The Ingalls-Voorhees Debate of 1888
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One of the bitterest personal debates in congressional history occurred in the U. S. Senate on April 25 and May 1, 1888, between Senators John J. Ingalls of Kansas and Daniel W. Voorhees of Indiana. The conflict had been brewing since March 6, at which time Ingalls had spoken in favor of a bill to increase pensions for Union soldiers. The Kansan was a friend of the G. A. R., and he perhaps saw an opportunity to revive war memories in order to strengthen the Republicans in a presidential election year. Whatever his reasons, he leveled his attack at the opponents of the bill—Democrats for the most part—and charged that members of the Democratic party still retained traces of the Confederacy.

Although he did not name Voorhees at that time as having been friendly to the Confederacy, he aroused the anger of the “Tall Sycamore of the Wabash” by describing Union Generals W. S. Hancock and George B. McClellan as sympathetic to the South.

VOORHEES’ FIRST ATTACK

Voorhees waited until April 25 to attack the Kansan. As the Indiana senator opened his speech, Ingalls was in the chair as president pro tempore. At first Voorhees confined his remarks to comments on the Republican party, high tariffs, and the pension bill. In the course of the speech, Ingalls was called from the room on business, and he turned the chair over to Sen. Isham Harris of Tennessee. Ingalls, then, was not present when Voorhees made his charges against him, nor did he learn of them until he read the newspapers the following morning.

Voorhees was indignant at the Kansas senator for his slur at Hancock and McClellan. He said, referring to Ingalls:

He stood in his place in the Senate, a recognized leader of his party, and denounced two great Union generals as traitors to their country, allies of the Confederacy, and no word of dissent or rebuke has been uttered by a single one of his party associates here or in the other branch of Congress. We have waited, and some have wondered, but the silent acquiescence in the horrible charge remains unbroken.

Having implied that Ingalls had been neither truthful nor just, Voorhees launched into a eulogy of the two generals and defended...
the Democratic party as actually having helped to preserve the Union.

INGALLS’ FIRST REPLY

Ingalls was furious when he read the speech the next morning. He arose in the senate that day and announced that he would answer Voorhees. The Kansan pointed out that he had been absent during most of the speech and that he had assumed that the Indiana senator was going to confine himself to a discussion of the tariff and finance. “I was, therefore, somewhat surprised this morning to be advised by an item in the newspapers that I had been the object of the Senator’s animadversion. . . . I therefore desire to give notice that on Tuesday next, at 2 o’clock, if the Senate will indulge me, I shall . . . submit some remarks. . . .”

Interest in the promised clash ran high, both in Kansas and in Washington. The day before the reply, the Kansas Republicans, in convention at Iola, prepared a resolution complimenting in advance Mr. Ingalls’ “seething rejoinder” and passed it with “three rousing cheers.” ² In Washington, visitors flocked to the senate chamber on May 1, the day of the speech. Said the Washington correspondent for the Kansas City (Mo.) Times:

At a comparatively early hour, notwithstanding the rainy and sultry weather, the street cars were packed with people . . . moving toward the capitol, drawn irresistibly by the announcement that Mr. Ingalls would irradiate the circumambient air of the senate chamber with his wild western oratory. . . .³

The New York Tribune reported: “The galleries contained at least 3,000 people, and the floor of the Senate was jammed with Representatives and others entitled to the floor. More people sought to gain admission probably than on the day when Cleveland was inaugurated President.” ⁴

Attention focused on Ingalls. Shortly before two o’clock he entered the senate chamber, said the Kansas City Times correspondent, “very much after the fashion of a minister about to preach a sermon.” He walked over to his desk, which was decorated with flowers for the occasion. The Times reporter said that when Ingalls took his seat “a profound silence ensued, broken only by the rustling of a thousand fans, blending their variegated colors, and when the Kansas statesman arose to . . . take up . . . his speech the silence became absolutely painful.”

