Group portrait of African American legislators

1. Robert C. De Large, (Top Standing side by side)
2. Jefferson H. Long, (Top)
3. H.R. Revels,
4. Benj. S. Turner,
5. Josiah T. Walls,
6. Joseph H. Rainy,
7. R. Brown Elliot.
DE LARGE, Robert Carlos, a Representative from South Carolina; born in Aiken, S.C., March 15, 1842; received such an education as was then attainable and was graduated from Wood High School; engaged in agricultural pursuits; delegate to the State constitutional convention in 1868; member of the State house of representatives 1868-1870; was one of the State commissioners of the sinking fund; elected State land commissioner in 1870 and served until elected to Congress; presented credentials as a Republican Member-elect to the Forty-second Congress and served from March 4, 1871, until January 24, 1873, when the seat was declared vacant, the election having been contested by Christopher C. Bowen; local magistrate until his death in Charleston, S.C., February 14, 1874; interment in Brown Fellowship Graveyard.

Bibliography
LONG, Jefferson Franklin,
a Representative from Georgia; born a slave near Knoxville, Crawford County, Ga., March 3, 1836; self-educated; became a merchant tailor in Macon, Ga.; elected as a Republican to the Forty-first Congress to fill the vacancy caused by the House declaring Samuel F. Gove not entitled to the seat on December 22, 1870; served from January 16, 1871 to March 3, 1871; was not a candidate for renomination in 1870; delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1880; resumed business in Macon, Ga., and died there February 4, 1901; interment in Lynwood Cemetery.

Bibliography
The United States Senate has a long history of producing historic leaders, but has featured only eight African-American members. The following eight senators set a number of political and social milestones spanning the Reconstruction and beyond. Continue reading to learn more about their many achievements.

Revels was the first African-American to serve as a state senator, representing Mississippi. Revels was elected by the Mississippi State Senate to fill a vacant U.S. Senate seat, which was abandoned by Albert G. Brown when Mississippi seceded from the Union during the Civil War.

Revels was greeted in Washington by two days of debate about his seating in the Senate. Southern Democrats staunchly opposed Revels' admission into the Senate because of the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision, which stated that African-Americans were property rather than citizens. Since the 14th Amendment was ratified in 1868, two years before Revels was elected to the Senate, Democrats argued that Revels could not fulfill the nine-year citizenship requirement and, therefore, could not legally assume the position of senator. Their argument was ruled invalid after a decision that the Civil War and Reconstruction amendments overturned Dred Scott.

Despite only serving from Feb. 25, 1870, to March 3, 1871, Revels served on the Committee on Education and the Committee on the District of Columbia, and helped introduce a number of bills. After his term ended, Revels became president of historically black Alcorn College and later served as pastor of the Holy Springs
Benjamin Sterling Turner (March 17, 1825, Weldon North Carolina – March 21, 1894, Selma, Alabama) was an American businessman and politician who served in the United States House of Representatives Representing Alabama's 1st congressional district in the 42nd United States Congress.

Early life and education

He was born into slavery in Halifax County, North Carolina near the town of Weldon. His parents were slaves. He was taken with his mother to Alabama at age five, as part of the forced migration of the internal slave trade. Turner received no early education. By clandestine study he obtained a fair education. He seems to have remained enslaved until the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in 1863.

Worked

Turner engaged in mercantile pursuits. He set up a livery stable in Selma, Alabama. Joining the Republican Party after the Civil War, Turner was elected tax collector of Dallas County, Alabama in 1867. He next served as councilman of the city of Selma in 1869.

Political Career

Freedmen were granted the franchise after the Civil War. Turner was unanimously nominated to be the Republican candidate from Alabama's 1st congressional district, which at that point encompassed Southwest Alabama. He was elected as a Republican to the Forty-second Congress (March 4, 1871 - March 3, 1873). He complained that northern Republicans living in his district had not supported him enough in his run for office. In Congress he worked to restore political and legal rights to Confederates who had fought against the United States in the American Civil War. He also fought for the repeal of the tax on cotton, on the grounds that it hurt poor African Americans.
In 1872 Turner was nominated again by the Republican Party in the first district. But another African American, Philip Joseph, ran as an independent. This caused a split in the Republican vote, and allowed F. G. Bromberg, a fusion candidate of the Liberal Republicans and Democrats, to win. Turner was elected in 1880 as a delegate to the Republican National Convention.

