Josiah Bushnell Grinnell:

Radical Abolitionist Through and Through

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Content Warning: This essay includes direct quotes from historical sources and transcripts which use derogatory racial epithets.

On June 14, 1866 congressman Lovell Rousseau from Kentucky cornered Josiah Bushnell Grinnell, a representative from Iowa, in the east front house portico of the United States Capitol building and repeatedly beat Grinnell with an iron-tipped cane until the cane broke. The incident was the culmination of several months of fiery arguments between Rousseau and Grinnell, which devolved over the course of 1866 into a bitter vendetta consisting of personal attacks exchanged on the House floor.[1] On the surface, the caning of Grinnell by Rousseau was yet another incident illustrative of the violent tensions between leaders from different parts of the country endemic of the Civil War and early Reconstruction eras. However, the caning represents a much more complex story: J.B. Grinnell's individual role in shaping the Union during the most turbulent time in American history.

Residents of Grinnell, Iowa, named after J.B. Grinnell, consider his legacy to be the foundation of the town and namesake of Grinnell College.[2] The foremost historian on J.B. Grinnell, Charles E. Payne, presents Grinnell as a man with vigorous character and strong abolitionist convictions that produced significant progress in his local community, the state of Iowa, and the country during his lifetime.[3] Considering Grinnell's achievements over the course of his life, the legacy given to him by Payne and his fellow Grinnellians is accurate and rightly deserved. Yet, if Grinnell maintained a righteous character throughout his lifetime, as Payne argues, how did his character and abolitionist beliefs weather the profound impact of the events of the Civil War on himself and other Union leaders?

In the debate over Union politics during the Civil War, scholars agree that the progress of the war effort directly influenced Union politics, causing ideological transformations by Union politicians toward the acceptance of abolition as a war measure. Congress was far from united at the outset of the war. Northern Democrats were strongly against abolition, and while the Republican coalition was firmly antislavery, Congress' dominant party lacked unity regarding when, how, and why abolition should occur. It is important to note that the Republican Party was still in its fledgling stage: as a combination of former Free-Soilers, Whigs, and other progressives, the party's umbrella ideology was constantly evolving before the war broke out.

Once the war broke out, Union politicians faced an unprecedented national crisis which created the necessity for leaders to abandon their personal ambitions and agendas and compromise on the Capitol floor, or in clandestine meetings in the dead of night, in order to preserve the United States. Given the extraordinary circumstances of a Congress in war, Michael Vorenberg argues that the Thirteenth Amendment was possible only after the war began, and that scholars underestimate the extent and complexity of the inter-party and intra party discourse that went into the emancipation question.[4] J.B. Grinnell served in Congress during a time when his Republican party was evolving, becoming more radical in policy and public discourse in response to the increasingly dire prospect of saving the Union. Despite their pre-war convictions regarding abolition, Michael Green contends that the Republicans put aside their regional, moral, and political differences and united under a wartime ideology valuing freedom, the Union, and power.[5]

The importance of the evolution of Union politics highlighted by these scholars suggests that J.B. Grinnell's legacy is incomplete without a close examination of his actions taken in Congress during the Civil War. Based on Grinnell's autobiography and speeches given by Grinnell in the House recorded in the Congressional Globe, his efforts in Congress during the war contradict the scholarly assumption that all Union politicians departed from their antebellum convictions and adapted to the Union cause. J.B. Grinnell's efforts in

advocating for the expansion of the Freedmen's Bureau and a Reconstruction plan that would seek justice for the wrongs done by the Confederate States on behalf of the country's Southern black population demonstrate that, while his colleagues compromised their principles because of the circumstances of the Civil War, Grinnell upheld his original radical abolitionist principles throughout his time in Congress.

J.B. Grinnell's Antebellum Career: a Rising Star in the Antislavery Debate

J.B. Grinnell grew up and spent his formative years in New England, antebellum America's hotbed for radical antislavery activism. Grinnell was born on December 22, 1821 in New Haven, Vermont.[6] His family subsisted on a modest income from the family's farm and his father's work as a writer and schoolmaster.[7] Although his father died when he was young, his vocations undoubtedly influenced Grinnell's interest in legislation and the promotion of education that would become one of the core tenets of his political platform later on.[8] After his father's death, Josiah finished his education and secured a job as a teacher in a country school when he was 16.[9] At an early time in his life, Grinnell developed an appreciation for education and serving others that would become a lifelong characteristic of his.