² "A Specimen From Kansas," Kansas City Times, May 1, 1888.
³ "Decidedly Hot," ibid., May 2, 1888.
At first the reply was a disappointment. Ingalls spoke for two hours. He offered a mild, refined, almost restrained series of arguments to prove that the civil and military leaders of the Democratic party had been Southern sympathizers during and after the Civil War. He began by saying that Voorhees had admitted in his speech of April 25 that “there is such a crime as treason, and that to be an ally of the Confederacy was to be a traitor.” His implication was clear as he applied Voorhees’ statement to a classification of Hancock and McClellan. He capped his arguments by saying that the Southern Confederacy still existed, that it was embodied in the Democratic party in the South, and that the Democratic party in that section was animated by all the ambitions, the purposes, and the hopes of the Southern Confederacy itself. He said,

Now, Mr. President, we are upon the threshold of another election. We have had McClellan and Seymour, Greeley and Tilden, Hancock and Cleveland for Democratic candidates, and Cleveland is practically renominated for another term. It will be the most important contest of the century, a political battle whose result will determine the destiny of the United States for the next twenty-five years. . . . And again we are confronted with the 153 votes of the “solid South,” as we have been at every election since 1876; a “solid South” that is the essence and substance of the Southern Confederacy; and the success of the Democratic party means the triumph of the Confederacy, which is to-day as much an organized, active, aggressive force in our politics as it was in 1860 or at any previous time. Slavery is dead and secession is dead, but the ideas, the impulses, the purposes, the intentions engendered by slavery and secession remain. Ideas are immortal. They never die. Force can not annihilate them. No man was ever convinced by being conquered, and no Confederate has ever confessed that the cause for which he fought was wrong.

Although he admitted that not “all Democrats were disloyal,” he was clear in his belief that all Southern sympathizers were Democrats. Said Ingalls, referring guardedly to Voorhees,

There were no Republicans enrolled in the “Sons of Liberty” or as “Knights of the Golden Circle.” These were Democrats. Every member of Congress who declared that he would not vote a man or a dollar or a gun to carry on the war for the Union was a Democrat. Every man who described Union soldiers as “Lincoln dogs and hirelings, who desired to have collars welded about their necks,” was a Democrat.

He even went so far as to picture the Democratic party as containing a gang of traitors, cutthroats, and outlaws. He declared,

All guerrillas and bushwhackers, the men from Union States who entered the Confederate service for plunder—in war cutthroats, in peace horse-thieves—were Democrats. . . . Quantrell, Bill Anderson, Dave Livingstone, Hildebrand, and the James boys belonged then, as they would were they living now, to the Democratic organization.
At this point Ingalls sat down, apparently having concluded his case.

**VOORHEES’ SECOND ATTACK**

The “Tall Sycamore” thought that Ingalls had expended his ammunition, for he began to taunt the Kansan. He recalled the fable of the mountain which labored and brought forth a mouse. He said, referring to Ingalls’ widely publicized announcement of his intention to speak that day, “The spectators had expected to see volcanic action, power displayed, but when the end came they saw nothing of the kind, and I have never been more reminded of that fable than on this occasion.”

He had, however, caught Ingalls’ implication that he, Voorhees, had belonged to the Knights of the Golden Circle, that he had voted against support of the war effort, and that he had made reference to the “Lincoln dogs.” The Indiana senator flatly denied that he had been guilty of any of those things.

Then Voorhees loosed a blistering attack at Ingalls, an attack full of vicious personal abuse. He said that his opponent was politically dead, but was “walking around to save funeral expenses.” He said that the Kansan represented the “old, decayed, hackneyed political campaign liars of the last twenty-five years.” He added sarcastically, “I have admired his brilliancy, his scholastic habit, but he was born with inaccuracy marked upon him. If he was my long-lost brother, and I was looking for the stripling, I should look for ‘Inaccuracy’ marked on him somewhere.”

