to put her vision into practice. In conferences with the "best men" of Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago, she urged the creation of a freedmen's bureau, headed by an abolitionist and humanitarian, supported and aided with funds from women throughout the North.[18] During this period she was in frequent correspondence with radical Congressmen—George W. Julian of Indiana, Charles Summer, and others—urging them to support her plan.[19]

Mrs. Griffing's conception of the needs of the freedmen had one point which stimulated considerable interest. She proposed in 1864

[16] *First Annual Report of the National Freedmen's Relief Association of the District of Columbia* (Washington, 1863).

[17] *Fourth Annual Report of the National Freedmen's Relief Association of the District of Columbia* (Washington, 1866), p. 17.

[18] Josephine Griffing to William Lloyd Garrison, March 24, 1864, Ms., Letters written to Garrison, Boston Public Library.

[19] *Ibid.* See also a clipping from the Chicago *Inter-Ocean*, April 16, 1887, a reminiscence of Mrs. Griffing's life by Giles B. Stebbins, Griffing scrapbook, Columbia University.

that the ex-slaves be colonized, not in Africa or the West Indies, but in the free states of the North and West. She would have this oppressed class carried to "those parts of the country where compensating labor, and protection of the law and humanity could be extended to them." [20] Here they could imbibe the spirit of free institutions and enjoy the superior cultural facilities of Northern educational institutions. By diffusing the Negro population throughout the nation Mrs. Griffing hoped that the race might be elevated and eventually that the burdens of color prejudice would be eradicated. Unfortunately, her plan did not find an encouraging reception in the North.[21] Nevertheless, for some eight years Mrs. Griffing fought for her immigration plan, traveling to New England and the northwest, conferring with State governors and officials of various freedmen's aid societies.[22] When the government would not support her work of transporting the freedmen away from the South she secured private funds. Although she was not the only advocate of such a plan, she was the most energetic and aggressive worker in its behalf.

Josephine Griffing may have visited Washington during 1863 in connection with her emancipation petitioning. In the following year she came to lobby for a freedmen's bureau bill, and her attention was drawn to the fate of the thousands of suffering Negroes in the District of Columbia. After observing for three months the condition of these people, she wrote to William Lloyd Garrison:

> I have seen them in every condition of want—from their first landing, sitting in the sand, with their babies hovering round them, without shelter or bread, through all the varieties and grades, up to comparative comfort and independence,—I conclude, without hesitation, that with assistance from Government, in protecting them against the control and the frauds of any and all who wish to usurp authority over them in regard to their homes, labor and children, this *independence* is their proper status of rights and duties, and the only one that will give them satisfaction, and secure their confidence in our Government and people. Indeed, I am astonished at the self-reliance and thrift that they possess, under these insurmountable difficulties.[23]

From 1864 onward Mrs. Griffing's aims centered around the freedmen in Washington. Deploring the attempts made long before

[20] *Fourth Annual Report of the National Freedmen's Relief Association. . . .*

[21] George Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (Philadelphia, 1955) pp. 17–18.

[22] Josephine Griffing to Charles Sumner, undated, Ms., Charles Sumner Papers, Harvard College Library.

[23] *Liberator* (Boston) XXXIV, August 26, 1864, p. 139.

the end of the Civil War to turn freedom for the slaves into speculators' profits, she struggled to prevent the development of the systems of apprenticeship and peonage which in fact did ultimately govern the status of the Negro. What did freedom mean? For the able-bodied adults it meant "that freedom will be realized to them, when they find *marketable labor*," and when they have "absolute control" over their persons and their labor.[24] For the young it meant opportunities to learn, free from the stifling atmosphere of prejudice and discrimination. For the old, the needy and suffering, freedom meant the absence of want and fear. Real freedom for the Negro would require a firm social and economic foundation, and it was this foundation which Josephine Griffing set out to build. To the task she brought a frail body, but an iron will and an indestructible optimism. She had a sympathy which only a woman can feel for suffering women, and she possessed practical organizing capacities learned during more than a decade of reform work.

In 1864 Josephine Griffing, a transplanted Yankee moralist, a furious woman, became the general agent of the National Freedmen's Relief Association of the District of Columbia, occupying the post until her death. Under her direction the Association took a more aggressive approach to the problems of the freedmen in the fields of education, relief, and employment. With considerable success Mrs. Griffing appealed to women's organizations in the North for financial aid, clothing, and provisions. She traveled to the West in the Fall of 1864, and to New England during the summer of 1865, conducting a campaign for funds and supplies. From Rhode Island she secured $1,200 plus barrels of clothing and cloth. A ladies' fair in Detroit brought in additional money. For the year 1865 the Freedmen's Relief Association spent $8,182 on salaries, relief, and schools, most of it raised by Mrs. Griffing herself.[25] During the winter of 1864–65 the Association was deeply involved in securing relief for the "utterly destitute" freed women and children in Washington.[26]

Under Josephine Griffing's management the Freedmen's Relief Association operated two "industrial schools" for the employment and education of women and children. Unlike most common schools for Negroes in the District of Columbia, the industrial schools were primarily sources of "employment to that class of women who had

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Third Annual Report of the National Freedmen's Relief Association,* (Washington, 1865). . . . *Fourth Annual Report. . . .*

[26] Flier, "Temporary Aid for the Freedmen," published by the National Freedmen's Relief Association, January, 1865.

families to support & who from want of suitable conveniences were unable to take in work at their homes." [27] Following a pattern later repeated at such schools as Hampton and Tuskeegee Institutes, these agencies were intended to teach former field hands a marketable skill—sewing. They had certain social and cultural aims as well:

> The Industrial School furnishes an opportunity for instruction in social science, and domestic relations, as well as the higher forms of Industry, and a marked change is observable in personal tidiness, good manners, and in the control and government of young children—whom some of the mothers are obliged to bring with them to the Rooms.[28]

From the schools families could obtain durable clothing, either in payment for the work of sewing, or to be purchased at slight cost.[29] Thus these unusual institutions were calculated to serve many needs of the freed people. Summing up the accomplishments of her own school in 1867, Mrs. Griffing wrote:

> Much gratitude is manifested by these women for the opportunity of learning to make their own and their childrens clothing, and for the employment it affords them, even at a low rate of pay. No woman in the school has been able to earn more than seven dollars a month, and they do not average four, as many are prevented by sickness from regular attendance. But this, to the extremely destitute is of great value as a last resource, from starvation or Pauperism.[30]

Managed by this energetic and forceful woman, the headquarters of the National Freedmen's Relief Association on Capitol Hill became a landmark. In 1865 Mrs. Griffing rented a large house at 394 North Capitol Street (number 213 under the new, 1870, numbering system), located just north of the Senate wing of the Capitol building, not far from the old Baltimore and Ohio Railroad depot on New Jersey Avenue. For its day this house was a remarkable institution. It included an industrial school for adults and young people, and facilities for the care of children. Mrs. Griffing and other women provided counseling and advice on family, financial, and legal problems. An employment bureau maintained lists of available jobs and brought job-seekers and employers together. The house was a relief

[27] Freedmen's Bureau Records, National Archives, War Record Group 105, hereafter cited as Bureau Records, Reports of Charitable Homes and Schools, Report of Industrial School number 1, Ms., dated December 4, 1865.

[28] Bureau Records, Reports of Charitable Homes and Schools, J. S. Griffing to Gen. C. H. Howard, Ms., dated October 4, 1867, Report on the operations of her industrial school.

[29] *Fourth Annual Report of the National Freedmen's Relief Association . . .*

[30] Bureau Records, J. S. Griffing to C. H. Howard, October 4, 1867, *op. cit.*

depot, a distribution point for food, clothing, and fuel. It contained limited room for temporary visitors who had no place to stay. In modern terms the building functioned as a settlement or neighborhood house, and included some facilities such as outright relief and comprehensive counseling that are seldom provided by the settlement house. Mrs. Griffing's establishment may well have been viewed as a nuisance by the legislators, public figures, and visitors who ascended Capitol Hill every day. Usually surrounded by a ragged crowd of freed people of all ages and shapes, the house was for years a symbol of the unsolved issues of freedom.

In March, 1865, after a long and bitter fight, Radical Republicans succeeded in creating the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, generally known as the Freedmen's Bureau. In drawing up the Bureau's charter the Republican Party responded more fully to partisan and sectional motivations than to benevolent idealism. The politicians were eager to assure their continued dominance of national affairs. With the availability of cheap Southern land and a disciplined labor force Northern speculators saw opportunities to make quick and substantial profits.[31] Nevertheless, despite the ungenerous aims of some of its framers, the Freedmen's Bureau represented a radical innovation in American welfare practices. For the first time the Federal Government entered into a large-scale effort to provide relief, social services, and education for great numbers of people. The Bureau constituted an opportunity to guide and insure the transition from slavery to freedom.

Josephine Griffing joined the Freedmen's Bureau as assistant to the assistant commissioner for the District of Columbia. Her appointment came in the summer of 1865 after pressure had been applied by her Radical friends in Congress.[32] It was the beginning of an unstable and difficult relationship. Immediately after her appointment she began to criticize the operations of the Bureau. Not content to submit to the usual bureaucratic restraints, she complained openly and vigorously of the inadequacy of relief provided by the Bureau, speaking out in public against the policies and actions of her superiors. It was particularly galling that military men—efficient, often ruthless, with little sympathy for suffering humanity—should be responsible for feeding, comforting, guiding into freedom a previously subject and now literally captive people. Mrs. Griffing complained that humane Bureau agents were discharged and cynical persons put in their places. Administrators of the Freedmen's Bureau

[31] Bentley, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

[32] Stanton, et al., *op. cit.*, II, pp. 33–34.

had little choice but to respond quickly to this challenge from within their ranks. They denied her allegations that 20,000 freed people were suffering in the District of Columbia, despite the fact that much evidence existed to support this claim.[33] Early in November, 1865, less than six months after her appointment, Josephine Griffing was discharged from her position in the Bureau, and the public was warned that she had no connection with the government, nor was she authorized to collect funds in behalf of the Bureau.[34] The bitterness of her feelings may be judged by the following comments which she wrote to a friend shortly after her discharge:

> You will see how our cause has been made to suffer from the Pro-Slavery spirit, which has power in the Freedmen's Bureau, and this is not strange when we see that the men who fill too many of these offices were six years ago wedded to the Institution of Slavery and their hearts are full of bitter recollections of Abolitionists. The action of the Bureau is, first to establish a policy of repudiation of the right to life or their bread, during the transition state, of the infirm, old and most destitute; a policy which I learn from good authority is being carried out throughout the Freedmen's territory to a greater or less extent. I do not mean to say there is a *direct conspiracy* and *intent to kill* off these Blacks, but I do assert that in this city thousands have died who only needed the aid that could have been secured if the President and the Freedmen's Bureau had been disposed to acknowledge the just claims of these emancipated people.[35]

Much as they might have wished to, however, Bureau officials could not ignore Mrs. Griffing. She was a sharp, influencial critic, with many friends among the radicals in Congress. And because of her many contacts with reformers in the North she might be of great service in assisting former slaves to find employment outside of Washington. One of her first efforts as an employee of the Bureau had involved efforts to find positions for freed people in New England and elsewhere.[36] Despite her removal from Federal employment, Mrs. Griffing worked throughout the year 1866 to develop a system for sending freedmen to jobs in the North. The government provided

[33] Bentley, *op. cit.*, pp. 77–79.

[34] Bureau Records, D. C.: Max Woodhull to Asst. Commissioner for D.C., November 7, 1865; Lt. S. N. Clark to the Associated Press, December 19, 1865; E. Carpenter to Asst. Commissioner for D.C., November 24, 1865; S. N. Clark to E. Carpenter, December 5, 1865; S. N. Clark to Mrs. F. L. Pond, January 11, 1866.

[35] Josephine Griffing to Elizabeth Buffman Chace, December 26, 1865, in Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman and Arthur Crawford Wyman, *Elizabeth Buffum Chace, 1806–1909: Her Life and Its Environment* (Boston, 1914), pp. 285–286.