Grinnell decided to pursue higher education after his time spent in the country school. He intended to study at Yale, but a family friend convinced him to instead study at the recently founded Oneida Institute in Whitesboro, New York.[10] During this period, upstate New York was the epicenter for the religious revival that gave birth to the national abolition movement. As antislavery ideas fermented in New York, the movement's evangelist leaders expanded their influence into politics and higher education. Gerrit Smith, the largest landowner in the state and a proponent of the movement, contributed considerable funds to the expansion of the Oneida Institute on the grounds that the institute would teach radical antislavery ideology.[11] Exposure to the antislavery zeitgeist in New York, and especially the radical community at the Oneida Institute, shaped Grinnell into a young, radical abolitionist.[12]

After graduation from the Oneida Institute, Grinnell pursued Congregational ministry as his first profession. In 1846, he graduated from Auburn Theological Seminary and moved to Union Village, New York to preach in the Congregational church for three years.[13] Grinnell's exposure to the radical abolition movement continued during this time. As the movement gained momentum, evangelist leaders in upstate New York increasingly believed it was a moral imperative to exercise political power to right the wrongs of slavery.[14] Grinnell's role in the Congregational church meant that he became involved in the second largest abolitionist denomination in the state.[15] The growing intersection between evangelism and antislavery politics in New York influenced Grinnell's career trajectory, leading him to move to Washington D.C. in 1850 to attempt to influence political players through sermons.

Once in the nation's capital, Grinnell purchased a small churchouse and founded the First Congregational Church. Grinnell's new life in Washington exposed him to the flourishing slave trade. Upon witnessing for the first time the evils of slavery he had grown to reject during his time in New York, of which chained slaves seemed to be the most jarring, Grinnell wrote that his "blood boiled."[16] Inspired by Washington's slave trade scene, Grinnell's debut sermons in his new church focused on freedom based on equality. His sermons were incredibly unpopular and quickly led to his literal escort out of town by a proslavery contingent.[17] Grinnell's first foray into the nation's political hub ended disastrously because of his commitment to preaching abolitionist principles. Ironically, his forced removal from D.C. on the grounds of his radical stance led to the circumstances that would allow him to return to the capital poised in a more powerful position to create change a decade later.

After the failed stint in Washington, Grinnell moved back to comfortable grounds in New York City, where he dedicated his time to earnestly preaching against slavery. He met his wife Julia Chapin in the city and married her in 1852. Grinnell's activism in New York exposed him to important political circles and fostered what would become a lifelong friendship with New York Tribune editor Horace Greeley. According to his autobiography, Grinnell was the recipient of the famous advice by Greeley to "Go West, young man. Go West."[18] Whether this is actually true is uncertain, but in 1854, Grinnell purchased several hundred acres of land west of the Mississippi and founded the village that would become Grinnell, Iowa.

J.B. Grinnell's vision for the town of Grinnell reflected the personal values he developed growing up in New England. Grinnell wanted a community antithetical to the conditions he witnessed in Washington D.C.

In the advertisements he released to draw residents, Grinnell called for people, "desirous of educational facilities, and of temperance and Congregational affinities."[19] Implicit in Grinnell's advertisements was the message that the town would be forward-thinking, and thus open to abolitionists seeking a welcoming destination in the West. The foundation of Grinnell is part of a larger narrative in Iowa's rapid growth in the 1840's and 1850's, in which evangelists from the Northeast, drawn by the promise of land and the allure of Manifest Destiny, settled into small communities across the state. Northeasterners brought with them their progressive ideas, shifting public opinion in the '40s and '50s to a solidly antislavery public opinion as part of the larger drive to make new states and territories free of slavery.[20]

As Grinnell grew, the town gained a reputation around the state as an antislavery town. Soon after founding the town, Grinnell also founded Grinnell University, which would later merge with Iowa College to become Grinnell College. Founders and early professors at the college shaped it into a radical abolitionist institution.[21] The influence from J.B. Grinnell and the college community created an open and accepting culture in the town for radical abolitionist thought and activism.[22]

Right around the time of the foundation of Grinnell, Iowans found themselves increasingly drawn into the national debate about slavery because of the state's close proximity to the slave state Missouri and the two states involved in the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Iowa quickly became an important corridor for settlers and railroads pouring into the region to settle in the two new states.[23] Iowans also faced a natural byproduct of all of the traffic: the Underground Railroad. Grinnell's reputation as an abolitionist stronghold made the town an important stop on the Underground Railroad.[24] Given his well established abolitionist convictions, it is no surprise that J.B. Grinnell himself played a key role in facilitating the town's stop on the path to freedom. At the same time that Grinnell was hiding runaway slaves in his wool barn, he began to get involved in state legislation in order to address Iowa's growing involvement with the slavery issue.