The Indiana senator derided the Kansan’s military service. Ingalls had served briefly on the side of the North during the Civil War. In 1864 he was a member of the staff of Maj. Gen. George W. Deitzler, Kansas state militia, with the rank of major, and later lieutenant colonel, and served through the two weeks’ campaign to drive General Price out of Missouri and Kansas. He was assigned the duties of judge-advocate during his brief period of active duty. Voorhees, in his attack, ridiculed Ingalls unmercifully about his military “career,” facetiously naming every Ingalls who had served in the Union army, but finding no John J. Ingalls listed.

**INGALLS’ SECOND REPLY**

When Voorhees paused, Ingalls, smarting from the personal attack, arose, cool and deliberate, to deliver one of the most dramatic speeches the senate had heard for many years. He had planned his strategy well. Although he had implied in his first reply that
Voorhees was friendly to the Knights of the Golden Circle and had been sympathetic to the Southern cause, the Kansan had not revealed that he held documentary evidence to support his claim. He had withheld the damaging proof, waiting to trap Voorhees in an unguarded moment.

His technique in his second reply was to employ cold logic through personal and documentary testimony. At the same time, as he recalled war memories and stirred sectional hatred, he gained much emotional effect. He used an ethical approach by allying himself with Lincoln, defending the latter against the remarks of Voorhees. The Kansas speaker continually referred directly to truth and to duty, and he appealed to his audience’s sense of justice as he drove home the point that he represented those who had defended the Union, and that Voorhees represented those who had fought against it.

He sounded a note of self-deprecation as he referred to his humble military service and his strong sense of patriotic duty:

I regret exceedingly that the Senator from Indiana has thought best to refer to personal matters in connection with my history, to which I do not propose now to advert. My military service was inconspicuous and obscure, and no one is more conscious than I am of the debt that I owe my country, and of the unpaid obligation of gratitude which I am under to those who did what I might under other circumstances have done.

Ingalls neatly turned the tables on Voorhees, for here was precisely the opening for which he had been looking. Saying that since the Indiana senator had commented on the Ingalls record, he then felt called upon to show the Voorhees record in the war. “I feel it to be my duty,” he said, “in the defense of the truth of history, to put on record the information in my possession, and I have it in a shape I think that he will not deny.” He displayed righteous indignation at being attacked on April 25 by one he had considered a friend:

My relations with the Senator from Indiana for many years have been those of cordiality and friendship, and never was I more surprised than when my attention was called to the vindictive, unfounded, malevolent, and unjustifiable asperion with which he assailed me in manuscript. I could have borne it if an enemy had done it, but it was, as the Psalmist said, “my own familiar friend.”

Ingalls made the statement that Voorhees had favored the Confederacy. Voorhees was on his feet instantly to deny it. Ingalls replied,

Mr. INGALLS. The Senator from Indiana has just said that he was in favor of the destruction of slavery and that he was opposed to secession, and yet in
the published volume of his own speeches there is a reprint of an address delivered by him in Virginia shortly before the war in which he advocates both. . . . I will say further than that, that the Senator from Indiana at the time when he delivered that speech had two editions of it prepared, one of them for circulation in the North and one in the South.

Mr. Voorhees. That is not true.
Mr. Ingalls. Not true! Why, they are accessible to-day, just as much so—
Mr. Voorhees. Get them and show them.
Mr. Ingalls. They are just as accessible as the Statutes of the United States.
Mr. Voorhees. Get them and show them. I say it is not true. I have met that on the stump. I have heard campaign falsifiers before.

Mr. Ingalls. The Senator pleases to call these campaign rumors because he has heard them for the last fifteen years, and therefore they are not true. In 1860, after the Senators from South Carolina had withdrawn from this Chamber, and when preparations for war were rife all over the South, and everybody knew that secession was to be, so far as the South could make it, an accomplished fact, the Senator from Indiana wrote a letter, which I shall read. Perhaps he will deny that. It is a letter to Mr. Francis A. Shoup, that he took South with him and filed in the Confederate war department in support of his own application for appointment as a brigadier-general in the Confederate army. The man who received it was appointed a brigadier-general in the Confederate army, and he is now an ecclesiastic in Alabama or somewhere in one of the Southern States. I will read what the Senator from Indiana wrote. Anybody can see it, and anybody who knows his handwriting can identify it. This is the letter:

"IndianaPolis, Ind., December 12, 1860.