[36] William Buckingham of Norwich, Conn., letter of introduction for Mrs. Griffing, dated August 17, 1865, Griffing Papers, Columbia Univ.

a certificate of transportation for each person and Mrs. Griffing made all other arrangements including generally the provision of a job for each traveler before his departure. The records of the Freedmen's Bureau contain such poignant reminders of her work as a request for "hardtack and dried beef" to be furnished to the freed people for their trip North, and letters to the Presidents of the Baltimore and Ohio and Pennsylvania Railroads seeking free transportation for Mrs. Griffing as she accompanied the freedmen on their journeys.[37] An eyewitness remembered the scene as she prepared to leave Washington: "We would sometimes go to the railroad depot at night to see her start for New York with a chartered car full of these freed people, she going to see that they were put in right hands and coming back the next day." [38] Mrs. Frances Dana Gage, a well-known lecturer and feminist of the time, once met Mrs. Griffing in New York with a group of 60 freed people whom she was escorting to New England, and learned that her friend had not only bought bread for the group from her own pocket but had also paid for their baggage to be hauled across the city.[39] Emma Griffing, a daughter, assisted in the work of transporting freedmen between 1865 and 1868.

Recognizing the importance of this resettlement enterprise, the Freedmen's Bureau cooperated with Mrs. Griffing in establishing agencies to receive the immigrants. In the spring of 1866 a surplus barracks building at Providence, Rhode Island, was opened for use as an employment office, and it became the destination of many District of Columbia refugees.[40] Federal funds were also provided for rent and personnel.[41] Later in the year Mrs. Griffing received the Bureau's cooperation in establishing offices in New York and other cities.[42] By the end of 1866 the system of securing employment for Negroes in the North and the procedures for transporting them and arranging for their disposition had become Mrs. Griffing's principal concern. It was estimated at the end of the summer that she had helped 1,200 people to emigrate from Washington.[43] Agents and correspondents in such abolitionist strongholds as Rochester, New York, and Hartford, Connecticut, held out hopes that hundreds and perhaps thousands

[37] Bureau Records, D. C.: J. S. Griffing to Asst. Commissioner for D.C., April 7, 1866; Charles H. Howard to J. M. Garrett and Isaac Hinkley, both dated July 9, 1866; Lt. Col. William W. Rogers to Maj. J. W. W. Vandenburgh, June 18, 1866.

[38] Clipping from Chicago *Inter-Ocean*, April 16, 1887, *op. cit.*

[39] *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York), September 1, 1866.

[40] Bureau Records, D. C.; William M. Rogers to J. S. Griffing, April 11, 1866.

[41] Bureau Records, D. C.; William M. Rogers to J. M. Brown, July 24, 1866.

[42] Bureau Records, D. C.: Samuel Thomas to J. S. Griffing, August 20, 1866; J. S. Griffing to Asst. Commissioner for D. C., October 30, 1866.

[43] *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, September 1, 1866.

of jobs might be obtained for the refugees.[44] Charles H. Howard, Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau for the District of Columbia, wrote of Mrs. Griffing's efforts: "We consider . . . that Mrs. G. is engaged in an important work which we desire to further in every practicable way." [45]

Along with accomplishments and praise came difficulties and blame. The transportation of refugees out of Washington sometimes resulted in the breaking up of families. Employers who wished to secure able-bodied men as laborers or factory hands, or single women and girls to serve as domestic servants were all too often unsympathetic toward the wishes and need of families to remain together. The transportation of able-bodied freedmen from Washington tended to leave the most dependent persons—the aged and infirm, mothers with large families of small children—in the city where there were few resources for their support. The immigrants also discovered that their employment in the North was sometimes only temporary. Not infrequently jobs which had been promised proved to be illusory. In Massachusetts during the dead of winter, destitute freedmen, sent to an area where they could not find work, could be seen begging on the streets.[46] Occasionally Mrs. Griffing's enthusiasm for settling freedmen in the North ran afoul of speculators who were anxious to secure an ample supply of cheap laborers for their Southern plantation ventures.[47] And in all good conscience, Mrs. Griffing had explained to her people that they were free, that they could come and go at will, without asking the permission of their employers. As a result freedmen returned to Washington after earning enough money to make the trip.[48]

In addition to scattered complaints, there were the inevitable human dilemmas and minor tragedies that arose from the disintegration of a slave-based social system. A girl by the name of Laura Jones ran away from an unloved aunt, with the assistance of Mrs. Griffing,

[44] Bureau Records, D. C.: J. O. Bliss, Rochester, N.Y., to Asst. Commissioner for D. C., February 26, 1867; Perry Davis, Hartford, Conn., to Asst. Commissioner for D. C., March 16, 1867; S. N. Clark to J. S. Griffing, April 9, 1866; J. S. Griffing to Asst. Commissioner for D. C., October 20, 1866.

[45] Bureau Records, D. C., Charles H. Howard to Mrs. R. M. Bigelow of Providence, R. I., November 10, 1866.

[46] Bureau Records, D. C., Rev. John Parkman, Boston, to Assistant Adjutant General, December 5, 1866. See also W. H. Rogers to J. S. Griffing, April 10, 1866, warning her against sending freedmen away unless their employment were assured.

[47] Bureau Records, D. C., J. E. Walker to C. H. Howard, April 9, 1866, complaining that Mrs. Griffing threatened his business of making up labor gangs to work in Mississippi.

[48] Bureau Records, D. C., C. H. Howard to Lt. Col. Beebe, April 29, 1867; James H. L. Eager to Assistant Adjutant General, September 28, 1868.

and had to be returned to her relative.[49] Another woman, the wife of a freedmen, had been sent to Philadelphia and her husband demanded her return.[50] Orphan children, suffering and destitute, could not be carried North because of the opposition of distant relatives.[51] But where there had been no standard of legitimacy, no legal bond beween husbands and wives or parents and children, how could the claims of parents or spouses be clearly judged? Although she often overstepped the absolute bounds of her authority as an agent of the Freedmen's Bureau, exercising judgment which was sometimes faulty, Josephine Griffing accomplished a great deal during the four years (1865–1868) that she was actively engaged in transporting former slaves away from Washington. Estimates of the number of persons whom she helped to settle in the North vary, but they probably numbered at least 3,000, and perhaps as many as 5,000. In organizing this large-scale effort she had to combine the talents of an administrator, a relief agent, and a social worker; and to a considerable degree Mrs. Griffing did so with remarkable success.

