

# Josephine Griffing

1814-1872

*Lobbyist for the Freedman*

One of the few abolitionists who looked ahead to the problems of the freed slave was Josephine Griffing. This foresighted woman and frontier settler used her years of work and contacts in the antislavery movement to persuade men like Senators Charles Sumner and Benjamin Wade that a Freedmen's Bureau was necessary. By March of 1865, in fact, thousands of black citizens were already beginning to converge in hopefulness upon the nation's capital. Griffing, who had moved there with her three daughters, first began to use Northern relief funds to obtain food, fuel, and temporary housing for the displaced ex-slaves in that city.

Both Josephine White in Hebron, Connecticut, on December 18, 1814, her father had represented Hebron in the state legislature, and she was a descendant of Peregrine White, the first white child born in New England. The young girl involved herself with those who urged "no union with slaveholders," especially after moving to the Ohio region with her husband, Charles Griffing, in 1842. In Ohio, Josephine Griffing contributed frequently to the Salem *Anti-Slavery Bugle* and was a member of the first Ohio woman's rights convention in 1850. A year later, in the strong belief that she should enlist women's "moral

influence" in the cause, she became a paid agent of the Western Anti-Slavery Society. Her outspokenness on these issues, which created a clash with the orthodox clergy, led her to become involved with a radical religious group called the Ohio Friends of Human Progress.

In post-Civil War Washington, where Griffing had moved after divorcing her husband, she was a vigorous advocate of a broadly based relief program for freed blacks. She worked as a district commissioner in the new Freedmen's Bureau herself until 1867 when, as an employment agent, she worked with private benevolent groups throughout the North trying to find jobs for freedmen, opening a special project to teach women to be seamstresses, and often personally escorting blacks from Washington to their new jobs in the North.

After the Freedmen's Bureau was abolished in 1869, Griffing raised funds privately in order to continue her work, insisting the nation be responsible for its wrongdoings despite criticism from newspaper editor Horace Greeley and others. She was also an officer of the National Woman Suffrage Association and remained active in both causes until her death in Washington, D.C., on February 18, 1872, at the age of 58.

Illustration: *An officer of the Freedmen's Bureau protects blacks against a white mob*