In the mid-1850s the slavery question dominated public consciousness, and with the issue intimately affecting his community, J.B. Grinnell decided his work on the Underground Railroad was no longer enough and embarked on a political career that would span two decades. The national genesis of the Republican Party spurned a consolidation of Whigs and Free-Soilers in Iowa. In 1856, Governor James Grimes orchestrated a state convention of known leaders sympathetic to the Republican Party and the antislavery cause in Iowa City to found Iowa's Republican Party. Grinnell's growing regional influence earned him an invitation to the convention. The newcomer's charisma and energetic participation in debate turned heads at the convention and earned him a coveted position as chairman of the committee to draft the new party's address to Iowans.[25] The address was a successful introduction for both the Iowa Republican Party and for Grinnell, garnering high acclaim from Salmon Chase, governor of Ohio and an old friend of Grinnell's from his time spent in Washington D.C.[26] Grinnell's strong first impression also led to his nomination as the Republican candidate for the state senate position for the district encompassing Poweshiek, Jasper, Tama, and Mahaska counties. Running on a platform promoting temperance, free soil, and universal free education, Grinnell was elected to his first public office in 1856 as a state senator to the Iowa state legislature's Sixth General Assembly.[27]

J.B. Grinnell entered the Iowa state legislature during a tumultuous decade in the history of Iowa. The decade began with a considerable setback to Grinnell's cause, as the General Assembly passed a bill in 1851 banning free blacks from moving into the state.[28] As the decade progressed, Iowa Democrats continued to control the majority of Iowa's elected offices when the Kansas-Nebraska Act was issued by Congress.[29] The proslavery leaning Democrats made the spread of slavery to Kansas, Nebraska, and even Iowa seem possible, due to the state's influence over the growing popular sovereignty states and the settlers passing through. Furthermore, Iowa entered into a period of severe economic hardship which wreaked havoc on the state's banks in 1857 and 1858. To make matters worse, a series of natural disasters ravaged the state's crop production.[30]

Grinnell produced significant accomplishes in the state senate during these trying times. The Sixth General Assembly became the conductors for a political takeover, as the unified Iowa Republicans, led by James W. Grimes, Grinnell, and James Harlan wrested control from Democrats and pushed for progressive policies. As chairman of the Committee on Education, Grinnell secured the adoption of a bill in 1857 that organized school districts for any community containing at least

200 inhabitants.[31] Following through on his temperance platform, he took part in the enactment of a bill that restricted the production and sale of alcohol in the state.[32] The bill was wildly unpopular, forcing Grinnell to devote much of his time on restructuring an amendment to allow for the production and sale of beer and wine. Grinnell, annoyed by the time the drafting of the amendment took away from the pursuit of the slavery question, expressed his frustration in his autobiography that "the millions of black men enslaved were set over against the freemen depraved by appetite."[33]

Despite the amendment, the bill earned Grinnell support from the German immigrant community crucial to his reelection to the Seventh General Assembly in 1858. Grinnell's work in his second term in office produced his crowning achievement in the Iowa state legislature, the introduction of a standardized education system. Facing immense public pressure, Grinnell worked with the renowned expert on public education Horace Mann to introduce and enact a bill that created township school districts, introduced educational reforms, and established the office of the county superintendent to oversee the new school districts.[34] Importantly, J.B. Grinnell was able to express in legislation for the first time his stance on racial equality by making public schools free to students of all races. Grinnell's reforms on the education system ignited public enthusiasm for education and stand out as considerable achievements for the advancement of the cause of education in the early history of Iowa.[35] The success of the reforms and the integration of African-Americans into Iowa's school system enhanced Grinnell's prestige as a champion of education and racial integration. His experience with shaping Iowa's education system paved the way for his influence on the Freedman's Bureau Bill's plan to extend educational opportunities to freedmen later in his career.

As J.B. Grinnell worked in the Seventh General Assembly to promote education reforms, momentous events in his home district permanently linked Grinnell's name with radical abolitionism. By 1859, both Grinnell and his town had become well-known to Iowans as facilitators of the Underground Railroad. An editorial in the Des Moines Journal claimed the town had developed a "widespread reputation of being the most notorious rendezvous for stolen and fugitive Negroes west of the Mississippi."[36] Grinnell's notoriety drew an unexpected guest, when in February of 1859, John Brown, the infamous impetus of Bleeding Kansas, showed up on J.B. Grinnell's doorstep. He allowed Brown to spend the night in his house and Brown's posse to stay in his barn. The following day, Brown gave a speech in front of a large gathering of Grinnellians before departing on the journey that would lead him to Harper's Ferry. State newspapers quickly heard about Brown's visit and the warm reception he received by Grinnell, dubbing him with a polarizing new nickname, "John Brown Grinnell."[37]