The same talents were useful in yet another field of freedmen's aid. Josephine Griffing believed that ultimately the solution to the status of the Negro in Washington lay in providing employment in the North for the city's surplus population. Until this should be accomplished, however, she worked vigorously to secure an adequate relief program for freed people living in the city. The pattern of relief, as it developed between 1863 and 1868, was characterized by a rather striking lack of coordination among the various participating organizations. There was much duplication of effort, making it possible for individuals and families to receive aid simultaneously from several agencies. Both private and public funds were used, often by the same organization, operating through different units such as industrial schools and soup houses. In terms of material resources the most ambitious program was that of the Freedmen's Bureau. Between its inception in 1865 and the discontinuation of most of its District program in 1868, the Bureau distributed many thousands of rations, items of clothing and bedding, and loads of wood to Washington's needy. Private relief served to supplement public support and to perform especially critical functions when

[49] Bureau Records, O. O. Howard to J. S. Griffing, September 23, 1867; see also Eliphalet Whittlesey to J. S. Griffing, July 13, 1868, describing a similar case.

[50] Bureau Records, D. C., Eliphalet Whittlesey to Asst. Commissioner for D. C., October 19, 1867.

[51] Bureau Records, D. C., J. S. Griffing to Asst. Commissioner for D. C., September 11, 13, 1867.

public funds were not available. For example, during the winter of 1868, the Provident Aid Society maintained six "soup houses" which distributed quantities of hearty soup to destitute freedmen. Receiving an uneven blend of public and private meats and vegetables, the soup houses were especially active during the winter months. To some degree they also served as distribution points for other goods.[52]

The National Freedmen's Relief Association, under Josephine Griffing's direction, was deeply involved in relief work. During her first winter in Washington, before the establishment of public relief, Mrs. Griffing endeavored to supply some of the most critical needs of the poor. And every winter, until her death, the office which she occupied just north of the Capitol was a center for the relief of the needy. Frances Dana Gage visited the office in January, 1866, and wrote:

> A cloud of darkness, poverty, rags, hunger, cold, and suffering, confronted me; over a hundred of the freed people were gathering there to ask for help. The door was opened and in rushed these shivering wretches, out of the piercing winds. The room could not hold them. Nearly all came with tickets from the investigating committee testifying to their needs.[53]

Relief became the major point of controversy in relations between Josephine Griffing and the Freedmen's Bureau. The military mind could not fathom the emotions of this fiercely dedicated woman. She would not follow the rules; she would interfere with the efforts of army officers to live within their budgets and obey their orders. One may sympathize with the men in uniform who came face to face with this difficult, irate woman. In her view the government, having freed the slaves, was obligated to care for them until they could care for themselves. Operating on this premise, she set out to exploit the Bureau as best she could. Numerous letters to the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia demonstrate the constant pressure which she applied—want, want, want. In the winter of 1866 the Bureau agreed to provide one wagonload of wood per day for sufferers in the south eastern quadrant of Washington. Later in the same year she pleaded for a horse and wagon to be used to investigate and assist relief cases. She fought to obtain condemned army stores—clothing, shoes, bedsacks, blankets, anything useful—for distribution to the freedmen. And she complained to administrators of the Bureau about the negligence of their subordinates in handling relief cases, much to the irritation of Bureau

[52] Washington *National Republican*, January 13, 15, 1868.
[53] *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, January 27, 1866.

personnel. She was not above interceding for freedmen who complained that they had been mistreated.[54]

The passage of time did not ease relations. After her appointment as a relief agent of the Bureau for the Capitol Hill and Navy Yard districts in 1867, Mrs. Griffing became less patient with bureaucratic restraints than ever before. In June she was ordered to stop issuing government clothing to the poor.[55] A warning from C. H. Howard, the Bureau's Washington chief, admonished her to follow the usual regulations and the chain of command:

> In those cases of extreme destitution which you mention, you are at liberty to send them to the Local Superintendent . . . for such clothing as they need. If liable to suffer from want of food their case can be reported to the Special Relief Commission. Any cases of permanent disability from old age or other cause, should be reported to be cared for either at the Hospital or at the Asylum at Freedmens Village.[56]

Defending her conduct with respect to relief, Mrs. Griffing insisted that she investigated every case in order to ascertain the needs of individuals involved.[57] Other members of the Bureau staff were unconvinced of her reliability and argued that she had been extremely lax in her investigation of cases.[58] But despite the growing criticism of her techniques, Mrs. Griffing continued her fearless badgering of the Bureau. During the spring of 1868 she called the attention of officials to scores of unemployed suffering freed people, including many women with families, and urged that government funds and provisions be provided for them.[59] In response to her pressure the Bureau agreed to have the Sanitary Commission building near the B. and O. depot at the foot of Capitol Hill fitted out as a tenement for poor people. She also appealed for other "public housing," demanding the retention of surplus barracks for occupancy by destitute freedmen.[60] In effect, Mrs. Griffing tried to serve as an inter-

[54] Bureau Records, D. C., J. S. Griffing to the Asst. Commissioner for D. C., April 22, June 10, 23, July 17, August 4, 30, 1867; S. N. Clark to J. S. Griffing, February 13, 16, 1866; S. N. Clark to Captain Sprugin, February 13, 1866.
[55] Bureau Records, D. C., William Rogers to J. S. Griffing, June 3, 1867.
[56] Bureau Records, D. C., C. H. Howard to J. S. Griffing, July 12, 1867.
[57] Bureau Records, D. C., J. S. Griffing to Asst. Commissioner for D. C. November 18, 1867.
[58] Bureau Records, D. C., Stuart Eldridge to J. S. Griffing, February 5, 1868; J. V. W. Vandenburgh to the Asst. Commissioner for D. C., April 2, 1868; Stuart Eldridge to J. S. Griffing, April 9, 1868.
[59] Bureau Records, J. S. Griffing to Asst. Commisioner for D. C., March 16, 18, 21, 25, 27, 28, April 1, 3, 4, 6, 1868; Stuart Eldridge to J. S. Griffing, April 3, 7, 1868.
[60] Bureau Records, J. S. Griffing to Asst. Commissioner for D. C., February 13, 15, March 7, 27, April 18, 1868; Stuart Eldridge to J. S. Griffing, February 20, 1868; Eldridge to J. M. Brown, March 4, 1868.

mediary between the ignorant, helpless freedmen and the Bureau, whose agents she viewed with great suspicion as members of a heartless, impersonal bureaucracy.

