

## Rainey, Joseph H. (1832-1887)

South Carolina. Born a slave, became free. Mulatto. Literate. Barber.



Joseph H. Rainey

A four-term congressman from South Carolina, Rainey was born in Georgetown, the son of Edward Rainey, a successful barber who purchased his family's freedom in the mid-1840s, moved to Charleston, and by 1860 owned one slave. For a time during the 1850s, Joseph Rainey lived in Philadelphia, where he married. He returned to South Carolina and worked as a barber in Charleston.

Drafted to work on Confederate fortifications early in the Civil War, Rainey escaped to Bermuda with his wife, Susan, in 1862; Barber's Alley in Hamilton is named for him. He returned to South Carolina in 1865 and attended the state black convention in that year. He also attended the state labor convention of 1869. Rainey represented Georgetown County at the constitutional convention of 1868 and in the state Senate, 1868-70, where he chaired the finance committee. A member of the Union League, Rainey served on the Republican state executive committee. He also served as census taker for Georgetown, 1869; county agent for the state land commission; and brigadier general in the state militia. According to the census of 1870, he owned \$1,500 in real estate and \$6,845 in personal property. He was an incorporator and stockholder in various railroad companies and other enterprises.

In 1870, Rainey was elected to Congress and became the first black seated in the U.S. House of Representatives. He served until 1879 (42d through 45th Congresses), failing to be reelected in 1878. In a notable speech on the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, Rainey said: "For my part, I am not prepared . . . to argue this question from a constitutional standpoint alone. . . . I desire that so broad and liberal a construction be placed upon its provisions as will insure protection to the humblest citizen. . . . Tell me nothing of a constitution which fails to shelter beneath its rightful power the people of a country." In his farewell speech, on 3 March 1879, Rainey compared the Redeemer government of South Carolina with Reconstruction: "As compared with Governor Hampton's doubtless it [the Republican government] was more extravagant. . . . But . . . can the saving of a few thousand or hundreds of thousands of dollars compensate for the loss of the political heritage of American citizens?"

After leaving Congress, Rainey served for two years as an internal revenue agent, then moved to Washington, D.C., where he failed in a brokerage business. During the 1880s, he supported black emigration from the South. Rainey died in Georgetown, South Carolina. His grandson was a prominent politician in Philadelphia in the 1970s.

See also Figures 3 and 4

Bailey, *Senate*, II, 1328-29. Holt, *Black over White*, 16, 108, 165, app. *Congressional Globe*, 42d Congress, 1st Session, 394-95; 45th Congress, 3d Session, Appendix, 267. Logan and Winston, *Dictionary*, 510. Cyril O. Packwood, *Detour—Bermuda, Destination—U.S. House of Representatives: The Life of Joseph Hayne Rainey* (Hamilton, Bermuda, 1977). Allen B. Ballard, *One More Day's Journey: The Story of a Family and a People* (New York, 1984), 105. Koger, *Slaveowners*, 198, 229. Reynolds, *South Carolina*, 61. Tindall, *South Carolina*, 178. Foner and Lewis, *Black Worker*, II, 26.