The visit by John Brown and the subsequent attention given to the affair by the press solidified Grinnell's status as the most prominent abolitionist in the state of Iowa. An article published in the Iowa City Press following the incident succinctly summed up J.B.'s new status: "No man in America, Owen Lovejoy not excepted, more fully embodies the whole juice and spirit of rampant abolitionism in its purest essence, than does J.B. Grinnell."[38] The news of Grinnell's association with Brown gained traction and spread around the country, assisted by Brown himself who gave credit to Grinnell wherever he went for providing him shelter in Iowa.[39] Iowa's Democrats naturally grilled Grinnell for harboring the notorious face of Bleeding Kansas, but despite the negative publicity, the news further boosted his meteoric rise on the national abolitionist scene. Brown's radicalism displayed at Harper's Ferry linked Grinnell with the Far Left of an already radical Republican Party, and once he was elected to Congress, it earned him a seat with the Radical Republicans in the House.[40]

Following Brown's visit, two more events confirmed J.B. Grinnell's commitment to the abolitionist cause. In July of 1860 Grinnell harbored five runaway slaves in his home. The slaves were the most wanted fugitives in the area because of the reward published by their owner from Nebraska City in several regional newspapers. Grinnell's notoriety was heightened to a new level when the Democratic Iowa State Journal published the headline, "J.B. Grinnell & Co. have recently received another consignment of negroes from Missouri."[41] The fact that he was widely regarded by Iowans as a conscientious lawbreaker probably contributed to his failure at reelection to the state legislature in 1859 by one vote.[42] Although he lost his spot in public office, he continued to gain greater political honors, as he was selected to the serve on Iowa's delegation to the Republican primaries in Chicago.[43] Grinnell submitted his vote for Lincoln at the primary, and although Lincoln did not fully support

abolition at the time, the vote should still be seen as Grinnell's first official act towards equality on the national level.

By the time of the 1862 congressional elections, J.B. Grinnell's political career and his private life proved that radical abolitionism was at the core of his being. Every step of Grinnell's career trajectory reflected his earnest passion for the abolitionist cause. He left his mark as a leader committed to his principles everywhere he went, from his time spent at the Oneida Institute during the proliferation of antislavery activism in New York, to his fiery sermons that got him kicked out of Washington D.C. Finally, in the state of Iowa, he left a legacy as a legislator that promoted education for all races, and as a member of the Underground Railroad who harbored John Brown on his way to Harper's Ferry. Grinnell's die-hard commitment to abolitionism prepared him to preside as a representative from Iowa to two of the most momentous sessions of Congress in American history, which would decide the fate of the cause he was most passionate about: the slavery issue.

The Evolution of Congressional Attitudes Toward Abolition

J.B. Grinnell entered his freshman term in Congress during a period of great uncertainty for the future of the country, and for the future of the millions of black Americans whose fates hinged on the outcome of the war and the actions taken by Congress. In 1862, when the Union held its wartime congressional elections, the Civil War was in full swing and victory for the Union seemed far from certain. The elections threatened the progress made by abolitionists and the Republican Party as control of the House and Senate seemed to be tilting in favor of the Democrats. J.B. Grinnell's race with Samuel Rice for their district's seat in the House of Representatives reflected the closely contested political divide in the Union, as Grinnell won by a measure of just 50 ballots.[44] Grinnell's election in Iowa was part of a delegation of swing states that secured Republican majorities in the House and the Senate for the Thirty-eighth Congress.[45] Despite the control of Congress by Republicans, internal divisions within the party jeopardized the solidarity necessary to instituting landmark abolition legislation.

From the very beginning of the war, Radical Republicans pushed for discussion of abolition in congressional debates, and pressured Lincoln to take a more radical stance regarding slavery.[46] While Radical Republicans called for Lincoln to expand his executive powers, Liberal Republicans opposed expansion of the federal government.[47] Conservative Republicans primarily focused on free labor and the preservation of the Union.[48] Republicans entered the war ideologically divided, but the rapid turn of events of the war drew them together under the common cause of preserving the Union.

Developments in the war catalyzed an evolution within the Republican Party, as partisans from competing ideological camps compromised over legislation that would contribute to Union military success, even if the measures contradicted their respective antebellum principles. President Lincoln led the way for his party's unification by promoting and approving increasingly radical legislation designed to restrict slavery's reach and tighten the noose on the Confederate economy. Civil War historian James Oakes maintains, "if anything guided Lincoln, it was the demands of war. [...] emancipating slaves from the seceded states, for so long disavowed, was becoming a 'military necessity.'"[49] In 1862, Republicans in Congress passed several quasi-emancipatory acts, including the Confiscation Acts, the prohibition of the expansion of slavery into federal territories, the abolishment of the Atlantic slave trade, and the abolishment of slavery in Washington D.C.[50] The measures taken by Congress in 1862 naturally aligned with Radical Republicans. For Liberals and Conservatives, however, Congress' actions defied their antebellum commitment to limiting the expansion of the federal government. Their acquiescence to the increasingly radical measures endorsed by Lincoln and the Radicals reflects the evolution of the mindset regarding the war by many Union congressman: that Congress should do what was necessary to secure a total military victory and preserve the Union.