As in most disputes of this kind, there is merit on both sides. Officers of the Freedmen's Bureau, responsible to their superiors and ultimately, to Congress and the public, operating always with a budget which could not begin to meet the great needs of their wards, required orderly procedures for handling and limiting the relief load, procedures that inevitably overlooked and excluded many deserving families. Some Bureau agents were incompetent, some were racially prejudiced, many were hardened to suffering, and few could share Mrs. Griffing's intense and overriding concern for every single case of hunger and suffering. Moreover, the Bureau administration was particularly fearful of pauperizing the freedmen—encouraging them, by the generous distribution of relief, to remain on the government dole. Mrs. Griffing, a reformer and a moralist of strong sentiments, could not abide the apparent unconcern which Bureau agents exhibited. Unlike the public officials, she was far less concerned for administrative order than she was for the welfare and elevation of the freed people. As an abolitionist, she interpreted every slight to the Negro as being inspired by racial bias or "rebel" sympathies. In addition, she was aware in a way that few of her contemporaries were, that only hard work and vast expenditures would overcome the disabilities confronting the freed people. Despite her incessant friction with the Bureau, she seems to have enjoyed the respect and confidence of its chief, General Oliver O. Howard.[61]

In the final analysis, the disputes between Josephine Griffing and the Freedmen's Bureau reflected the very basic conflict between a minority dedicated to the principle of racial justice and full equality and the general public, generally unconcerned about this issue and probably unsympathetic toward the aspirations of the Negro. This is not to say that the chief fault lay with the Bureau. Many agents were dedicated men, eager to serve the cause of freedom. In particular, General Howard felt deeply the responsibility which his agency had to protect and uplift the freedmen.[62] But in fact the Bureau had little opportunity to prove its worth. A noble but short-lived experiment, its activities were drastically curtailed in 1868 and virtually abandoned in 1870.[63]

[61] Evidence on this point is not certain, but see O. O. Howard to J. S. Griffing, October 13, 1868, Ms., Griffing papers, Columbia University, and O. O. Howard to Sayles J. Bowen, published in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 10, 1866.

[62] James A. Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch: Oliver Otis Howard* (Pittsburgh, 1964), pp. 91–93.

[63] Bentley, *op. cit.*, passim., serves the Freedmen's Bureau well as an organizational history, and passes judgment upon its work, citing both its strengths and its weaknesses. A sympathetic evaluation of the Bureau is contained in Robert H. Bremner, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago, 1960), pp. 86–88. John Hope Franklin, in his *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (Chicago, 1961), argues (pp. 196–204), that indifference and outright anti-Negro feelings, developing between 1867 and 1875, doomed any real efforts to serve the freedmen.

The prospect of abandonment produced consternation among persons who cherished the hope that the Bureau might continue to serve the freedmen. Despite three years of assistance, the problems of the needy in Washington were as considerable as they had ever been. The aged and infirm were not diminishing in numbers, "The gap caused by death being filled up by those whose hard service & mode of life have rendered them prematurely old & unfit for service."[64] Dr. Charles B. Purvis of Freedmen's Hospital, who had worked with the poor in Washington for three years, wrote:

> During this time I have seen no period in which the freedmen stood in greater need of the assistance and protection of the Bureau than at present. The scarcity of labor—the high price of living keeps them in abject poverty. The gross impositions practiced upon them by those who employ them, paying them but half their earnings, refusing in fact to employ them at all, the hatred which is too often openly manifested towards them by reason of their being voters. *All* demand for them a protection such as the Bureau now affords.[65]

Economic problems lay at the root of the matter, for the Negroes suffered from unrelenting discrimination in employment.[66] These were the very problems which Josephine Griffing had worked to avoid by transporting the freedmen away from Washington. Yet her efforts were increasingly futile. During a period of eight months ending in July, 1868, she had found jobs for only 254 out of 2,114 applicants.[67]

Despite the critical state of affairs in the District, the Freedmen's Bureau reluctantly abandoned most of its operations except those supported chiefly by private contributions. Against the advice of Mayor Sayles J. Bowen, Mrs. Griffing and her daughter, a trusted assistant for three years, were dismissed from their posts in August, 1868. Despite this setback, she campaigned to be reinstated, and endeavored in other ways to make the Bureau live up to its responsibilities.[68] She met with some success in extracting support from the

[64] Bureau Records, T. D. Eliot Papers, G. A. Wheeler to Eliot, December 27, 1867.

[65] Bureau Records, T. D. Eliot Papers, Charles B. Purvis to Eliot, January 9, 1868.

[66] Bureau Records, T. D. Eliot Papers, J. S. Brown, to Eliot, December 27, 1867.

[67] Bureau Records, D. C., Stuart Eldridge to Asst. Adjutant General, August 3, 1868.

[68] Bureau Records, D. C., S. J. Bowen to Asst. Adjutant General, July 28, 1868; E. Whittlesey to J. S. Griffing, March 18, 1868, August 27, 1868; J. S. Griffing to Asst. Commissioner for D. C., September 15, 26, October 13, 1868; April 20, 1869.