"My friend, Capt. Francis A. Shoup, is about visiting the South with his sister, on account of her health.

"I have known Captain Shoup since our boyhood; we were schoolmates. He is a graduate of West Point, and was in the Army as a lieutenant four years. No more honorable or upright gentleman exists. On the disturbing questions of the day his sentiments are entirely with the South, and one of his objects is a probable home in that section.

"I take this occasion to say that his sentiments and my own are in close harmony.

"D. W. Voorhees."

I suppose the Senator will say that that is a campaign slander, the vile calumny of the opposition press.

Mr. Voorhees. Mr. President, that is not a campaign slander, but it is—
Mr. Ingalls. He has trodden it under foot and spat on it.
Mr. Voorhees. Will the Senator pardon me for a moment?
Mr. Ingalls. Certainly.
Mr. Voorhees. I say it is not a campaign slander, but it is one of those things the people of Indiana have passed upon for now nearly thirty years.
Mr. Ingalls. The Democratic party of Indiana have passed upon it, I dare say. [Laughter.]
Mr. Voorhees. They have passed upon it by a very large majority and no—
MR. INGALLS. Oh, I know the Knights of the Golden Circle have passed upon it.

MR. VOORHEES. No colporteur or missionary from Kansas can give it any more respectability than the fellows in Indiana have heretofore. I have disposed of them. There was no war when the letter was written; there was not for nearly a year afterwards.

MR. INGALLS. Sumter fell ninety days afterwards.

MR. VOORHEES. No, it did not.

MR. INGALLS. Let me look at the date.

MR. VOORHEES. In December.

MR. INGALLS. December 12, 1860. When did Sumter fall?

MR. VOORHEES. In April.

MR. INGALLS. In April, 1861?

MR. VOORHEES. Yes.

MR. INGALLS. December, January, February, March—four months afterwards.

MR. VOORHEES. Yes; inaccuracy is written on your face.

MR. INGALLS. Within four months from the time the letter was written Sumter had fallen, and yet the Senator from Indiana says: “I take this occasion to say that his sentiments and my own are in close harmony.”

The Kansan brought up the “Lincoln dog” remark again and charged Voorhees with having made the statement, adding that he had a witness to the fact:

MR. INGALLS. I will say to the Senator from Indiana that the averment that he made that statement can be substantiated by as credible a witness as there is in this city at this time.

MR. VOORHEES. It is false, and even if the Senator said it it would be utterly false—just as false coming from the Senator as from the greatest liar ever in the country.

MR. INGALLS. If this were a police court the Senator from Indiana would be sent to the rock-pile for being drunk and disorderly.

The senator from Kansas made a telling point when he produced a document, signed by eighteen citizens of the state of Indiana, who testified that they were present at a meeting in Sullivan, Ind., on August 5, 1862, at which time the Hon. D. W. Voorhees said, speaking in reference to the Union soldiers, that “they should go to the nearest blacksmith shop and have an iron collar made and placed around their necks, inscribed thereon in large letters, ‘My dog. A. Lincoln,’ and at the same time he referred to the Union soldiers as Lincoln’s dogs and hirelings.”

