

Joseph Rainey (1832-1887)



The first black American to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives, Joseph Rainey was born into slavery on June 21, 1832, in Georgetown, South Carolina. Rainey's father, a successful barber, purchased his family's freedom in the early 1840s. Joseph Rainey followed in his father's footsteps, maintaining a lucrative barbershop in Charleston, South Carolina.

Having escaped to Bermuda during the Civil War, he returned to Charleston eager to dive into local Republican politics in 1866. Elected to the 41st Congress (1869-1871) in a special election, Rainey took his seat as the first black American to serve in the House on December 12, 1870. Rainey spent his congressional career protecting the civil rights of black Americans, and his loyalty was to the Republican Party. He served on three committees: Freedmen's Affairs, Indian Affairs, and Invalid Pensions.

Freedmen's Affairs was created in 1865 to handle all the legislation concerning newly freed slaves and protecting them from the Ku Klux Klan, the White League, and the Red Shirts.

In April 1874, he was the first black American to preside over the House of Representatives. During his tenure, he submitted an appropriation bill managing Indian reservations and opposing restrictions on the influx of Asian immigrants into the United States.

Rainey also involved himself in economic issues. The Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company was established by Congress in 1865 to assist freed slaves build capital through secure savings.

During the 1878 re-election, however, Rainey was defeated. He worked for two years as a federal agent of the U.S. Treasury Department in internal revenue in South Carolina, and then for five years he worked in brokerage and banking in Washington, DC. He retired in 1886 and returned to South Carolina where he died of congestive fever on August 1, 1887. He was married to Susan Rainey, and they had three children, Joseph II, Herbert and Olivia.

For more information on Joseph Rainey, please visit:

[http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/RAINEY,-Joseph-Hayne-\(R000016\)/](http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/RAINEY,-Joseph-Hayne-(R000016)/)

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