Bureau, and for a time she was able to purchase supplies at reduced costs from the Commissary General. But late in 1869 Bureau funds simply gave out.[69]

The period from 1869 until 1872 is in some respects the most dramatic chapter in the story of Josephine Griffing's relief work. For her office and residence on North Capitol Street remained a center for social and economic assistance to the freedmen, one of the few spots in Washington where the poor were certain of a welcome. To Lucretia Mott she wrote in 1870 a long explanation of her operations. Acknowledging that the Freedmen's Bureau was merely a temporary and partial source of support for freed people during the transition from slavery, she asserted:

> The Bureau ... was abolished without a substitute, for the aged and worn-out Slaves who were now older and more infirm, and *lost in this change, houses, food, fuel, clothing, medical treatment,* and visiting agts (excepting myself). Since the *discontinuance* of the Bureau I have acted as before its *creation* as "best friend" and as agt of the National Freedmens Relief Assoc of this District in the care of the old, crippled, blind, and broken down of whom I have at this time in number, *eleven hundred* not one of whom, is able to earn for themselves, the necessaries of life.[70]

More than ever before, she was truly an "angel of mercy" to the most disabled freed people. Every day saw large crowds of ragged Negroes, in every stage of distress, surrounding her house on Capitol Hill, occupying the porches, moving in and out of doors, all hoping for aid. A reporter from the New York *World* visited this scene and recorded her impressions:

> I sat for an hour this morning in Mrs. Griffing's office during the distribution of rations, and a curious scene it was. There was not a sound creature among the crowd which filled the yard, and which hangs about all day from 9 till 4, which the neighborhood calls "Mrs. Griffing's signs." It reminded me of another crowd of impotent folk, lame, halt, and blind, which filled the loveliest space in Jerusalem. . . .[71]

Other pictures of the distress with which she lived may be obtained from some of the appeals written to Northern philanthropists. A woman of 91 (undoubtedly exaggerated since few slaves had any

[69] Bureau Records, O. O. Howard to J. S. Griffing, November 10, 1868; E. Whittlesey to J. S. Griffing, November 24, 1869.

[70] J. S. Griffing to Lucretia Mott, April 22, 1870, Ms., Griffing Papers, Columbia University.

[71] Clipping, dated February 25 [1870], from the New York *World,* Griffing scrapbook, Columbia University.

clear idea of how old they were) with no home for the winter, no friends or relatives in the city, had survived by begging from poor Negroes on the outskirts of Washington. Mrs. Griffing took the aged woman in and gave her lodging. Other old people were nearly helpless and in desperate need of medical attention:

> Anna Sanxter 101—with a consumptive son, sixty, and has slept on an old table, through the winter—*watching,* as she says, two days and a night, at one time *with no food at all*—She was one of the slaves of Washington. Anna Furguson another of his slaves, emancipated when young, lives in a wretched garret, and has not no one to give her a cup of water. She sent a child to me who said ... she was "*perishing* for nourishment, could I send her an Irish Potatoe? she added to this, in her message, "tell her to come and see me, I'll not be here long." [72]

Her appeals were often exaggerated and heavily laced with sentiment, as when she wrote in behalf of the two women who claimed to be the slaves of George Washington. Noting the great reverence for material relics of the first President—his watch for example—she was anguished by the disregard for these sorrowful and helpless people: "Will not the heart of patriotism beat a response to the living pulses of these sacred relics of George Washington?" [72a]

Appeals of this sort in letters or published in newspapers were calculated to strike a responsive chord in women. They helped in some slight measure to relieve the oppressive burden of financial crisis which always hung over Mrs. Griffing's enterprise during the later years. Small sums were often obtained through correspondence. The eminent philanthropist, Gerrit Smith sent $10 on two separate occasions, and Lucretia Mott collected money more than once from members of the Society of Friends in Philadelphia.[73] Ladies' organizations and sewing circles sent in funds and useful articles. In two years her organization, the National Freedmen's Relief Association, had provided approximately $7,000 worth of clothing for the very aged.[74] She was largely dependent upon the generosity of Northern people, but Washingtonians occasionally made contributions. One appeal in the city papers brought an immediate response of $20, which Mrs. Griffing spent the day it was received on food, and netted

[72] J. S. Griffing to Lucretia Mott, April 22, 1870.

[72a] Clipping, not dated (July 27, 1870?), from *Washington Chronicle.*

[73] Gerrit Smith to J. S. Griffing, January 2, 1866, August 10, 1869; Lucretia Mott to J. S. Griffing, 12 mo. 25, 1869, 5 mo. 17, 1870, Mss., Griffing Papers, Columbia University.

[74] Clippings, undated, from the Washington *Chronicle,* Griffing Scrapbooks, Columbia University.

altogether $50.[75] For the most part, however, Washington residents did not regard the care of destitute freed people as their own obligation, but rather as the responsibility of Congress.[76] Despite the urgent needs of these people, the wells of Northern philanthropy were slowly but certainly drying up. Northern cities had relief problems of their own, and the interests of philanthropists were shifting to other causes such as "the claims of the Indians." [77]

In addition to her efforts to obtain private financial aid for the freedmen, Mrs. Griffing exerted constant pressure for public assistance to this class. To Charles Sumner she wrote in March, 1869, asking for another Congressional appropriation for the special relief fund, urging its absolute necessity: "If Cong. should refuse this reasonable provision, . . . I should insist that a part of the 'remnants of the war' be appropriated for this first duty, to the dependent—aged (blind & crippled in slavery for life) of, at least, a scanty subsistence." [78] Evidently the bill passed but two years later, after Federal appropriations had been exhausted for 12 weeks, Mrs. Griffing appealed desperately to the District government to help at least a thousand persons who could not work.[79] Many critics opposed her entire relief program on the grounds that it encouraged and supported people who would not work.

Horace Greeley launched a bitter attack on Mrs. Griffing in 1870, questioning the principle of freely offered assistance:

> In my judgement, you and the others who wish to befriend the Blacks crowded into Washington do them a great injury. Had they been told, years ago, "You *must* find work; go out and seek it!" they would have been spared much misery. They are an easy worthless race, taking no thought of the morrow; and liking to lean on those who have been kind to them. Your course aggravates their weaknesses, when you should raise their ambition and stimulate them to self-reliance. Unless you change your course speedily and signally, the swarming of Blacks to the District will increase, and the argument that slavery is their natural condition will be immeasurably strengthened.[80]

[75] Clipping from the *National Anti-Slavery Standard,* letter from Catherine F. Stebbins dated February 10, 1871, Griffing Scrapbook, Columbia University.

[76] J. S. Griffing to Lucretia Mott, April 22, 1870.

[77] Lucretia Mott to J. S. Griffing, 12 mo. 25, 1869, Ms., Griffing Papers, Columbia University.