Ingalls hammered home the point about the competence of the witnesses: “I suppose those are reputable citizens of Indiana. They are not ashamed of their names or their residence. They give their home and their designation. The Senator from Indiana can settle the question of the truth or falsehood with them and not with me.”
From this point Ingalls pressed his advantage. He struck again and again, giving quotation after quotation from witnesses and authorities to support his claim that Voorhees' sympathies had been with the Confederacy. He verified the authenticity of his documents by stating that they had been discovered in a Washington office which had once been occupied by Voorhees, but which documents Voorhees had neglected to take with him or to destroy when he moved to new quarters. He referred to 112 copies of the ritual and rules of organization of the proslavery Knights of the Golden Circle, which had been found in Voorhees' office. He produced highly incriminating letters from Senator Wall of New Jersey, endorsing a proposition to furnish Voorhees with 20,000 stand of Garibaldi rifles. He produced letters from several Southern sympathizers. Every letter was quoted in part, and every part drove home the point that Senator Voorhees had favored the Confederacy.

The Kansan quoted a speech in which Voorhees had displayed his sympathies. Said Ingalls,

With regard to the question as to the side on which the sympathies of the Senator from Indiana were—I suppose the Senator from Indiana will deny this also and say it was mere campaign calumny cast out and trodden under the feet of men—on the 5th day of March, 1864, he spoke of Vallandigham as "that representative American patriot, who, with Hendricks and Seymour and Richardson, had done so much to uphold the hands of the American public and had preserved so far the guaranties of constitutional liberty," a man who was tried and banished from the country for being a traitor. . . .

His opinion of Mr. Lincoln was contained in the same speech—"Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, preserved by the pen of the historian for universal execration, found no pursuit so pleasant as calling for more men for the harvest of death, and, like our present Executive, snuffing with jests and ribaldry the warm taint of blood on every gale. . . ."

Ingalls turned to the congressional speeches of Voorhees, recalling his address of April, 1861, in which he declared that he would "never vote a single dollar or a single man for the prosecution of the war, and he never did so long as he was in Congress." Continued the Kansan,

He consistently and persistently voted against every measure for upholding the Union cause and re-enforcing its armies, voted against all the constitutional amendments, and finally declared by a nay vote that he would not hold that the amendments were constitutional or binding upon the conscience of the American people. And yet the Senator from Indiana, who I think deserves charity more than any man that I know upon this floor, and who has received it at the hands of his associates, and who can less afford than any man of my acquaintance to invite a scrutiny of his war record with any-
body, with playfulness and hilariousness refers to the fact that I served during the war as a judge-advocate with the rank of major and subsequently of lieutenant-colonel.

Here Ingalls closed his speech on the same ethical tone of self-deprecation with which he had begun: "I have this to say: That however obscure or inefficient my services may have been, they were always on the side of my country, and not as his has been, always against it."

Voorhees at this juncture attempted to reply to the charges which Ingalls had so effectively made. His arguments were rambling and inconsistent as he resorted to denial, then made an about-face to appeal to his audience to forget the "stale, putrid, cast-off" past. At last Ingalls interrupted Voorhees with the question that put the senate chamber into an uproar:

MR. INGALLS. Will the Senator from Indiana allow me to ask him whether the soldiers of Indiana did not threaten to hang him with a bell-ropes on a train between New Castle and Terre Haute after he made that "Lincoln dog" speech? [Laughter.]

MR. VOORHEES. Mr. President, the Senator is a great liar when he intimates such a thing—a great liar and a dirty dog. ["Order!" "Order!"] Such a thing never occurred in the world. That is all the answer I have to make.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is hardly in order. Personal discussion is not proper. The Chair hopes Senators will be in order.

MR. VOORHEES. I pass it back to the scoundrel behind him who is instigating these lies.5

MR. INGALLS. Mr. President, there is a very reputable gentleman in the Chamber, a citizen of Indiana, who informs me that the signers of the certificate about the "Lincoln dog" speech are entirely reputable inhabitants, male and female, of Sullivan County, and that he knows fifty people there who heard the speech made and can swear to it.

MR. VOORHEES. I say he is an infamous liar and scoundrel who says I did. I say so.

White and shaken, Voorhees was led from the senate chamber muttering to himself, "The dirty dog, the dirty dog."