One such action taken by Congress to contribute to military victory was approving the admission of black soldiers into the Union army, a milestone in the war that J.B. Grinnell played an important part in orchestrating. Grinnell proudly recalls in his autobiography:

> The blacks, their position in the war, and their future, was a question which loomed high and was the occasion of many a threatening storm. Even if egotistic, I must say that the first resolution which I ever offered in the American Congress and which was adopted, gave focus to an

> opinion and was in these words: Resolved, that a more vigorous policy to enlist, at an early day and in larger numbers, in our army, persons of African descent, would meet the approbation of the House. More than a mere sentiment, it was heeded by land and by sea.[51]

That the first resolution proposed by Grinnell in the House called for the enlistment of black soldiers is remarkable because it indicates that he was committed to advocating for blacks from the very beginning of his tenure in Congress. His adopted resolution for the inclusion of black soldiers in the army was part of the trend of legislation made possible by the demands of the war that fit neatly into Radical Republican ideology. The other resolution echoing radical principles that involved Grinnell was the Thirteenth Amendment.

The progress of the war changed public opinion on the prospect of the national abolishment of slavery, making the Emancipation Proclamation possible for Lincoln. According to Vorenberg:

> [...] people's prewar attitudes toward the founding document and its revision constantly shifted in relation to changing political and social objectives. The immediate circumstances of the Civil War, rather than established principles concerning slavery and the Constitution, shaped people's understanding and appreciation of the antislavery amendment.[52]

Indeed, as the war raged on, citizens in the Union and their political leaders realized that the abolitionist cause and the preservation of the Union were intimately linked.[53] Union victory and reconciliation would only be possible if Congress abolished the Confederacy's principal cause, the institution of slavery.

Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, setting in motion the process of drafting and ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment that would force the need for the Thirty-eighth Congress to continue to find ways to compromise. By framing emancipation as a war measure, Lincoln gained the full support of Republicans, despite some reluctance by conservatives, because emancipation was directly tied to securing Union victory. Although the proclamation catered to the interests of each of the factions in the Republican Party, the public's reaction signified that the country would have to adapt to Lincoln's radical decision.[54] Furthermore, Lincoln and the Republicans faced immediate backlash by Democrats against the Emancipation Proclamation, claiming that Lincoln had given over to fanaticism.[55]

Following the proclamation, the Thirty-eighth Congress embarked on two years of heated congressional debates over the contents of the Thirteenth Amendment and the promotion of the amendment by Republicans in order to swing Democratic votes to gain the two-thirds majority in the House and the Senate necessary for ratification. Once again, the spirit of disgruntled compromise characteristic of the Civil War congresses prevailed on January 31, 1865, when enough Democrats changed their votes to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment. Even though their decision to ratify the amendment countered their convictions about abolition, these Democrats came around to ratification because they believed it removed an important political roadblock to Congress' contribution to winning the war.[56]

J.B. Grinnell was able to resist the trend of voting against personal principles experienced by many congressman in the Thirty-eighth Congress simply because the tides of war veered public opinion, Lincoln, the Republican Party, and even some Democrats toward Grinnell's abolitionist cause. He served in the House of Representatives during a period of unbridled optimism for Radical Republicans, as the proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment set the country on a course to finally accomplish emancipation.[57] The circumstances of the war contributed to a series of compromises that allowed for J.B. Grinnell to assert his antebellum antislavery ethic by adding his signature to the decisive act by Congress to abolish slavery in the United States forever.[58] Yet, while emancipation was a watershed achievement for Grinnell and the rest of the Radical Republicans, the fight for equality had only just begun. In the Thirty-ninth Congress, J.B. Grinnell's principles would be tested by the enormous task of Reconstruction, an issue that would cause divisions even within his own radical faction.

The Headstrong Radical: J.B. Grinnell's Commitment to

Upholding Equality in the Thirty-ninth Congress

J.B. Grinnell developed an outspoken voice in the House of Representatives upon his reelection to the Thirty-ninth Congress in 1865. The process of adjusting to his first term in Congress and the singular direction of the Republican Party toward winning the war limited Grinnell's opportunity for oration in the Thirty-eighth Congress, save for his resolution for the enlistment of black soldiers. But confidence drawn from a session of experience under his belt, and the growing divide in the debate over the direction the country should take during Reconstruction, encouraged Grinnell to take a more active role on the House floor. Grinnell became one of the leaders of the Freedmen's Bureau committee's efforts to expand the powers of the Bureau in order to protect the rights of the country's black citizens during Reconstruction.