[78] J. S. Griffing to Charles Sumner, March 30, 1869, Ms., Harvard University Library.

[79] J. S. Griffing to the Mayor and Board of Common Council, Washington, D. C., April 8, 1871, Ms., copy, Griffing Papers, Columbia University.

[80] Horace Greeley to Josephine Griffing, September 7, 1870, Ms., Griffing Papers, Columbia University; see also an earlier letter from Greeley to Mrs. Griffing, January 31, 1866, Ms., Griffing Papers, arguing in the same vein.

To Greeley and many other unsympathetic persons, devoted to "liberal" economics and self-reliant individualism, it was unthinkable that any group, however much they might suffer, should derive their subsistence without working for it. The proponents of individualism argued with some justice that relief tended to pauperize the freedmen. Mrs. Griffing defended herself vigorously, asserting that her efforts were engaged on behalf of those Negroes who could not help themselves:

> If, to provide houses, food, clothing, and other physcial comforts, to those broken-down aged slaves whom we have liberated in their declining years, when all their strength is gone, and for whom no home, family friendship, or subsistence is furnished; if this is a "great injury," in my judgement there is no call for alms-house, hospital, home, or asylum in human society. . . . So far as an humble individual can be, I am substituting to these a freedmen's (relief) bureau; sanitary commission; church sewing society, to aid the poor; orphan asylum; old people's home; hospital and alms-house for the sick and the blind; minister-at-large, to visit the sick, console the dying, and bury the dead; and wherein I fail, and perhaps you discriminate, is the want of wealthy, popular, and what is called honorable associations. Were these at my command, with the field before me, it would be easy to illustrate the practical use as well as the divine origin of the Golden Rule.[81]

The problem was, as Mrs. Griffing and a very few associates recognized, that the former slaves could not immediately, without preparation, undertake the responsibilities of free economic agents.

The pattern of Mrs. Griffing's work represented a downward spiral after 1870—a constant and unsuccessful struggle merely to say abreast of current demands. The last industrial school which she supervised was discontinued about 1870. Her employment office continued to operate on a completely informal basis after the Freedmen's Bureau had abandoned all support for employment agents. In response to correspondents who desired Negro servants and laborers, clerks of the Freedmen's Bureau referred them to Mrs. Griffing, the only person who might assist them in finding suitable workers. To one writer she was described as "formerly an agent of this Bureau, and now more familiar with matters of this kind than any other person." [82] Bureau officials, by 1869 almost completely without funds,

[81] Letter dated September 12, 1870, Josephine Griffing to Horace Greeley, published in Stanton, et al., *History of Woman Suffrage* II, p. 36.

[82] Bureau Records, letterpress books, E. Whittlesey to Benjamin Richardson, June 8, 1870, Ms. See other letters in the same records: J. B. Littlewood to Thomas Heaton,

also hoped that Mrs. Griffing might assist destitute and deserving freedmen to find work—for example, "help a meritorious person to obtain an honest support," or in a last resort, to give them food and shelter—"to do something for them." [83] The problems of meeting the unceasing demands for her pathetic charges was compounded by Mrs. Griffing's own diminishing energies. Apparently afflicted with "consumption," she drove herself excessively, and in 1870 she was ill and bedridden for many weeks. But she would not take time out to recruit her strength. It was not encouraging to her that as her own ability to aid them diminished, the worn-out former slaves were less and less able to help themselves.

Although her attention was occupied chiefly by the condition and needs of the freedmen, Mrs. Griffing maintained her enthusiasm for another reform interest which had captured her attention as early as 1850—the women's rights movement. Between 1866 and 1870 she was the most vigorous suffragist residing in the District of Columbia. During the so-called "Negro's Hour," at the close of the Civil War, when reformist attention was focused upon the need for enfranchisement and civil rights for the former slaves, Josephine Griffing joined a militant minority of women in demanding that Negro rights and women's rights be coupled in legislation. Along with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, she fought to keep the word "male" out of the Constitution, and she was disappointed as the 14th amendment included the hated word three times, giving Constitutional sanction to the denial of woman's right to the ballot. For this view she earned a bitter rebuke from the great Negro abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, who "never suspected" her of sympathizing with the position of Mrs. Stanton and Miss Anthony, "that no negro shall be enfranchised while woman is not." He wrote: "While the negro is mobbed, beaten, shot, stabbed, hanged, burnt, and is the target of all that is murderous in the South, his claims may be preferred by me without exposing in any wise myself to the imputation of narrowness or meanness towards the cause of woman." [84] Mrs. Griffing would not be deterred, however, believing that consistency of principle demanded equal treatment for all. In 1866 she became a vice president

June 1, 1869; J. B. Littlewood to W. F. Sanders, of Helena, Mont. Terr., June 10, 1869; H. M. Whittlesey to J. S. Griffing, November 2, 1869, February 25, 1870; E. Whittlesey to Edmund Foster, May 19, 1871. Many other letters during this period refer to Mrs. Griffing as a source for Negro labor.

[83] Bureau Records, letterpress books, H. D. Beam to J. S. Griffing, October 28, 1869; H. M. Whittlesey to J. S. Griffing, January 10, 1870, February 24, 1870.

[84] Frederick Douglass to Josephine Griffing, September 27, 1868, Ms., Griffing Papers, Columbia University.

of the American Equal Rights Association, dedicated to equal rights for men and women alike. In the late 1860s and early 1870s the suffrage struggle shifted to Washington and Mrs. Griffing was an organizer and became president of the District of Columbia Suffrage Association. During this period she and other women worked for a Federal suffrage amendment like the 15th amendment which guaranteed Negro voting rights. She participated in several women's conventions and addressed a Senate Judiciary Committee meeting in January, 1871.[85] Although she sided with the militant Stanton-Anthony group, the National Woman Suffrage Association, there is abundant evidence that she tried to act as a peace-maker and a compromiser after the split in the suffrage movement in 1869.[86] She invited speakers from all factions among the suffragists to come to Washington.[87] Her last major public appearance took place at the New York suffrage meeting in May 1871, where she reported on the campaign for the ballot in Washington.[88] Here she was physically so weak that a screen had to be placed behind her in order that she might be heard by the audience. Always the reformer, she fought for the freedom and equality of two significant disadvantaged groups—Negroes and women—and expended her energies until she had none left to offer.