After his political career, Turner engaged in agricultural pursuits in Alabama. He died in Selma, Alabama on March 21, 1894, aged 69; he was interred in Live Oak Cemetery.
First elected to the Congress in 1870, Josiah T. Walls became Florida’s first elected African American Congressman. Walls was born a slave in Winchester, Virginia on December 30, 1842. He was conscripted by the Confederate Army and captured in Yorktown by Union forces in 1862. Walls then enlisted in the U.S. Colored Troops Infantry Regiment in 1863 where he rose in rank to First Sergeant. Prior to his discharge from the Army in 1865, Walls married Helen Ferguson of Newnansville, Florida.

After leaving the U.S. Army Walls settled in Alachua County, Florida and became active in local politics. After passage of the U.S. Military Reconstruction Act of 1867, Walls joined the newly formed Republican Party in Florida. He was an elected delegate to the 1868 state constitutional conventions and shortly afterward was elected to the lower house of the State Legislature in 1868. He advanced to the State Senate representing the 13th District, which was mostly Alachua County, in 1869.

Walls’s six year tenure as a U.S. Congressman was filled with controversy. He was the only black representative unseated three times by opponents challenging his elections in 1870, 1872, and 1874 including J.J. Finley a former Confederate General. Despite these disputed elections, Walls compiled a legislative record which included introducing bills favoring land grants to railroads and securing connections to ports servicing Cuba and the West Indies. Walls also submitted measures to reinforce the Civil Rights Act of 1866. After serving in Congress he returned to the Florida State legislature and resumed farming on his 175 acre plantation near Gainesville, Florida he had acquired in 1873. Walls also purchased a newspaper, The New Era. Walls remained active in politics serving at various times as mayor of Gainesville, a member of the County Board of Public Instruction and County Commissioner. In 1896 he moved to Tallahassee to become the Farm Director at what is now Florida A&M University. Josiah Walls died on May 5, 1905 in Tallahassee. - See more at: http://www.blackpast.org/aah/walls-josiah-thomas-1832-1905#sthash.aioRHsMs.dpuf
RAINEY, Joseph Hayne, a Representative from South Carolina; born in Georgetown, Georgetown County, S.C., June 21, 1832; received a limited schooling; followed the trade of barber until 1862, when upon being forced to work on the Confederate fortifications in Charleston, S.C., he escaped to the West Indies and remained there until the close of the war; delegate to the State constitutional convention in 1868; member of the State senate in 1870 but resigned; elected as a Republican to the Forty-first Congress to fill the vacancy caused by the action of the House of Representatives in declaring the seat of B. Franklin Whittemore vacant and was the first black to be elected to the House of Representatives; reelected to the Forty-second and to the three succeeding Congresses and served from December 12, 1870, to March 3, 1879; appointed internal-revenue agent of South Carolina on May 22, 1879, and served until July 15, 1881, when he resigned; engaged in banking and the brokerage business in Washington, D.C.; retired from all business activities in 1886, returned to Georgetown, S.C., and died there August 2, 1887; interment in the Baptist Cemetery.

Bibliography
Not much is known about Elliott's early life. He claimed to have been born in Liverpool, United Kingdom to West Indian immigrants, but biographers have been unable to corroborate these facts. Elliott arrived in South Carolina in 1867 at the age of 25, where he established a law practice. Elliott helped organize the local Republican Party and served in the state constitutional convention. In 1868 he was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives. The next year he was appointed assistant adjutant-general; he was the first African-American commanding general of the South Carolina National Guard. As part of his job, he helped form a state militia to fight the Ku Klux Klan.

Elliott was elected as a Republican to the Forty-second and Forty-third United States Congress. He "delivered a celebrated speech" in favor of the Civil Rights Act of 1875. He resigned on November 1, 1874, to fight political corruption in South Carolina. He served again in the South Carolina House of Representatives, where he was elected as Speaker of the House.

He ran successfully for South Carolina Attorney General in 1876. In the state elections that year, white Democrats regained dominance of the state legislature. The following year, 1877, when the last of the federal troops were withdrawn from South Carolina, he was forced out of office.
Blanche Kelso Bruce

Also elected by the Mississippi Senate, Blanche Kelso Bruce was the first African-American senator to serve a full term, from 1875 to 1881.

Bruce's mother, Polly Bruce, was a house slave, and his father was a white Virginia plantation owner. As a child, Bruce was educated alongside his white half-brother and legally freed by his father to pursue an apprenticeship as a printer. After attending Oberlin College in Ohio for two years, Bruce moved to Mississippi, where he purchased an abandoned plantation. The purchase allowed him to prosper and gain notoriety within the state.

As senator, Bruce participated in debates regarding the civil rights of minorities, including those of African-Americans, American Indians, Chinese immigrants and even those of former Confederates. Despite his efforts in the Senate, Republican influence in Mississippi diminished toward the end of the Reconstruction period and Bruce was not elected for a second term.

In 1881, President James Garfield appointed Bruce as register of the United States Treasury.