REACTIONS TO THE DEBATE

The reactions to Ingalls' speech were instantaneous. The St. Louis Globe-Democrat, a Republican newspaper, said with obvious bias that the shrewdness of Mr. Ingalls' plan of attack was universally complimented. According to the report:

The opportunity which Ingalls had anticipated came, and he interrupted Mr. Voorhees with a question which disturbed his equanimity, then annoyed him, then angered him, then enraged him. He plunged about in his madness

5. A reference to Rep. James T. Johnston of Indiana, who was sitting immediately behind Ingalls and who may have supplied Ingalls with much of his proof.
until he clumsily fell into the pit Ingalls had warily prepared for him, and from that moment he was at the mercy of the Kansan. Mr. Voorhees lost his temper, and Mr. Ingalls' remarkable coolness and smiling serenity only exasperated him the more.  

The immediate reaction of Voorhees may be judged by this comment by William Connelley, an admirer of Ingalls:

At this point the friends of Senator Voorhees led him from the Senate Chamber. He was pale and trembling. He tried to hold up his head and look defiant—an effort that was a miserable failure. Outside the door he burst into tears and cursed his fate, saying that his career was run and his reputation for patriotism blasted. He was in despair. And he was desperate. His friends kept him concealed for several days.  

Messages of congratulations poured in upon Ingalls. Many of the telegrams were from Indiana. Kansans were highly enthusiastic. The Globe-Democrat said of the messages:

The Governors of no less than a dozen Republican states sent their congratulations, and complimentary telegrams came even from Indiana. Kansas was evidently overjoyed by the victory of her senior Senator, for there were telegrams patriotic, enthusiastic, and full of all the eloquence the wires could transmit from every portion of the Sunflower State.  

Some of the press, too, was delighted. Kansas newspapers gave columns of front-page space to reports of the debate. Typical of the Republican papers in Kansas was this comment by the Washington correspondent for the Topeka Capital:

The galleries were often in an uproar, and several times the president threatened to clear them all out. No such hot debate has occurred in the senate since the war period. This is the testimony of all the old employees of the Senate. Throughout this fiery discussion Ingalls gained ground all the time. Voorhees floundered and finally lost his grip entirely. . . . It was evident to everybody that Ingalls had taken Voorhees' scalp.

The New York Tribune, also strongly Republican, eagerly reported:

If "The Congressional Record" of to-morrow is a true and not a "revised" transcript of the debate to which the Senate has listened to-day [apparently it was a true version], that publication will for once contain some "mighty interesting reading." Not within the recollections of its oldest members has the Senate witnessed a contest in which so many personalities have been banded about, the lie has been passed so frequently, so much ill-temper has been shown or the traditional dignity of the body been so set at defiance by

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8. Also in the Atchison Daily Champion, May 4, 1888.
the audience. . . . It was a scene not easily forgotten by those who were so fortunate as to be present.10

Even the London Times had a comment, calling it the “bitterest debate which has been heard in the Assembly for years.”

Newspapers which opposed Ingalls politically were, of course, sharp in their criticism. On May 2 the Kansas City Times, strongly opposed to Ingalls, called the speech a “disappointment.” A day later, editor W. B. Hotchkiss of the Wichita Beacon was highly critical of the Kansas orator, calling his replies a waste of time. The South was incensed at the Kansan. In fact, a few days after the delivery of the speech, Ingalls was burned in effigy in Nashville, Tenn.

Republicans, however, hailed the speech as strong political ammunition, and the next day in the house, up to 10 o’clock there were over 70,000 copies of the speech taken by members at their own individual expense.

Years later the Topeka State Journal declared of Ingalls, “one of the traditions of the capital at Washington is his reply to Senator Daniel Voorhees of Indiana.” In 1900 the Kansas City (Mo.) Journal summed up the senator’s speech: His reply to Senator Voorhees will be cited as an example of scathing and combative oratory as long as there lives a man who heard it.