He distinguished himself as one of the most outspoken Radical Republicans in the Thirty-ninth Congress with fiery rhetoric on the House floor that drew bitter political enemies from the Johnson camp in the Reconstruction debate, which led to the feud with Rousseau that put Grinnell's own life in danger. The caning by Rousseau was all due to his persistence in promoting his principles, as Grinnell himself recalls on his time in Congress during Reconstruction, "my humble acts were based on decided convictions."[59]

Upon the conclusion of the war, Congress entered a fierce debate over the nature of Reconstruction. Conservatives under President Johnson approached Reconstruction from a perspective of reconciliation, pardoning hundreds of ex-Confederates and allowing for Southern states to shape their own reconstructive laws. Radical Republicans, led by Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner, argued for federal intervention in Reconstruction in order to protect freedmen, redistribute land, and extend suffrage to black Southerners.[60] At the beginning of the Thirty-ninth Congress, Lyman Trumbull introduced the Freedman's Bureau Bill, which would extend the existence of the Freedman's Bureau, abolish the discriminative Black Codes instituted by the Southern states, and provide for military and judicial protection of freedmen.[61]

Grinnell emerged as a leader for the Freedman's Bureau committee, and in early 1866, Grinnell made a series of speeches on the House floor advocating for the expansion of the powers of the Freedman's Bureau. According to his autobiography, General Oliver Howard, the head of the Bureau, and several prominent black leaders saw Grinnell as a "champion" of the Freedman's Bureau Bill.[62] He delivered one of his most controversial speeches on February 5, when he used the state of Kentucky as an example for the necessity of the protection of civil rights guaranteed under the proposed bill. In that speech, he argued:

> The white man in Kentucky can testify in courts; the black man can testify against himself. The white man can vote; the black man cannot. The white man, if he commits an offense, is tried by a jury of his peers; the black man is tried by his enlightened, unprejudiced superiors. The rape of a negro woman by a white man is no offense; the rape of a white woman by a negro man is punishable by death, and the Governor of the State cannot commute.[63]

His objective in this speech was to advise the House that, without the adoption of the Freedman's Bureau Bill, black citizens in Southern states would continue to live without equal protection under the law. Grinnell recognized that his abolitionist ethic did not end with emancipation. To remain true to the egalitarian morals he developed before the war, Grinnell needed to maintain the fight for equal rights for freedmen during Reconstruction.

As he continued his oratory, Grinnell personally attacked representative Lovell Rousseau in order to highlight the dangers freedmen in Kentucky faced due to racial prejudice. Grinnell fearlessly claimed:

> The honorable gentleman from Kentucky declared on Saturday as I caught his language that if he were arrested on the complaint of a negro and brought before one of the agents of this bureau, when he became free he would shoot him. Is that civilization? It is the spirit of barbarism, that has too long dwelt in our land, the spirit of infernal regions that brought on the rebellion and this war.[64]

By making Rousseau's comments known to the House, Grinnell hoped to show that freedmen were potentially not even safe from their own congressmen. His personal attack did not further the cause of the Freedman's

Bureau Bill as he intended. Rather, the speech only served to exacerbate the divide between proponents of the bill and those aligned with President Johnson's vision for Reconstruction. On February 19, Johnson, who had previously expressed little concern over the bill, shocked Republicans with a veto.[65]

On an individual level, Grinnell's speech initiated a personal vendetta with Rousseau that would culminate in his own caning. The speech came at a time when tensions by competing factions in Congress were approaching the level of belligerence exhibited in the antebellum congressional sessions that prompted the caning of Charles Sumner. Indeed, as William M. Carter writes in an article regarding the Thirteenth Amendment in the Columbia Law Review, Sumner's caning happened because "one of the key aspects of the Slave Power was the use of violence and intimidation to retaliate against persons who advocated ideas of liberty and equality."[66] In Grinnell's case, the "Slave Power" was Johnson and his band of Conservative Reconstructionists who wanted to limit equality by blocking the expansion of the Freedman's Bureau. Grinnell was a prime target for the return to violent retaliation by Southern congressmen because of his renewed activism evident in the series of speeches he delivered on behalf of freedmen. According to Payne, Grinnell's "uncompromising attitude on negro rights made him many bitter enemies in the House who lost no opportunity to attack him."[67]

In the months between his initial speech and the caning, Grinnell continued to attack Rousseau on the House floor, questioning Rousseau's personal honor as a Union general who fought for emancipation in the war, but supported the version of Reconstruction that would limit the rights of the black population the Union fought to free.[68] Grinnell was motivated to continue his persecution of Rousseau because he saw him as the representation of the trend by Union congressmen to abandon the fight for black equality after emancipation. He lambastes the congressmen that discarded their wartime convictions during Reconstruction in his autobiography:

> The shame of so-called patriots in opposing the policies of the war party should have brought confession, but rather angered those who had been defeated at every step. Those amendments which were designed to forbid slavery and to protect the poor were not supported by the anti-war party. This alone was enough to place obstructionists at the North under suspicion as to future acts. Not as prodigals, then, did the South come back, but to affiliate with the most dangerous foes of the Union at the North. Trade and commerce wanted peace and outvoted the radicals.[69]

In Grinnell's opinion, Rousseau, in pushing to block the Freedman's Bureau Bill, was colluding with the former Confederate States so that they could continue the disenfranchisement of freedmen. Rousseau, Johnson, and their colleagues endangered veering Congress away from the path of progress it had worked for during the war. But by using Rousseau as an example for his argument, Grinnell brought on unnecessary controversy that detracted from his original aim.

Although he was a Unionist, Rousseau, as a Kentuckian, came from a traditional Southern society that placed a high value on the integrity of a man's honor. The Southern honor culture was extreme, mandating a willingness to die in defense of one's own character and reputation.[70] Grinnell seems to have gotten carried away with his hatred for Rousseau, as their verbal fights on the House floor devolved into petty exchanges that detracted from congressional discussions and drew ire from national press.[71] Having been raised in a slave society, Grinnell's verbal dominance over Rousseau embarrassed the Southerner, and may have caused Rousseau, much to his chagrin, to view himself as the subordinate in their relationship much like the master-slave relationship in slave societies.[72] Such an imbalance in the control of power in personal relationships, especially when one party was relegated to having slavelike qualities, usually led to Southerners to feel the need to defend their honor.[73]

On June 14, 1866, Lovell Rousseau decided Grinnell had disparaged his honor too much, and he beat the defenseless Grinnell with a cane in the Capitol building until the cane broke. The caning received widespread press coverage, and a hearing in the House on the event. Though a vote in the House did not collect enough for votes for Rousseau's expulsion, he was reprimanded by Congress and resigned from his seat.[74] Grinnell was shaken by the incident, but maintained his resolve. He was also condemned by the House for his excessive antagonization of Rousseau, nevertheless he was allowed to continue serving in Congress. Although

the prolonged instigation by Grinnell should not be celebrated, the root of the conflict deserves recognition. In his initial speeches for the Freedman's Bureau, J.B. Grinnell exhibited a significant degree of courage in disclosing the jeopardization of civil rights for black Kentuckians in a hostile session of Congress that would become notorious in American history books for ignoring the rights of black citizens.

While he weathered the changing political sphere of the Thirty-eighth Congress, and argued in favor of the Freedman's Bureau and all of its protections, Grinnell was not immune to the weight of politics on personal principles. In 1866, as he gave speeches in the House promoting suffrage for Southern freedmen, Grinnell actually mobilized a group of Republicans in Iowa to oppose granting suffrage to blacks in Iowa.[75] Payne argues:

> The inconsistency of his record on this question laid Grinnell open to the charge of putting party above principle. He would doubtless have replied that the negro did not require the vote in Iowa for his own protection, as he did in the South, and that the ascendancy of the Republican party was essential to negro security in both regions.[76]

The argument is credible that the sacrifice of black suffrage in Iowa, so that the Republican party could retain power and thus ensure a better future for black Americans, was a necessary evil committed by Grinnell. Still, as a man so focused on exposing the wrongs done by other congressmen, Grinnell teetered on forgoing his own principles in this episode. But the sacrifice allowed Republicans in Iowa to maintain their position, which in turn allowed Grinnell to continue arguing for Southern black suffrage in Washington. Furthermore, a clash with one of his best friends on the House floor would prove that Grinnell's endgame was justice for freedmen.

On January 17, 1867, Grinnell argued against the architect of Radical Reconstruction, Thaddeus Stevens, in a speech on the House floor. By this time, Grinnell was no stranger to confrontation, but his speech represented a professional break with a personal friend. Stevens and other prominent radicals admired Grinnell from afar when the John Brown affair broke national news in 1859.[77] Grinnell met Stevens during the roll call at the beginning of the Thirty-eighth Congress, when he offered Stevens his favorable seat in the House hall so that the leader of the Radicals could sit in a prominent position.[78] The move sparked a lifelong friendship between the two, and Grinnell's admission into the Radical Republican inner circle. The friendship made Grinnell privy to important information, as he says, "I had only to hint to Mr. Stevens to learn the order of bills, with the privilege of amendment and frequent yielding of time in debate."[79]

Stevens was a fierce proponent of confiscating Confederate lands and redistributing them to freedmen, and part of his plan hinged on the cooperation of leaders of the ex-Confederate states to institute reconstruction on the state level. In the speech he made against Stevens' plan, Grinnell argued that Reconstruction needed to be handled by the federal government, and that it was the federal responsibility to ensure "justice and safety meted out for the loyal millions."[80] He warned the House that Stevens' plan, which asked for the former Confederate states to swear allegiance to the government as a requirement for state level administration, did not ask enough of the states in question because they needed to be held accountable for the crime of slavery.[81] Stevens' plan was radical in itself, but Grinnell called for even more radical measures to ensure justice for freedmen beyond emancipation.