Josephine Griffing died in February 1872, probably of tuberculosis, after years of poor health. She was buried in Burris Hill Cemetery at Hebron, Connecticut, her birthplace. In one respect she was typically Victorian, the victim of a "decline," but her illness arose not from languid purposeless inaction. Instead she was the victim of an overpowering need to act which led her literally to work herself to death. Of all the reformers who tried to aid the Negro in the post-Civil War world, none was more enthusiastic nor more persevering than Josephine Griffing. In seeking to relieve the free Negroes of Washington, she lobbied in Congress and with the District government, she served as a counselor and social worker, she helped in finding employment, she opened schools for children and adults,

[85] Harper, *Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony* I, pp. 255–270, 313–314, 337–339, 377, 383.

[86] On the suffrage split, see Robert E. Riegel, "The Split of the Feminist Movement in 1869," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review XLIX* (December, 1962), pp. 485–496; and Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, 1959), ch. 10.

[87] Letters to Josephine Griffing from Thomas Wentworth Higginson, January 13, 1870; Henry Ward Beecher, January 6, 1869, October 10, 1870; Lucretia Mott, 12 mo. 25th, 1869; Theodore Tilton, June 22, and September 6, 1871, all Mss., Griffing Papers, Columbia University.

[88] Stanton, et al., *History of Woman Suffrage* II, p. 39.

she distributed food, clothing, and shelter to the destitute, and she defended the ignorant and helpless against exploitation. Undoubtedly many of her undertakings were marred by poor judgment and excessive zeal. Yet she saw through the superficiality of much of the sentiment which governed the reformers' attitudes toward the Negro. As one of many persons interested in the Negro, she took advantage of the existing organizations—freedmen's aid societies and antislavery societies—depending upon them for supplies and funds. Her perceptions however, went far beyond common views. She knew that constitutions and proclamations would not lead to real emancipation. She realized the complexities and dimensions of freedom for the slaves, and knew from daily experience the power of racial discrimination. She understood that the structure of freedom could be built only upon a solid economic foundation. She knew that actual freedom could be gained only after an immense investment of time and energy, and she was fully aware that the necessary investments were not likely to be made. But her accomplishments did not live up to the breadth of her vision. She was too far ahead of her time to succeed. Indeed, many of the proposals for action that she advanced have not been seriously undertaken in the century since they were first suggested. Josephine Griffing belongs to a distinguished company of Victorian Yankee women whose names include such illustrious American humanitarians as Clara Barton, Dorothea Dix, Susan B. Anthony. It was in the ambitious nature of her cause—the drive for true emancipation of the Negro—that she could not begin to achieve her aims; and her accomplishments, unlike those of her better-remembered, more successful contemporaries, are nearly forgotten.

Like many other notable women of her generation, Mrs. Griffing was a formidable character—a "yankee female"—harsh, unbending self-righteous, yet sentimental and charitable to a considerable degree. Her motives may not have always been generous: she evidently dealt with many people, Negro and white, in a patronizing manner, and she often displayed a singular lack of humility. Despite such personal qualities, however, Mrs. Griffing emerges from the dim past as a far-sighted, energetic, and gifted woman who made a significant if minor contribution to post-Civil War life in the District of Columbia. To the thousands of former slaves who crowded into the city during this period she was truly an "angel of mercy." Saddened by her death in 1872, local reformers paid tribute to her in glowing eulogies. Mrs. Belva A. Lockwood—soon to become one of the most notable women in Washington—said, "we appreciate her broad and beneficent charities, which were regardless of sex or color, and promoted by a heart which beat for all humanity. . . ." [89] The impact of her work in Washington was summed up by an old friend and co-laborer, William Lloyd Garrison, who wrote:

> With what unremitting zeal and energy did she espouse the cause of the homeless, penniless, benighted, starving freedmen, driven by stress of circumstances into the national capital in such overwhelming numbers; and what a multitude were befriended and saved through her moving appeals in their behalf! How like the angel of mercy she must have seemed to them all! [90]

It is a commentary on the state of public feeling that these generous words concerning her angelic mission had scarce been written, before Josephine Griffing was forgotten. It is also discouraging to note that probably few members of Washington society in the era of Ullysses Grant were moved by the death of this able spokeswoman for equality.[91] Thus as history shows again and again, when major crises diminish, in the consuming desire of most citizens to return to "normalcy" or "business as usual," the spirit of reform and reformers is forgotten.

It is a commentary also on the scope of her vision and the magnitude of the task which she undertook that at present, in the year 1965, the United States is witnessing widespread efforts to achieve the same ends that she sought. The Negro Civil Rights movement seeks through agitation and pressure of every sort to realize complete freedom and human equality for Negro Americans who became Constitutionally free in 1865 with the ratification of the 13th Amendment. The recently-inaugurated "War on Poverty" aims, as did Josephine Griffing, to elevate the poor of all races to a condition of economic security above the mean level of subsistence. In its attack on poverty, this program uses some of the same techniques that Mrs. Griffing applied a century ago to the problem—relief for the aged and helpless, practical education and work for the able-bodied unemployed, wide-ranging social services and counseling for those poor who need assistance in their struggle for dignity and self-sufficiency. The job and the methods for carrying it out have changed only slightly in 100 years. No doubt if she had been born a century later, Josephine Griffing would be in the forefront of contemporary at-

[89] Clipping, undated, from the Washington *Chronicle*, Griffing Papers, Columbia University.

[90] William Lloyd Garrison to Giles B. Stebbins, March 4, 1872, published in Stanton, et al., *History of Woman Suffrage* II, p. 38.

[91] Green, *Washington. . . .* pp. 364–375, considers the status of the Negro and conditions of Washington society in the early 1870s.

tacks on inequality and poverty, participating in demonstrations, lobbying in Congress, or working on the community level to insure the economic advancement of the underprivileged. Perhaps at this time she would be more successful, for the nation is better prepared to complete the task which Mrs. Griffing set out to accomplish 100 years ago.