By taking on his colleague Thaddeus Stevens, Grinnell demonstrated a willingness to tackle any obstacle to equal rights for black Southerners. After years of leadership of the Radical Republicans, and as chairman of the Appropriations committee, Stevens wielded immense power in the House of Representatives.[82] Only the desire to act on deep moral convictions would motivate Grinnell to challenge such a political behemoth, and a personal friend, and push for a version of Reconstruction beyond the plans proposed by his own Radical Republican faction. Grinnell's crystallized personal beliefs regarding justice for freedmen by the end of his run in Congress are best expressed by the conclusion to his speech against Stevens:

> Allow me to say, in conclusion, that it rests upon us to decide at an early day whether we are to allow rebels to come and take their seats here unwashed, unrepentant, unpunished, unhung, [laughter;] or whether we will heed the voice of our friends, fleeing from the South for their lives; whether we will listen to the supplication of four

> million black people, all true to the great principles which we ere seek to establish. For one I urge the earliest action. I desire we should place those States in a position where a home may be possible, where education may be established, where the ballot may be secured to all those who are loyal to this Government.[83]

Conclusion

J.B. Grinnell's steadfast commitment to his principles ultimately led to his political downfall. As Rousseau repeatedly struck Grinnell with his cane that fateful day in 1866, Grinnell withstood the blows to his head without fighting back. Upon hearing the news that he did not fight back, Iowans lost respect for Grinnell and voted against his bid for reelection to the House of Representatives.[84] J.B. Grinnell may have appeared cowardly for refusing to physically retaliate at the time, but his record shows that Grinnell exuded courage and a tiresome willingness to fight for his principles along every step of his political journey. From his fiery sermons against the antebellum slave trade in Washington D.C., to his reception of John Brown, his signature on the Thirteenth Amendment, his audacity to take on the state of Kentucky, and to the challenge of his friend and preeminent Radical Republican Thaddeus Stevens, Grinnell proved that he would not back down from a fight. J.B. Grinnell's legacy does not end at founder of Grinnell, Iowa, and namesake of Grinnell College. Grinnell's legacy stands among the very few congressmen who overcame the chaotic events of the Civil War and emerged as a headstrong champion of their own principles on the other side.

Notes

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Michael Vorenberg, Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5.
4. Michael S. Green, Freedom, Union, and Power: Lincoln and His Party During the Civil War (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 6.
5. J.B. Grinnell, Men and Events of Forty Years, Autobiographical Reminiscences of an Active Career from 1850 to 1890 (Boston: D. Lothrop Company, 1891), 1.
6. Ibid, 5.
7. See Grinnell's accomplishments as chairman of Iowa's Committee on Education, page 10.
8. David Hudson, Marvin Bergman and Loren Horton, The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 199.
9. Ibid, 199.
10. Douglas M. Strong, Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 89.
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21. Ibid, 116.
22. Soike, 99.
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24. Payne, 66.
25. Grinnell, 122.
26. Ibid, 68.
27. Morton M. Rosenberg, "The People of Iowa on the Eve of Civil War," Annals of Iowa 39 (1967): 114. http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7857&context=annals-of-iowa
28. Soike, 85.
29. Rosenberg, 128.
30. Payne, 70.

31. Ibid, 72.
32. Grinnell, 128.
33.Payne, 79.
34. Ibid, 82.
35. Nicole Etcheson, "Daring death for an idea: J.B. Grinnell and the Underground Railroad," Grinnell Herald Register (Grinnell, IA), accessed through the Grinnell College Archives, http://www.grinnell.lib.ia.us/files/archives/JB%20Grinnell%20and%20Underground%20RR.pdf
36. Nollen, 56.
37. Payne, 112.
38. Wall, 118.
39. Ibid, 118.
40. Soike, 181.
41. Payne, 116.
42. Ibid, 125.
43. Payne, 148.
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45. Green, 145.
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50. Grinnell, 143.
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52. Green, 155.
53. Ibid, 158.
54. Oakes, 192.
55. Green, 167.
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71. Greenberg, 62.
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